



IT'S TIME TO  
**PRAY**

God's Power Changes Everything

**CARTER CONLON**

Senior Pastor, Times Square Church



**BIBLE STUDY**



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THE LORD GAVE THE WORD & GREAT  
WAS THE COMPANY THAT PUBLISHED IT.

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# A NOTE FROM CARTER CONLON

Almost fifteen years ago I preached a message from Mark 9:14–29—little did I know that the message would give birth to an important mission. That mission has since moved beyond our own church fellowship in New York City to a national and even global outreach. The mission is to encourage believers at large about the need for and the power of prayer. And, I might add, from that one original message on Mark 9, a regional and then national radio ministry called *It's Time to Pray* was born!

Now that specific sermon has given birth to a larger message, which is contained in my book, *It's Time to Pray*, and in this 10-week Bible study. I have thought for quite some time about the passage in Mark 9—I've looked at it, studied it, and read it over and over. The Lord has expanded the original message He gave me to show me just how impacting prayer can be in every area of both our personal lives and our community life.

The story in Mark 9 describes a journey most Christians will travel in their lifetime. It certainly reflects my life and my journey. I believe that the truth that is clearly annunciated by the Lord in Mark 9 is a critical message that the church needs to hear today.

There are far too many Christians who are walking around dejected, depressed, hopeless, powerless, and in bondage to the flesh. Friend, this is not what the Christian life is or should be. Jesus Christ fulfilled the will of the Father, and together they made a new covenant—one that set us free from the enslavement of sin and gave us new life both here and in eternity. Through the shed blood of Christ on the cross and His resurrection, Jesus restored our relationship with the living God and enabled us to live an abundant life!

Please understand, I'm not saying that as Christians we should never have a problem, feel down, or face trials. On the contrary, we will indeed face difficulty in life and experience spiritual warfare when living according to the Spirit rather than our flesh. But in the midst of these things, as believers we are not powerless and without hope. We are not under the power of our flesh or Satan anymore. Our power and hope are in God, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to live above the fray! The most powerful thing we can do in our lives is pray! The Bible tells us to pray without ceasing and to pray about everything.

Join me in this Bible study as we look at the tremendous lesson Jesus gives us in Mark 9—along with some of my own personal experiences—and how it relates to us, our walk with God, and our impact on the world. You will find, as I have, that it's time to pray!



# IT'S TIME TO PRAY

## Bible Study

"I was instantly reminded of 1978, the year I first came to Christ. I was a young cop in Ottawa, Canada, only three years on the force. I had no public-speaking skills or training. I had certainly never preached a sermon. I was terrified of crowds and had struggled to even speak out in the classroom throughout my youth—afraid that I would be judged, criticized, or laughed at. Nevertheless, as I walked my beat one day, I prayed, "Lord Jesus, I want to win one hundred thousand people to You before I die."

Twenty-five years later, in the fields outside Jos, Nigeria, God answered my prayer in an instant. I hit my knees beside the bed that night in 2003, astounded that God would answer my prayer in such a majestic way. But I was also astounded at what He then said.

"Don't limit me," I heard God say again. "Don't put boundaries around what I can do."

After more years of Bible study, prayer, and reflection, I realized that the greatest sin of Israel was not in the building of the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai. As vile a sin as that was, the psalms teach us that the children of Israel sinned even more when they limited the Holy One of Israel by asking, "Can God furnish a table in this wilderness?"

One of the greatest sins any one of us will ever commit against God is suggesting that He has no right or power to be God in our lives—or believing that our lives have become such a wilderness that there is no chance God could ever prepare a table before us or use us to fulfill His mighty plan. I have confidence that God can and God will do what He tells us through Scripture He can and will do, if we simply pray and believe."



# PRAYING FOR SALVATION

When I arrived at the hospital, my father was seated in a chair next to the door of his room. My brother, Shawn, was standing against the wall beyond the chair.

Hi, Dad," I said. "Have you been praying?"

"I've been praying all week."

"Are you ready to pray with me?" I asked.

"If you would like that," he said, "I would like to do that."

It was a precious moment that I will never forget. I knew that he knew what he was agreeing to. We had covered that territory on my prior visits, especially the visit just prior, when I wasn't sure if I would see him again. My father was very aware of the profound commitment he was about to make. As I sat and we prayed together, we picked up the conversation right where we left off on my prior visit, when he had allowed me to explain what it means to be a Christian.

I led him on a prayer of surrender that must have lasted over five minutes. I led him around Mount Sinai and through the wilderness. I didn't want to leave anything out. I wanted him to know—truly understand—what this meant. As I would do with the crowd in Jos, Nigeria, the following year, I prayed him from Genesis to Revelation.

We prayed in great detail. I didn't want him to go through the motions to appease me, and I didn't want him to be the least bit confused. "Jesus, I need You as my Savior," we prayed. "I open my heart....I give You my life....Jesus, I receive You as my Lord and Savior."

Everything I would do during an altar call at Times Square Church I did with my father in his Rouyn-Noranda hospital room. After we had prayed through, I helped him stand up and put him in bed. Shawn was still leaning against the wall, literally frozen in disbelief. To know my father, you knew he

wouldn't have prayed that prayer if he didn't mean it. His word had always been his bond. He was a man of truth. I never in my life heard him tell a lie. I never heard him embellish anything. Whatever he said, he said straight out. It was what it was.

**READ MARK 9:1-29**

(If you have the book, It's Time to Pray, also read Chapter One)

**THE POWER OF GOD TO SAVE**

When Jesus began His public ministry, the Jewish people saw a difference in Him—He was not like the religious leaders who put heavy burdens on them. His teaching was powerful—piercing their hearts and minds. Mark 1:21-22 (NIV) says, ***“They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.”***

What was this power that Jesus displayed? Was it the kind of power that did the impossible? Did Jesus' power bring about God's goodness, grace, and mercy in the people and situations that He touched? The answer, of course, is a resounding yes! Jesus taught with authority because He was and is the authority—and through this authority His power is displayed to show God's glory.

1. When you think of God's authority, what comes to your mind?

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2. How has the Lord displayed His power in your life or in those around you?

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3. The Bible has a lot to say about God's power. Why is this so important?

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In the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 9, there are two stories that display the authority and power of Jesus in an incredible way. The first is what is known as the Transfiguration.

Mark 9:2–8 says: ***“Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’—because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid. And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!’ Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves”*** (NKJV).

Jesus had been on a mountain, and on that mountain, He was transfigured—the glory of God that was in Him showed forth, and the disciples were in awe as they looked on. All of a sudden Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on that mountain and spoke with Him about His coming death in Jerusalem and the victory of salvation that would be won through Him for all people.

It was a mountaintop experience—a blessed spiritual victory filled with God’s glory, revealing what He was able and going to do in the lives of His people!

Write out the following Scriptures regarding God’s power of salvation:

Romans 1:16 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Acts 4:12 \_\_\_\_\_  
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1 Corinthians 1:18 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Revelation 12:10 \_\_\_\_\_  
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The second display of God's power and authority came about in a much different way. After the glorious mountaintop experience of the transfiguration, Jesus and his disciples came down from the mountain, and as is the case so often in our lives, they were immediately met by the reality of a sinful, fallen world. Immediately, Jesus was met by a man who was in trouble.

Mark 9:14–29 says: ***“When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ‘What are you arguing with them about?’ he asked. A man in the crowd answered, ‘Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.’ ‘You unbelieving generation,’ Jesus replied, ‘how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.’ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy’s father, ‘How long has he been like this?’ ‘From childhood,’ he answered. ‘It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.’ ‘If you can?’ said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for one who believes.’ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!’ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. ‘You deaf and mute spirit,’ he said, ‘I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.’ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, ‘He’s dead.’ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why couldn’t we drive it out?’ He replied, ‘This kind can come out only by prayer.’”*** (NIV)

The father was distraught. The boy was unable to hear things, and he was unable to speak. He was out of control and in agony. It had obviously been a long road for this man, his son, and his family, and there seemed to be no future for them. They were living in a situation that by human standards was hopeless. No one had been able to help, not the “doctors” of their time, not the religious leaders, and not even the disciples who had just experienced the glory of God on the mountain!

It's a situation that some of us face, and we say, “Is this the way it's always going to be? Is this my future?”

4. Why do you think that no one had been able to help this man and his son?

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5. What was Jesus' reaction towards the disciples, the father, and the demon-possessed boy?

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6. Have you ever felt like this father in the story? Or perhaps the boy? Have you ever encountered a situation in your life where no one was able to help?

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Like this dear father, some of you are not overly filled with faith that your situation can change. You have a glimmer of hope in your heart that Jesus can fix your problem, and your prayer is exactly like this father's: "If You can do anything, Jesus; if You are still listening; if You are more than what people have told me You are; if You are beyond what I have seen in the people who are supposed to represent You—if You can do anything, Jesus, would You have mercy on me and save me?"

Have you cried out to God? Be intentional in your prayer—ask God to intervene in your life and in your situation. Everything Jesus did was intentional. He didn't do anything randomly; everything He said and everything He did fulfilled the purpose that God had laid out before the foundation of the world: the salvation of mankind.

### **So what is involved when we commit to praying for salvation—for ourselves and for others?**

#### ***When Praying for Salvation—BE INTENTIONAL***

The Transfiguration of Jesus on the mount was a moment of glory that God wanted His disciples, Peter, James and John to witness. They needed to see that the end result of their salvation was an eternal and glorified life! This time on earth is not all there is to our lives. The disciples were witnesses to the fact that Moses and Elijah were alive—even though they had died ??? years ago! This moment in time was INTENTIONAL!

#### **\*Eternal life is for all men and woman**

Immediately following the transfiguration Jesus led His three disciples back down into the valley to see a man whose son was possessed by an evil spirit. God's heart is for complete deliverance for those held captive by Satan.

**\*The Greek word for salvation is SOZO**

The word for salvation comes from the Greek word SOZO. It has a power packed meaning. It can mean deliverance from demonic power; being kept safe/preserved from evil; or healing of the body, soul and mind. And of course SOZO is not limited to just the natural or physical being it is inclusive of a spiritual transformation.

***When Praying for Salvation—BE INCLUSIVE***

**\*What did this mean for the demon possessed boy?**

In the narrative of Mark 9:25 Jesus commanded the evil spirit to leave the boy. Healing from demonic strongholds was immediate. Nothing can resist the power of Christ's power when He speaks.

**\*What does this mean for you today?**

Take time right now to ponder the scriptures below and what they mean to you. This is God's will for you—to believe on His Son Jesus Christ and receive eternal life.

***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”*** (John 3:16, KJV).

***“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him”*** (John 3:36, KJV).

***“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”*** (Romans 10:9, 10, KJV).

***“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life”*** (1 John 5:11, KJV).

***When Praying for Salvation—BE INSTRUMENTAL***

God never intended for eternal life to be just for yourself, he intended it to be for all of fallen mankind.

**CLOSING ASSIGNMENT!**

Write down the names of five people that you know who do not know Jesus Christ. Whether its family members, co-workers, friends, or neighbors, commit to praying for the salvation of each person you have written down below!

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_



# PRAYING FOR LIFE

My season of Christianity based on works and human effort was heavy into being in the right place and doing the right things. I was intent on pressing my children into Christian service and not allowing them to make the kinds of bad decisions I had made. Being that tightfisted and legalistic with Christianity has a bounce-back effect. My children couldn't handle it because there was no joy in it.

To be clear, I was preaching a gospel of grace in those early years. How could I be a Christian and not know the Word and comprehend what it means? But mine was a message of grace coupled with human effort. I should say, heavy on the human effort. There was no joy in me. My attitude and the mandate I made for my family was that we were going to doggedly serve God.

I could never enjoy myself. If I went to a summer fair, I would feel weighted down by a burden to save people. "How can I enjoy myself," I would think, "while people all around me are lost and going to hell?"

My kids began to resent me. They loved me as their father, but they resented the life I was forcing them to lead. One day, when we were preparing to go to some social event or another, one of my children said, "Dad, please stay home. Everywhere we go, you just ruin it for us."

I can see so clearly now that my dogged Christianity was nauseating. If I had the chance to raise my children again, I would be outside playing ball with them more often. It would be a very different life for them. But I didn't come into a covenant understanding of the joy of the Lord until I was thirty-seven years old. I was saved at the age of twenty-four and wouldn't fully understand grace for thirteen years.

I was four years into full-time ministry, Jason was barely a teenager, Jared was knocking on the door

of his teen years, and Kate had yet to celebrate her first decade on earth. I was driven to do what I was doing. As I said, there was no joy in me. I forced them to get up at 5:30 in the morning and do our devotions together because I felt that was what God wanted us to do.

The Christianity I forced on my family was utterly unattractive—well-intentioned, but foolish. It was stupid and immature and lacking in any true understanding of grace. I received full covenant when I broke down and couldn't do it anymore in my own strength. When that happened, I finally realized that I could only go forward by grace.

**READ MARK 9:1-29**

(If you have the book, It's Time to Pray, also read Chapter Two)

**LOSE YOUR LIFE, AND YOU WILL GAIN IT**

Some Christians are just miserable. They go to church, and they become critical of anything that doesn't move them. The worship, the music, the preaching...none of it satisfies them. But the reality is that they are not going anywhere in God. They are trying to propel their Christian life in the natural.

What is preventing us from living the abundant life that Christ promised us? The answer is as simple as it is difficult: self.

It's interesting that analysts often peg different decades with various labels. I remember the 1980s being called "the decade of me—it's all about me." Yet the reality is that every decade and every culture has exalted self over others and over God.

The abundant life that God promises is not based on venerating self. The wonderful life that Christ promises us is not about personal blessing, personal prosperity, or personal aggrandizement. This self-focus brings about spiritual defeat and immaturity as well as opening the door to immorality. We cannot live the Christian life by our own mechanisms or power. When self propels our Christian walk, we fail.

1. Take an inventory of your walk with God. Are you focused on "doing" or "being"?

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2. What propels your relationship with God? How does a self-focus hinder a believer's walk with Christ?

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3. How would you describe the abundant life that Jesus gives us (see John 10:10)?

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In our biblical passage of Mark chapter nine there was a desperate need for God to intervene in a situation that had no human solution. A father's child was demon possessed and like any loving parent his desire was to have a normal life for his child.

Mark 9:18 says, ***"I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not."***

The perception of the father was that it was somebody else's problem (and lack of power) as to why his son remained in bondage to demonic strongholds. Today in our culture we would term this condition a victim mentality—"My problems are always caused by other people, not me!"

The father wanted to make it clear to Jesus that his son was not healed because of the disciples' lack of power. The real problem was not the disciples' powerlessness (though Jesus would address this issue with the disciples as well) but the father's own lack of faith in God for deliverance.

This father could have dedicated himself over the years to the Word of God and to building up his faith, but he focused on his son's condition rather than on God's covenant promise to be a father to His people. When Jesus asked the father how long his son had dealt with this condition, it wasn't that He didn't already know, but He wanted the father to recognize the years he had wasted because of his own hardness of heart. The dear father was so focused on the problem instead of looking to God that it's easy to see how his heart became duller and harder to the things of God.

4. When things go wrong in your life, do you focus more on the problem or on God? Explain.

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5. When you look back on your life, has there ever been a time that you wasted time and energy focusing on your condition rather than relying on God?

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6. How does our ability to enjoy the abundant life offered by Jesus become marred when we focus on our problems rather than on the Lord?

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Jesus said, ***“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it”*** (Matthew 16:25).

When we come to the place where we die—die to our rights, our plans, our desires, and our way of thinking—we are then propelled by the life of Jesus living in us! The reason we lack abundant life, the reason we lack victory in our walk, the reason our prayers are stale and ineffective, the reason we have no joy is because we have not died to self—self is still on the throne instead of Christ. How do we die to self? How do we stop propelling our faith through our flesh? We realize that the gospel is about grace—it’s about what God has done and not about what we can do!

7. Why is dying to ourselves often a difficult thing to do?

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8. In what areas of your life do you find it difficult to die to your rights, your plans, your desires, or your thinking?

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9. Can you think of a fellow believer who has “died to self”? What does that look like practically speaking?

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### **So what is involved when we commit to praying for life—for ourselves and for others?**

#### ***When Praying for Life—EXERCISE FAITH***

When Jesus came down from the mountain, a crowd of contentious people and religious leaders were questioning His disciples about their lack of power and ability to deliver a boy from demon possession. Jesus went directly to the heart of the matter; He called all of them a **“Faithless generation”** (Mark 9:19).

Jesus needed to lead the father of the child away from criticizing His disciples to a place of personal REAL FAITH where; **“all things are possible to him that believes”** (Mark 9:23).

#### **\*When STRETCHED real FAITH doesn’t BREAK**

Jesus had to stretch this father’s faith to one that believed God’s desire was to break the power of Satan and set his son free.

#### **\*When put to the test true faith always produces genuine RESULTS**

Jesus had no doubt about the healing that was going to take place in the boy. His goal was to encourage the father’s faith in God to bring about the healing his boy needed.

#### ***When Praying for Life—GIVE GRACE***

Instead of deriding the father for his critical attitude towards His disciples, Jesus drew him aside from the contention and led him into the grace of God.

The Lord knew this man’s criticism emanated from years of disappointment over the lack of seeing his son helped. People had failed this man, and Jesus knew the father grieved over his son’s condition. The Lord wanted this dear father to see his own lack of faith and not simply focus on the lack of someone else. This was a divine moment—Jesus showed grace and compassion to this man and it softened his heart.

#### **\*When PRESSED–UPON real GRACE doesn’t FALTER**

When confronted by God’s grace this father turned from a critical attitude to one of brokenness and tenderness.

**\*When put to the test, true grace always produces genuine HUMILITY**

The father's eyes were opened and he saw the need for his own healing as well as his son's! He responds by saying to Jesus, "If you can do anything, have compassion on US, and help US." This was genuine humility produced by grace alone.

***When Praying for Life—SHOW MERCY***

The devil had taken a child captive by a deaf and dumb spirit. This was not the result of any sin the child had committed but rather he was a victim of Satan's destructive power. But this same child became the beneficiary of the abundant mercy of God and was delivered instantly from the grip of Satan.

**\*When TESTED real MERCY doesn't JUDGE**

Real mercy is benevolent help whether the person deserves it or not.

**\*When put to the test real mercy always produces genuine HELP**

Jesus' came into this world to heal the sick and to set the captives free (Isaiah 42:7).

***When Praying for Life—EMBRACE LOVE***

When Jesus said the most important commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, He added a new commandment that He said was like the first—to love your neighbor as yourself. Therefore to embrace Christ is to embrace all that love is! ***"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"*** (John 3:16).

It was love that overlooked any offence that may have been incurred by this father and to heal a boy who was being destroyed by the influence of Satan.

**\*When EXPERIENCED real LOVE doesn't DOUBT**

Jesus loved this man and his demon possessed son. Because of Jesus' response to him, the father moved from doubt to faith!

**\*When put to the test Love always produces genuine LIFE**

It was through the love of God that this child was set free and brought into an abundant life.

**CLOSING ASSIGNMENT!**

List AND pray over the fifteen attributes of love mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
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5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_
12. \_\_\_\_\_
13. \_\_\_\_\_
14. \_\_\_\_\_
15. \_\_\_\_\_



# PRAYING FOR STRENGTH

That wasn't the last I heard of my decision. People thought I was crazy. My father said to me, "When there is no food to feed your family and there is no milk in the fridge for your kids, don't come to me. I will not help you. What you are doing is foolish." That was a bitter pill to swallow.

I had Christian men say to me, "You're leading your family into a place of jeopardy." Yet I knew it was an open door. More importantly I knew that it was God's open door. I said to my critics, "In the natural it makes no sense. All I can tell you is that I hear God calling me to walk through this door, and I've decided to go."

There were two Christian police officers on the Ottawa Police Department who supported me in my conversion and helped steady me as I took my first baby believer steps. When I made the decision to leave the police department and enter full-time ministry, however, they both opposed what I was doing—and were quite vocal about it. They questioned my Christian responsibilities to my wife and three children, as other believers had. "You're going to bring your family into hardship," they complained. Then, when they realized I wasn't going to be turned back from it, the older of the two came to me alone and shared, "I once felt God calling me to become a pastor, and I didn't go."

It was his way of saying, "Good luck; Godspeed," without literally coming out and endorsing what I was doing. When he spoke those words, it suddenly became clear to me why he had argued so vehemently against my choice. My going through the door God had set before me made him feel condemned for not going through the door God had set before him. He had argued that I could have been a good witness as a Christian cop and done many good things. However, that's the path he had chosen for his life, and indeed, his Christian walk blessed many, many people. I never would have condemned him for that. He was a nurturing kind of guy, full of compassion. He would have made a great pastor. But he wouldn't go through the open door that the Lord had set before him. And he only admitted it after I refused to turn back.

When I had about a week to go before my last day on the Ottawa Police Department, the word of my leaving was out, and lots of people were perplexed because I had attained a high-profile position, especially for a man of my age. I came out of the elevator one day and came face-to-face with an officer in uniform. I knew who he was, but I can't say I knew him well. There were nearly seven hundred people working at the Ottawa Police Department at the time. But I knew him well enough to know he was not a believer.

He reached out and hugged me. No one hugs in the French-Canadian Ontario-Quebec National Capital Region in public! He stepped back and looked at me through misty eyes and said, "I don't agree with what you believe. But you've got guts, man. I respect that."

As he got on the elevator and went his way, I stood there for a moment, realizing the first encouragement I had received to step out in faith came from a nonbeliever.

I was aware that there appeared to be a cliff on the other side of my open door. I wasn't blind. I knew that God would need to sustain me. I felt like Peter stepping out of the boat. There was nothing in the natural to support me. I knew that if God did not support me, I was finished. But from the moment I stepped out of the boat, the journey God put before me was amazing to behold.

### **READ MARK 9:1-29**

(If you have the book, *It's Time to Pray*, also read Chapter Three)

### **Not by Might, nor by Power, but by My Spirit**

Do you feel as if you have only a little bit of strength? Are your weaknesses more pronounced than your strengths?

You are not alone. What may surprise you is that God does not require a huge amount of strength, nor does He shun our human weakness! We are His instruments—it is God who sculpts a masterpiece from our human fragility.

Hudson Taylor was a missionary and wonderful man of God. Prayer was the foundation of his life and his ministry. He once said, "God chose me because I was weak enough. God does not do his great works by large committees. He trains somebody to be quiet enough, and little enough, and then uses him."

1. When you think of weakness, what comes to your mind?

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2. Do you feel your weakness is a roadblock in life? Explain your answer.

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3. Are there particular areas in your life where you feel weak? What are they?

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The focus of much of the preaching in America in the last two decades turned away from the actual work of the cross of Jesus Christ and toward the gratification of self. Because of that the church has been left crippled and depleted in many ways.

How do we turn it around? The beginning of a spiritual awakening is the humility to finally admit our condition and stop boasting about what we are not! Instead, as we turn to the Lord in prayer with willing hearts to follow Him, we will see that our “little strength” is no longer an albatross around our necks.

Can God use our weakened condition? Is a little bit of strength enough?

Revelation 3:7–13 says: ***“And to the angel [or that means the messenger, the pastor] of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, ‘He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens’: ‘I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”***

Jesus is telling us, "I have set before you an open door that no one can close." Did you hear that? The Lord is inviting you and me into a place where the impossible becomes possible. It's a place of victory—a place where God fights the battle, a battle that you could never win in your own strength.

When our "little strength" is coupled with prayer and faith, we can be assured that the Lord will lead us exactly where He wants us to be and we will do what He wants us to do.

4. Our "little strength" is a good thing when coupled with prayer and faith; it is a recognition of our need for God's power and strength in our life. When is our "little strength" a negative in our walk with God?

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5. What open door do you need God's strength to walk through?

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6. Have you ever prayed for God's strength in your life? Explain.

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Mark 9:23–25 says, ***"Jesus said to him, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!' When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!'"***

Nothing can bring about the tears of brokenness more than the revelation of your own weaknesses. The father's snarky attitude with Jesus' disciples had now melted into a pool of spiritual weakness and ineptness. With tears streaming down his face, he cried out from his heart—he was no longer concerned about the thoughts or views of others; this was now a confrontation between God and a broken man.

The father answered Jesus, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

When the father said, “I believe,” he was literally saying that he was convinced no earthly man could set his son free—it had to be God and His divine power. This was the beginning of his faith; the door was open, and he could walk through it.

After telling Jesus he believed, the father went on to ask the Lord to help him in his unbelief! The man knew that his help could only come from God. But he had a distrust of being helped by humanity. After all, no one person had been able to help him or his son. The father was convicted in his heart that only God could set his son free, but his lack of confidence in Jesus was because he was a man.

With one foot through the open door, he needed help in taking the next vital step of trusting God through His sent Messiah, Jesus Christ. It was an internal battle—a battle that was even tougher than his son being bound by Satan.

The father made an honest confession from a broken heart, and it carried him across the finish line of faith!

God looks upon the heart. He looks upon your heart. Jesus saw the father’s battle and dispelled his unbelief by performing a miracle of deliverance for his possessed son. It is here in the heart where man believes (Rom. 10:10) and where faith in God is rewarded. This father’s prayer came from a place of little strength in himself, yet it was enough with God to propel him through an open door of impossibility to the reality and freedom of God’s power.

7. How did Jesus react to the father’s brokenness? What did the Lord do?

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8. The Lord allows situations to come our way so that we see our need for God. In what way have you been broken and sought out the Lord’s strength?

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9. God looks at the heart. He looks at your heart! How does this encourage you?

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**So what is involved when we commit to praying for strength—for ourselves and for others?**

Praying for strength to go through open doors is about living a life that can only be explained by the supernatural presence of God. It's about moving beyond ourselves. We are not to muscle our way through our Christian life. Our inner strength will get us nowhere! The Christian life is lived through the power of Christ.

***When Praying for Strength—Walketh not in the Counsel of the Ungodly (Psalm 1:1, KJV).***

In light of the father whose son was demon possessed, the moment he stepped away from the crowd (ungodly)—those whose lives were morally wrong, lawless, and unrighteous—the strongholds of wrong thinking could be broken in his life. The influence of the crowds, their arguments and their complaining, could no longer be a persuasive power over him. He had chosen to walk with Christ and away from the corrupt company that fed into his discontent. Christ was now able to begin speaking into his life about his own hard heart and the resident unbelief that filled it.

***When Praying for Strength—Standeth Not in the Way of Sinners (Psalm 1:1, KJV).***

The term sinners in the Hebrew writings has the same connotation as the word sin in the Greek, literally meaning to miss the mark, like an archer who shoots his arrows at the target but keeps missing the bull's-eye. In real terms it means a person who keeps missing a real relationship with God because of the wrong relationships the person is involved in.

This father had been missing the mark for years (as seen by the answer he gave Jesus regarding how long his son had been possessed). But now he turned around 180 degrees (see my book *The 180-Degree Christian*), stepping away from the cantankerous crowd and choosing instead to walk with Christ.

***When Praying for Strength—Sitteth Not in the Seat of the Scornful (Psalm 1:1, KJV).***

When a person sits around and scorns others, the result is a personal consequence of rejection in the person's own heart. In other words, after the crowds have gone home, the scorner is left carrying the full weight of ridicule and scorn in his or her own conscience. Once the father was away from the influence of the crowd, Jesus was able to reveal to him just how broken his relationship with God was.

The father's brazen accusations against the disciples and their failed attempts to deliver his son were actually accusations against God. Jesus knew that if this father would follow Him away from the crowd's influence, two things would happen: First, Jesus would be able to reveal to this father

his bankrupted faith and spiritual weakness. Second, Christ would open the door of faith and God's blessings for him.

When Jesus said to the father, ***"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth"*** (Mark 9:23, KJV), the open door was presented to him.

Jesus gave the father the opportunity to recognize his own weakness and depravity and to immediately lay hold of the offer of Christ to believe and step through the open door! ***"And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief"*** (Mark 9:24, KJV). The father's response was exactly what Jesus was looking for. It was the confession of a man convicted in his heart of his own sin and inability, and by it God's open door of deliverance was presented, and the father walked through it.

### **Closing Assignment!**

Write out the following Scriptures regarding God's strength and then pray over them this week:

Isaiah 40:31 \_\_\_\_\_

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Psalm 73:26 \_\_\_\_\_

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Philippians 4:13 \_\_\_\_\_

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2 Corinthians 12:6 \_\_\_\_\_

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# PRAYING FOR SERVING

In 1997, about three years after coming to Times Square Church, I was invited to speak at Sullivan prison in Fallsburg, New York. I was ushered into a section of the prison with about sixty “lifers.” These sixty men, whose greatest ambition was to kill a cop—in this case, an ex-cop—had nothing left to lose. What would another life sentence matter to them? They were already going to die behind bars.

David Berkowitz led the worship that night. You might remember him as the infamous Son of Sam and the string of six murders he committed between July 29, 1976, and July 31, 1977, in New York City. David is serving six life sentences and has asked to never be paroled because of the responsibility he now feels for the murders he committed and injuries he caused. He is now a wonderful Christian man, totally in love with his Lord. He has a ministry to prisoners who come in so beaten up that they can’t brush their own teeth. He brushes their teeth for them and helps them wash themselves as he tells them how much God loves them. I know the Holy Spirit was and is with David, yet further evidence that the Lord can save and completely transform anybody and anything.

With the auditorium doors locked behind us, I was there with two unarmed guards, one trumpet player from Times Square Church named Angelo, and the sixty aforementioned lifers. As soon as I got up to speak, I told them that I was an ex-cop. Angelo, who was seated behind me, muttered, “Uh-oh.” Angelo, who was a former inmate himself, scolded me later about how dangerous it was for me to confess that I used to be a cop, especially to lifers. No sooner had I mentioned that I was a former cop than one of the prisoners from the back of the auditorium stood up, walked down the aisle, sat down directly in front of me, folded his arms, and glared at me.

“I’m not here because I’ve got nothing better to do,” I told them. “I’m not here because I’m a do-gooder. I’m here because God loves you. I’m here because you can be free, even if you never leave these walls. Your prison is not built by men; your prison is a matter of the heart, and you are captive

because you don't know the love God has for you. You don't know the freedom Christ died to give you."

When I finished speaking, I made an invitation. About eight men came forward. I hugged each one of them, one by one. It was a beautiful sight to see—a cop hugging men with life sentences. Every one of them was weeping and shaking like a baby. What a privilege it was to tell them that God loved them.

### **READ MARK 9:1–29**

(If you have the book, It's Time to Pray, also read Chapter Four)

## **JESUS' MINISTRY IS OUR MINISTRY—SERVING OTHERS!**

We are all born, without exception, selfish in the core of our beings. This self-focus is entrenched in our sinful nature, and though there are compassionate people in society, the general human tendency is not to be focused on the well-being of other people.

Compassion is the focus of God. ***"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"*** (John 3:16, NIV). In the same way, as God's children, we are to be more concerned about other people than ourselves. We are to love and serve others—God's entire ministry to us is about others. And when I say "love and serve others," that doesn't mean just our friends!

I have always believed that it is impossible to claim, "I am in Christ, and Christ is in me," and not be lovingly and compassionately invested in the physical, spiritual, and emotional health and well-being of other people—no matter who they are.

***"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"*** (Matthew 5:43–48, NIV).

1. How are “love” and “serving” connected to one another?

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2. Jesus tells us to love our neighbor. Who is our neighbor?

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3. The Lord commands us to love our enemies. Why is this so important?

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Mark 9:14–19 says: ***“When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ‘What are you arguing with them about?’ he asked. A man in the crowd answered, ‘Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.’ ‘You unbelieving generation,’ Jesus replied, ‘how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.’”***

The ultimate expression of how deeply I really do love God is based on how I interact with other people. In other words, the Scripture says that in fact I am to love my neighbor as myself. Who is my neighbor? You may not like the answer, but your neighbor is not just the people you like—your neighbor includes the person that you don’t like; the person that you have nothing in common with; the person that sees things completely different than you do; the person that is of a different culture, ethnicity, or belief system; the person that you fear; the person that you stereotype; the person that you disrespect; the person that you consider your mortal enemy!

As we have seen so far from our study in Mark 9, Jesus does not happen upon a loving situation when He comes down the mountain. In fact, what He does find is arguing, chaos, anger, disappointment, and demonic activity. Just reading the passage up above it’s obvious that there is a lack of love, compassion, and mercy.

Jesus comes down from the Mount of Transfiguration to find the father distraught about his child’s demon possession, as well as the disciples’ lack of power, and this needy father becomes the Lord’s

immediate neighbor. This man had been beaten up emotionally by the devil, who had taken control of his son's life. He needed Jesus' help in an impossible situation. Jesus could have walked away, as the priest and Levite did when they ignored the plight of a man robbed, beaten, and left half dead by thieves. But a compassionate Samaritan man took pity on the man and transported him to an inn to be cared for: **"But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him"** (Luke 10:33, NIV). The word pity here literally means "to be sick to the stomach."

This poor father had been ignored by the religious leaders and sadly found the disciples were unable to help, though they tried (Mark 9:22). So this father, moved to the deepest core of his being, asked Jesus to set his son free. Jesus, like the Good Samaritan, didn't turn away from His neighbor but directly and personally ministered to this father, who was desperate for God's help.

4. Whether it was fear, hatred, or judgmentalism, the religious leaders turned their back on this father and his son. Do you see this kind of behavior in our society today?

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5. Jesus loved the father and his son. And the father responded to Jesus' heart of compassion. How can loving people, especially the marginalized and the disenfranchised, open the door for God's transformative and healing power?

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6. Have you ever felt like this father in the story? Or perhaps the boy? Have you ever encountered a situation in your life where people shut you out, avoided you, or even judged you instead of showing the love of Christ?

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God will be God, even to the most ungodly among us. Better said, God will be in His greatest glory in the midst of the most ungodly among us. Jonah couldn't bring himself to pray that God would be merciful to those who were professed enemies to the people of God. Yet to those who treated the people of God with contempt and cruelty, God was nonetheless merciful, especially merciful. It annoyed Jonah to no end. After God extended indescribable mercy to the people of Nineveh, Jonah sat on a hillside above the city, angry and grieved in his heart that God had not destroyed the people who had caused such pain to his own nation.

It is hard for some to admit, but how low has religiousness sunk when our hearts are saddened when our enemies turn to God? We'd rather call down fire upon them and see them burn in hell for all eternity than see them receive God's mercy—the same mercy, by the way, that He extended to us! We'd rather pound the pulpit with our fists and claim that their degrading and disgusting sin is abhorrent and intolerant to God than open our fists and lift open hands, crying hot tears and pleading with God to show them mercy and change them from the inside out.

Write out the following Scriptures regarding compassion:

1 Samuel 23:21 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 103:13 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 54:10 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Colossians 3:12 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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James 5:11 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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Luke 7:13

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**The Joy of Serving Others**

Joy will fill your heart when you start serving others and love them with the love of Christ. Not only will the Lord give you the ability and the power to love others; He will change how you see people—He will give you fresh eyes and His thoughts so that even your enemies become people you deeply care for and love. It is in this unconditional giving of yourself to other people that you find the diminishing of your own selfish desires and a true foundation of joy welling up in your soul. The Bible tells us that Jesus went to the cross willingly, enduring it and despising the shame, for the joy that was set before Him. Now the Lord sits at the right hand of all authority—and offers you the joy and peace that comes from Him.

We can't share truth about God's love with any shred of authenticity until we truly begin living for others—until we begin praying for a heart that loves and serves others, just as God has loved and poured out His life for us.

Although we are all born, without exception, selfish and self-focused to the core of our beings, God will set doors before us that, if we pray and believe enough to pass through, will lead us to a joyous and blessed life of service to others.

**So what is involved when we commit to praying for serving others?*****When Praying for Serving Others—FOCUS ON LOVE***

The Bible tells us that God loves a cheerful giver. In the same way, the only way one can truly serve others is by loving them—truly caring for their welfare, their needs, and their spiritual condition. When love is absent from our service, we are merely doing “good” works out of selfish reasoning rather than from a loving and giving heart. If you struggle with loving people, especially your enemy, pray that the Lord will give you a heart for people—that you will see them as God sees them. Focus on love then your serving will be about the other person and not about you!

***When Praying for Serving Others—BE INCLUSIVE***

This is something, especially in our culture today, that can't be stated enough—our “neighbor” is everyone. Every human being is made in the image of God and loved by our Lord. As believers, we are to bring the light of Christ to every person we know and encounter no matter their race, their ethnicity, their belief system, their political views, their sinfulness, their lifestyle, etc. We need to remember that Jesus died for us while we were still sinners! The religious leaders in Jesus' day shunned “sinners” (even though their hearts were desperately wicked) and even kept them from

knowing God! The Lord forbid that we keep anyone from coming to know Him by our words or our treatment of them.

***When Praying for Serving Others—BE COMPASSIONATE***

Compassion flows from a loving heart. The Bible asks us that if we see someone in need but do not help them, how can the love of God be in our heart? The opposite of compassion is indifference. And indifference stems from self-focus rather than putting other's needs before our own. Too often, as believers, we can be indifferent to people's suffering, grief, or needs because we are swallowed up in our concerns. When praying for serving others ask the Lord for a heart of compassion so that indifference is not a part of our Christian character. No matter how busy Jesus public ministry was, He always put people's needs at the forefront—He was never indifferent to the cries for help that surrounded Him. And, He is never indifferent to our needs or cries for help either!

**Closing Assignment!**

Write down five ways you can pray for and serve your "neighbor" and show them the love of Christ:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



# PRAYING FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE

Years ago we were in Jamaica for a three-day evangelistic crusade in an area of the inner city of Kingston. This particular area had been given over to violence and mayhem for thirty years. The population was one hundred thousand, and unemployment was at 100 percent. Six drug lords controlled the whole area and constantly vied for supremacy in the drug trade.

It got so violent in this community that the government plowed down a thirty-acre field between the six areas that were under the control of the drug lords. That area became known as “no-man’s land.”

An unwritten law was created that no person was allowed to cross that land to the other side. It was a buffer zone. Anybody who tried to cross was usually shot at by people from the other side. Over the span of thirty years there were over eight hundred murders recorded on that infamous field. Those were the recorded ones, but people told us there were a lot more murders than eight hundred.

The Lord called us to set up a platform in this no-man’s land and have a three-day crusade! He spoke to my heart that He was about to destroy the power of violence, poverty, and unemployment and was going to do a miracle in this sin-ravaged community.

I remember gathering the pastors together from the community and telling them what the Lord had spoken. I told them God had spoken something to my heart and that I fully believed it was going to happen. I let them know that there was going to be a revival in this area, that thousands of people were going to be saved and that they were going to have to be there and be ready to disciple these people.

I remember them looking at me, and more than one got up and walked out of the meeting. They said I was a madman!

"It's crazy—it's a dangerous area to go in, and people don't go there," they said.

Just before we set up the crusade, we had to hire a mercenary soldier, who was feared by all those in the area. He actually was a very tough guy. In order for us to hold the crusade in that area, we had to get permission from all six drug lords, or they could kill us.

There was no law there anymore. The government had tried to disarm the rebels and the warlords after the attacks in NYC on 9-11, but they failed in their efforts.

While I was riding in the car with the tough soldier, he looked at me and said, "You guys are nuts; you are completely nuts. Nobody is coming to this thing. In fact, you will be lucky if you don't get yourselves killed. You have no idea what you are dealing with."

We set up the stage on the field. There was only a little flock of Christian people, but because of fear some wouldn't come on the field. So the people on the periphery of this thirty-acre parcel of land were about five or six rows deep—but no matter what, they wouldn't come onto the field.

As I was speaking on Ezekiel 37, the Holy Spirit came on me, and I stood back and forgot for a moment where I was, but I leaned over the pulpit, and I began to cry for the people. I wept and cried out, "Oh, Holy Spirit, come." It was a moment in which I realized that all was hopeless apart from the Holy Spirit! I just kept asking the Spirit to breathe on these dear people so that they may live.

I didn't care what people thought as they saw me crying out. It didn't matter because I knew the hopelessness of the moment if God didn't intervene. The weeping that had come on me suddenly hit the front row of the people and just started going down the line! One of the concessionaires who was way at the back of this field told me later that the thug (one of the drug lord's minions—and there were many) who was standing next to her started to weep as well. Before I knew it, people started to fill the field!

That night about two thousand people met me at the altar and came to Christ. It was an amazing night! By the last night of the crusade, there were fourteen thousand people on that field. Many came to Christ, and the spirit of violence was broken.

On that field today the government has built beautiful houses and condominiums. What used to be no-man's land now holds a church and a children's playground. The Queen of England found out what was happening and donated personal money to build a pottery-making plant. Now there is employment and a thriving community, all because God did the impossible!

**READ MARK 9:1-29**

(If you have the book, It's Time to Pray, also read Chapter Five)

**A BIG GOD OR A LITTLE GOD?**

Do you believe that God can do the impossible in your life? I mean, really believe?

I read a little story once that I want to share with you here:

Robert Dick Wilson was one of the great professors at Princeton Theological Seminary. One of his students had been invited to preach in Miller Chapel twelve years after his graduation. Old Dr. Wilson came in and sat down near the front. At the close of the meeting, the old professor came up to his former student, cocked his head to one side in his characteristic way, extended his hand, and said, "If you come back again, I will not come to hear you preach. I only come once. I am glad that you are a big-godder. When my boys come back, I come to see if they are big-godders or little-godders, and then I know what their ministry will be." His former student asked him to explain, and he replied, "Well, some men have a little God, and they are always in trouble with him. He can't do any miracles. He can't take care of the inspiration and transmission of the Scripture to us. He doesn't intervene on behalf of his people. They have a little God and I call them little-godders. Then, there are those who have a great God. He speaks and it is done. He commands and it stands fast. He knows how to show himself strong on behalf of them that fear him. You have a great God; and he will bless your ministry." He paused a moment, smiled, said, "God bless you," and turned and walked out.

1. Are you a little-godder or a big-godder?

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2. How can the wrong image of God (little-godder vs. big-godder) affect your life?

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3. What problem are you facing now? Do you believe that God is able to work on your behalf in the midst of this problem?

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Throughout the history of humanity, God's people time and again have found themselves facing the impossible. And time and again, the Lord showed Himself strong on behalf of His people.

In our present age, however, it would seem that the church has fallen spiritually asleep. We have become little-godders and have found ourselves inwardly confused and outwardly defeated, all because we have focused on the natural and have stepped back from the true work of God.

The Christian life is not lived in the natural, yet that's exactly what so many believers are trying to do—and that includes leadership in many churches as well. We have moved away from the supernatural walk of the Holy Spirit and have relied on ingenuity, programs, and professional skills to try to accomplish God's work. We have moved from the compassion of God that was exhibited on the cross to an inward focus.

Is it any wonder that we seem so weak and ineffective—in our own lives and in our communities and nation?

Write out the following Scriptures regarding God's ability to do the impossible in and through you:

Jeremiah 32:27 \_\_\_\_\_

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Job 42:2 \_\_\_\_\_

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Mark 10:27 \_\_\_\_\_

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Matthew 17:20 \_\_\_\_\_

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God has given us the power of His Word and His Holy Spirit to live our Christian walk and accomplish His will. Where God says He is able to take you, what He says He is able to do, wherever He has determined to lead you is entirely possible as long as God Himself is the author and finisher of it. Your part is prayer and faith. Anything other than that, once you get involved, will tarnish the word of God or take something that should glorify the name of Christ and diminish it.

Jesus' growth strategy for the church is found in Acts 1:7–8, which says, ***“He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth’”*** (NASB).

Take a moment and think about your Christian walk. What does it look like to you? How's your prayer life? Are you in God's Word? And, most importantly, are you relying on the Lord to do the impossible in and through you—or are you reliant on yourself and living in the natural? Write down your thoughts to these questions:

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***“The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, ‘He’s dead.’ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up”*** (Mark 9:26–27, NIV).

When Jesus came down the Mount of Transfiguration, the crowd came running to Him. They wanted to see a miracle. It was then that the demonic spirit manifested itself before them (v. 20). This is how the enemy works. He manifests his power before God does His work in order to put fear and doubt into your mind and to stop you from trusting God. I've seen it happen so many times, and because of that I have learned when the enemy shows his hand, it's because God is about to do something amazing! I'm sure when the crowd suddenly saw the boy writhing in agony on the ground and foaming at the mouth, they were filled with fear and thought it was an impossible situation.

Even after Jesus cast the demon out, the initial result looked no different from what had already been witnessed—in fact, it looked much worse. The boy was cast to the ground again, but this time it looked as though he were dead (v. 26). Had the power of God been unable to counter the power of Satan? Was Jesus no better than His disciples who could not cast the demon out? It sure seemed like it.

Imagine how confusing (and disappointing) this must have been for the father.

Over the years I have heard sincere people make this statement: “Every time I get serious about the Lord and make a decision to live fully for Him, I get severely attacked. At times I have thought it’s easier not to be a Christian than be one and open myself up to this attack.”

I imagine this was the sentiment of the crowd as they watched the boy writhing on the ground. They must have thought it would have been better for the child to remain “possessed” and alive than to be “delivered” and dead.

Beloved, this is exactly what the enemy wants you to believe. People give up at the very point of true victory. Jesus wasn’t finished yet.

The very next moment Jesus reached down and took the child by the hand and lifted him up; immediately life began to flow into the boy. The Greek text literally means to awaken. What looks like death to us is nothing more than sleep to God. I’m sure when the boy stood up, the father and the crowd of onlookers were amazed! Life came to the child that day, and he would go on to live a life like everyone else, neither marginalized nor impaired by what the devil had done in the past. Jesus had done the impossible.

Do you find yourself in an impossible place right now?

4. How does this story in Mark 9 encourage your faith?

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5. If you had been in the crowd watching this happen, what would have been your response?

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6. Is there anything in your heart that you believe God can't do? What steps will you take to grow your prayer life?

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You will never rely on the supernatural until the natural ends. In other words, until you come to the end of yourself—your skills, your schemes, and your manipulation of circumstances—you will not experience the power of God working out the impossible in your life.

We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit—relying on (trusting) God's Word and communicating with Him through prayer—rather than trying to live out our faith in the natural.

The Lord does not withhold His Spirit from us—He wants to work in and through our lives, but too often we forfeit His hand upon us because we are dead to prayer, dead to His Word, and lacking in faith!

Prayer to a Christian is the very breath of life, and God's Word is our sustenance. When we forsake both of these vital components, we are left with living in the natural, which never brings about God's power and redemptive work.

**So what is involved when we commit to praying for the impossible—for ourselves and for others?**

What will bring about God's greater purpose and glory in our situation? We pray and believe the Lord for the impossible and watch Him bring about that which the natural cannot do.

***When Praying for the Impossible—REMEMBER, HE IS GOD!***

First and foremost, when you are praying, remember whom you are praying to! The apostles did not relegate God to the realm of the possible. They got together and prayed and in unison said, "You are God."

That's where our prayer has to start—"You are God! You spoke, and the worlds were created. You spoke, and life came into being. You spoke, and animals were created. You looked at dust in the earth, and You spoke and breathed, and man became a living soul. You are God—nothing is impossible with You."

***When Praying for the Impossible—RELY ON GOD'S POWER***

When we pray for the impossible, that means we recognize that nothing will be accomplished by the natural—not our abilities or our own mechanisms—but by God's Spirit.

Miracles, for the Christian, should not be something we just accept but expect. Now, in saying that, it doesn't mean that God throws His miracles around like an item that can be found at the dollar store. God's miracles are not for your personal enjoyment or luxury. Yes, God can bless us. But He's not a cosmic genie who hands out cheap miracles for our own selfish benefit. God works in the impossible to bring redemption and to bring glory to His name. God's will is about accomplishing God's work in our lives. That's why some people are healed miraculously from disease and others are not.

***When Praying for the Impossible—RELY ON GOD'S LEADING***

God is not hiding His will for your life from you, though many believers seem to think that is the case. The Lord will always unravel His plan for you and lead you in His timing and in His way. But when you are praying for the impossible, ask the Lord to lead you and then believe that is exactly what He will do!

God declares through the promises in His Word that He is going to take you and make you into something much greater than you are. It's the visible testimony God gives to His church that you and I are made into much more than we could ever hope to be in our own strength. We change by the Spirit of God, Paul says, from image to image and glory to glory.

The changed lives of people, redeemed by the power of the cross, are the greatest witness of the truth of the gospel to our fallen and needy world.





# PRAYING FOR FORGIVENESS

John Perkins, in his book *Let Justice Roll Down*, tells how Jesus' forgiveness is what enabled him to forgive. This is what he says:

The spirit of God worked on me as I lay in that bed. An image formed in my mind. The image of the cross—Christ on the cross. It blotted out everything else in my mind.

This Jesus knew what I had suffered. He understood. And He cared. Because He had experienced it all Himself.

This Jesus, this One who had brought good news directly from God in heaven, had lived what He preached. Yet He was arrested and falsely accused. Like me, He went through an unjust trial. He also faced a lynch mob and got beaten. But even more than that, He was nailed to rough wooden planks and killed. Killed like a common criminal....

But when He looked at the mob that had lynched Him, He didn't hate them. He loved them. He forgave them. And He prayed [to] God to forgive them. "Father, forgive these people, for they don't know what they are doing."

His enemies hated. But Jesus forgave. I couldn't get away from that.

The Spirit of God kept working on me and in me until I could say with Jesus, "I forgive them, too." I promised Him that I would "return good for evil," not evil for evil. And He gave me the love I knew I would need to fulfill His command to me of "love your enemy."

It's a profound, mysterious truth—Jesus' concept of love overpowering hate. I may not see its victory in my lifetime. But I know it's true.

I know it's true, because it happened to me. On that bed, full of bruises and stitches—God made it true in me. He washed my hatred away and replaced it with a love for the white man in rural Mississippi.

I felt strong again. Stronger than ever. What doesn't destroy me makes me stronger.

I know it's true.

Because it happened to me.<sup>1</sup>

### **READ MARK 9:1–29**

(If you have the book, *It's Time to Pray*, also read Chapter Six)

## **GOD IS WORKING OUT A GREATER GLORY IN OUR SUFFERING**

We have all been hurt, betrayed, and treated badly by others. Some of us have been abused and brutalized in ways that are hard to comprehend.

God's Word is full of real-life stories of people inflicting pain on others. Throughout the Old and New Testaments we read time and again of betrayal, injustice, brutality, and abuses carried out, often, I might mention, against God's people.

The hurts that we experience are as old as sin entering the world. The very first murder in history happened within the very first human family to walk the earth! Adam and Eve's son Cain killed his brother Abel out of jealousy and hatred.

How are we to respond to those who have hurt and betrayed us?

God's Word tells us that suffering is, in some measure, a doorway to knowing Christ in such a way that we can't know by any other method.

That truth in no way belittles the pain you experience brought on by the actions of another, but it does set into motion the process of freedom from the bondage of hate, bitterness, and hardness of heart that can smother the work of God in your life.

2 Corinthians 11:23–27 says, ***“Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger***

***from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food,[a] in cold and exposure.”***

When we think of Paul the apostle or Silas, we love to remember the prison doors opening, the jailer and his family being saved, the songs in the night, the earthquake, and all the people that were saved in their ministry. But the precursor to the victories were stripes laid on their backs, false accusations, public beatings, humiliation, and night after night laying on a cold, hard stone slab with their feet in stocks in prison.

In the above verse, Paul talks about the severe treatment he received at the hands of others. Considering all the injustice and brutality that Paul experienced, one would think he would become hard and bitter. However, the apostle knew that even in his sufferings God was working out a greater glory in and through Him. In Philippians 3:8–10 Paul says, ***“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”***

1. Read the verses listed above in 2 Corinthians 11:23–27. Write down all the ways that Paul suffered at the hands of other people:

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2. What strikes you about Paul’s attitude towards his mistreatment and suffering?

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3. How did Paul see his suffering as ultimately being a worthy happening?

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Are you suffering today? Have you been betrayed? Have you faced injustice? Are you bearing the pain of abuse and brutality?

When we are betrayed, it is a trial like no other. I have experienced the hurt of betrayal. It is a pain sometimes like no other, and some of you have been betrayed long before you became a Christian. Your little feet hit the floor, and before you got to be five, you were betrayed. Your pathway became less sure; your steps became feeble. The act of betrayal or abuse became a very, very difficult place for you—like a large hole that swallowed you up, and to this day you still have not been able to climb out. You were betrayed by people whom you trusted. You were betrayed by people in authority. You were betrayed by people who should have loved and protected you.

So how do you get out of that hole? How do you get past the pain and get to a healthy place where you are walking in the love, peace, and joy of Christ?

The answer is found in one word: forgiveness.

When Jesus was dying on the cross, He prayed to His heavenly Father. Guess what? He didn't pray that God would seek revenge on His persecutors. He didn't call down fire and brimstone to kill those who had betrayed and abused Him. He did something that would forever change the world and show the heart of God: Jesus asked God to forgive those who hurt and betrayed and would kill Him—to not charge them with this offense but rather forgive them. And then with that still, small voice—filled with love and grace—Jesus said, **"They know not what they do"** (Luke 23:34, KJV).

Write out the following Scriptures regarding forgiveness:

Daniel 9:9 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Matthew 26:28 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Acts 26:18 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Ephesians 1:7

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An unforgiving heart can cause a distortion in how we view others and interpret their actions. It's like looking out of a dirty window thinking it's a dark and dismal day when in reality the sun is shining and the flowers are blooming. The power of forgiveness is like wiping the window clean; your whole perspective on life changes instantly. Unfortunately it is one thing to be betrayed by another human being, but sadly there are many who look at their difficult circumstances and feel God has betrayed them. They believe that God wasn't there at their moments of crises or He let them down by not fully meeting their desperate needs. So they live with an accusing heart toward God and because of it blame Him and His people for letting them down.

Mark 9:18 says, ***“And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.”***

When I read the words of the distraught father in that verse, it reveals an accusation leveled at the disciples. What is interesting is the emphasis of the Greek with the words could not. It means to have no power, no authority, no strength, or no ability. This was not a casual statement the father made concerning Jesus' disciples. It was an indictment to their lack of spiritual power.

It is evident that the father's feeling of betrayal resulted in his own lack of faith and unbelief toward God. After all, he was a Jewish man who believed he was a child of God. Therefore, why would a loving God allow his son, who was just a child, to be possessed by a demonic spirit?

The boy had done nothing deserving of being held captive by Satan. Where was God in his time of need? The father felt betrayed not only by God but also by the disciples.

It's easy to reject or turn away from those who have betrayed you in life. Yet Christ gives us the supreme example when from the cross He prays, ***“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”*** (Luke 23:34, KJV).

Notice Jesus' response towards the father. He didn't condemn him but rather showed Him love and compassion. And that started the process of softening the father's heart toward God.

4. How did Jesus' response toward the father affect his bitterness toward God?

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5. Have you ever felt betrayed by God? If so, explain.

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6. Is there someone in your life that you need to forgive? Are you willing to trust God to bring about His greater glory in the suffering you have faced?

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The basis for letting go of our hurts—for not seeking revenge or harboring hate and bitterness in our hearts toward our enemies—is rooted in the act of forgiveness. As Christians, we cannot withhold forgiveness from the one who hurt and betrayed us because God has not withheld His forgiveness of our sins.

**So what is involved when we commit to praying for forgiveness—for ourselves and for others?**

***When Praying for Forgiveness—REALIZE: JESUS KNEW THE HURT OF BETRAYAL***

Jesus was betrayed by His friend—one of His own disciples, a man in his inner circle. He was betrayed by countless hundreds, and maybe even thousands, whom He had fed on mountaintops, whose children He had been kind to, and healed every kind of ailment and disease—including casting out demons. He had seen this crowd standing before Him and saying, “Crucify Him, crucify Him,” and then asking Pilate to release the murderer Barabbas instead of Jesus, the Son of God, the One that had loved them and helped them in every way imaginable.

***When Praying for Forgiveness—UNDERSTAND: JESUS KNEW THE PAIN OF ABUSE***

The Lord was treated as a criminal. He endured mocking by the Roman authorities and soldiers. He was abused and battered, suffering such brutality that His face was marred and unrecognizable. Each hair of His beard was plucked out by hand. He was punched, whipped, lashed, slapped, and beaten with a stick. The soldiers spit on Him and humiliated Him through their taunting words and their “crown of thorns” that they smashed onto His head.

***When Praying for Forgiveness—CONSIDER: JESUS KNEW THE STING OF INJUSTICE***

The Lord was arrested under false testimony from others and charged with a crime that He did not commit. He did not receive a fair trial. And though innocent, He was given the death penalty.

**Closing Assignment!**

There are many stories of betrayal, mistreatment, and abuse in the Bible. In particular, read the story of Joseph which can be found in Genesis 37:17–33. Right down four ways that God used Joseph's suffering for a greater good.

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# PRAYING FOR FAITH

We could feel the tension the moment we arrived in Burundi. My family and I were put in a compound surrounded by armed guards day and night. The president had assigned guards to me and my family who were part of his elite presidential guard unit because the danger was so real and present. No one knew if our evangelical rallies would reignite to genocide and bloodshed. If that was the sentiment, then I would surely become a target for at least one side of the conflict, as would the president. We both might be targets for both sides. The situation, though quiet, was still volatile.

Burundi was an eerie place. I noticed soon after our arrival that there were no dogs as we had seen running freely in other African nations, such as Nigeria. I asked why there were no dogs and was told that they had all been shot because they became uncontrollable, eating the human bodies in the streets. That helped to remind me how fresh the emotional wounds were. There had scarcely been time for the wounds to close up, much less for scars to form.

I woke up in the middle of the first night in the heavily guarded compound to the sound of screaming and a huge explosion. The guards told me that there was no explosion. They assured me that there was no screaming. It seems I was the only one who heard it. But it was not a dream. I distinctly heard those sounds. I had never heard such sounds before.

A sense of dread came over me that there would soon be another uprising, and I felt guilty that I had perhaps brought our people from New York into harm's way. I got up and went to the rooftop of the guarded compound and paced back and forth for much of the night, reminding myself over and over again what God had sent me to do. I reminded myself how important it was to simply believe that He was going to accomplish what He promised to accomplish. It required faith, and I was on the spot like never before. "Carter, do you trust Me?" I felt the Lord saying to me.

**READ MARK 9:1-29**

(If you have the book, It's Time to Pray, also read Chapter Seven)

**INSTANT GRATIFICATION DOES NOT PRODUCE FAITH**

Our society is obsessed with instant gratification. We don't want to wait for anything. Americans find themselves in debt because they need to have the latest iPhone, television, car, or house by getting loans and credit cards to pay for them.

No matter where we look or what we do, instant gratification is the god of the age. And because of this, we find a generation that is immature, rebellious, and feeling entitled to just about everything—without working hard to gain what they need or want.

But that's not the way the kingdom of God works. Instant gratification is not in God's dictionary because it does not produce faith and trust in Him. In fact, it doesn't produce anything of spiritual worth, nor does it produce godly character.

As believers, we have a tendency to expect instant gratification from the Lord. We pray a handful of times and are distraught if our prayer has not been answered. We might be walking a difficult path in our lives and get frustrated when the Lord does not smooth it out quickly.

His ways are not our ways, the prophet Isaiah said. His thoughts are not our thoughts. He will answer our prayer, but it's in His perfect timing and in His perfect way. He will smooth out our paths but not until He is able to build in us the faith, trust, and character that is needed. Instant gratification does nothing to build one's character or faith. And ultimately God is most interested in maturing us in our walk so that our trust in Him is solid.

1. What does instant gratification produce in someone's life?

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2. Why is it so hard to wait? And why is waiting so important to our character?

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3. What in our society fuels the desire for instant gratification?

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Waiting is not easy. But God tells us to be persistent in our prayers, believing that He will indeed answer at just the right time. Maybe you are tired of waiting for an answer. You've prayed for a specific situation, person, or circumstance, but you have not seen an answer, and you are beginning to lose heart.

Luke 18:1–8 says: ***“Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: ‘There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’ Then the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’”***

If an ungodly human judge can grant the request of a persistent widow, how much more will God answer you (and fight for you) if you call out to Him? God will answer you if you pray in faith.

Jesus said we should always pray and not lose heart...

4. What do His words mean to you?

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5. We usually lose heart when our prayers are not answered according to our time frame. How can being persistent in prayer increase our faith?

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6. Think of one time where you lost heart because of what seemed like unanswered prayer. What did God do in that situation? Are you still waiting for an answer?

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Due to our inclinations for instant gratification—instant answers—we often think our prayers are falling on deaf ears. Instead of being persistent in prayer and having faith, we throw our arms up and say, “What’s the use!” We need to understand that, as God’s children, He does instantly hear our prayers. Our cries to God do not go ignored—they don’t fall on deaf ears. He is fully aware of our situation and our heart’s cry. And just as importantly He is not failing to answer our prayers. In fact, God answers all of our prayers, but we need to understand that He does so in His way and in His perfect timing. Sometimes His answer is yes, no, or wait.

Read Hebrews 11 Regarding Faith. What are the main points being made in this passage?

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Mark 9:22 says, **“And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”**

But if You can do anything...

This was the question posed to Jesus by the father of a son who was demon possessed. Jesus replied and said, **“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth”** (Mark 9:23, KJV).

In essence, Jesus was saying, “Life under the dominion of Satan’s kingdom doesn’t have to continue.” The kingdom of God overcomes the kingdom of Satan just as light overcomes darkness. You only have to flick the light switch on once to become a believer that light is more powerful than the darkness. The issue wasn’t if God could perform the impossible but rather, could the father believe He could?

Friend, the issue is the same today! God has already won the victory for you. He paid the price for your sin on the cross, and He rose—conquering the power of death and darkness in your life. The issue isn’t whether God can; the issue is whether you believe He can.

The distraught father recognized that neither he nor the disciples had power in themselves to bring about the deliverance of his son. But here was a man called Jesus standing before him saying, “If you believe, all things are possible with God.” This was a crucial moment for the father—he was being confronted with his own lack of faith in a God who had created the universe by a single command. The realization impacted him so powerfully he began to weep. With tears streaming down his face—of course he believed all things were possible with God—he realized he needed help in believing God would set things right for him and his son.

With a single command Jesus delivered the boy from the stronghold of Satan. The light went on, and darkness departed in an instant. Such is the power of God through faith!

Faith in Christ is the foundation for everyone who comes to God; no one is exempt from God's divinely designed plan.

When Jesus asked the father of the demon-possessed son how long he had been that way, the man replied, “**Of a child**” (Mark 9:21, KJV). In other words, it had been a long time. It was through this long, ongoing difficulty that sparked the father's desire to seek God's help. God will use the difficult seasons in our lives to bring about a desire to seek Him and to have faith in His deliverance.

7. Why do you think that no one had been able to help this man and his son?

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8. What was Jesus' reaction towards the disciples, the father, and the demon-possessed boy?

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9. Have you ever felt like this father in the story? Or perhaps the boy? Have you ever encountered a situation in your life where no one was able to help?

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When the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Why could we not drive the demon out?” Jesus said to them that this kind of demonic possession only comes out with persistent prayer and fasting. In other words, “Don’t give up if you don’t see the answer immediately.” But God has promised to do this, and God will do it.

### **So what is involved when we commit to praying for faith—for ourselves and for others?**

#### **When Praying for Faith—BE PERSISTENT**

The Oxford dictionary describes persistence as firm or obstinate continuance in a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition. Faith never gives up. It’s never built on instant gratification—instant answers—but rather on the continuing effort to lift situations, problems, people, communities, and nations before the Lord.

#### **When Praying for Faith—BELIEVE GOD ANSWERS**

You can’t have faith without believing God! Not only do you need to believe God is who He says He is, but you need to believe that God hears your prayers and answers them. The Bible says that **“faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”** (Hebrews 11:1). And 1 John 5:4 says, **“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”**

#### **When Praying for Faith—TRUST GOD’S TIMING**

Psalm 27:14 says, **“Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!”** God always answers your prayers, but He does so in His way and in His timing. His delays bring about His glory. In the book of John, chapter 11, we read the story of Mary, Martha and Lazarus—good friends of Jesus. Lazarus is very sick and his sisters, Mary and Martha, send word to Jesus to come quickly and help (heal) Lazarus. John 11:4–7 says, **“When Jesus heard this, He said, ‘This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, on hearing that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was for two days, and then He said to the disciples, ‘Let us go back to Judea.’”**

Jesus loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus. But he purposely delayed his answer to their cry for help so that He could do a much greater work than merely healing Lazarus from his sickness. The Lord didn’t want to just heal Lazarus—He wanted to raise him from the dead!

God’s delayed answers to your prayers are for your greater good and for God’s greater glory. TRUST HIM and TRUST HIS TIMING.

**Closing Assignment!**

Do you have the kind of faith that believes God for situations that are impossible in the natural, that kind of faith that says, “I will not let go of my sons and my daughters. I will not let go of my marriage. I will not let go of my faith—even though my situation looks hopeless, I trust God will hear my cry”?

Pray this prayer:

“God, I cry out to You, for You are the only One who can make a difference. I cry out to You, God, for issues in my own character that I can’t change. Your Word says a leopard can’t change its spots. I can’t change this about my character. But O God, I cry out to You, Lord, to send the answer into my heart. Send the answer into my life, and supernaturally give me victory in this area of my life.

“O God, I’ve carried this wound around in my life far too long. I walked the streets, Lord, mourning like a dove day in and day out. O God, you’re the only One who can heal my heart because You promised that You would come and heal those that have been bruised in heart.

“So I cry out to You, God, and I ask You, Lord, for the healing that You’ve promised. You say that out of weakness we are made strong. You say in Your Word that You take the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. O God, help me now to do something that will glorify Your name. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit, O God; give me the strength that can only come from You, and make a difference through my life.

“I lift up the people that I know, the people in my community, the people in my office, the people I see on the street every day who seem so indifferent to truth. But You know their heart, and there’s something arising in this generation. There’s a cry now coming into it. I can hear it now. There’s a cry in this generation!”



# PRAYING FOR PEACE

***“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”*** (Philippians 4:7, KJV).

It is not only possible to have peace in the midst of darkness; it’s a promise that Jesus gives to all who believe on Him.

Are you in a dark place today? Are you praying for God’s peace to fill your heart and mind?

You may be thinking, “Yeah, but you don’t know the trials I am facing right now.” And you would be right, I don’t. But God does. And His promise of peace in the midst of your circumstance is exactly what He can and will give to you.

Consider the following true story.

In 1873 a successful businessman lost all his material possessions in the great Chicago fire. This did not trouble him too much, for he had set his affection on “things above.” However, just a few weeks later, when his wife and children were on board the Ville du Havre to visit France, their ship was rammed by an English vessel and sank within two hours, claiming the lives of 226 people. Although his wife survived, all four of their children perished in the icy waters.

The man was given the tragic news and later shown the spot in the mid-Atlantic where the shipwreck occurred. Although heartsick with grief, Mr. Spafford suddenly felt an inrush of supernatural peace and comfort as he looked to the Lord for strength. With tears streaming down his face, he picked up a pen to record his feelings, and from his well-blessed heart flowed these thrilling words:

“When peace like a river attendeth my way,  
when sorrows like sea billows roll;  
whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’”

**READ MARK 9:1-29**

(If you have the book, It's Time to Pray, also read Chapter Eight)

**GOD GIVES US HIS PEACE**

No one likes to get bad news.

You can be going right along with your daily activities, and then in an instant everything in your life can change—a phone call, a report, a vehicle accident, a pink slip, or something else that rocks your world can take place. It doesn't even have to be a calamitous event to change your life in a moment of time.

Have you experienced that? You are cruising right along in life, but then your husband comes home from work and says he wants a divorce, and your world comes crashing down. Or you wake up as usual to get ready to go to work, but once there, you find out you no longer have a job, and like that, your world falls apart.

Can we have peace in our hearts when our world is turned upside down?

- 1. What life-shaking event have you experienced?

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Jesus said, ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”*** (John 14:27).

The kind of peace that the world gives is conditional—it stands on a shaky foundation that can change with every passing whim. Some people find peace and security in money, until they lose

their job or the stock market crashes. Other people find peace in relationships or in their marriage, until they fail. The kind of peace that Jesus promises His children is unconditional. It's a peace based on the foundation of God Himself—unchanging, loving, gracious, merciful, and faithful. God's peace is not dependent on our circumstances; in fact, it thrives in the midst of our trials, tribulations, and dark valleys.

The peace that Jesus gives you and me is drawn from the very heart of God. It's a peace that reminds us in the deepest of our trials that He is faithful, He keeps His promises; it assures us that we are His and that nothing—no person, no demon, no fear, no enemy—can take us out of God's hand; and it comforts us with the truth that we are secure in Him.

The peace of God in your life gives you the sense that you are not walking alone; God is walking with you. God's peace tells you that you do not have to sustain yourself; God is sustaining you. The peace that Jesus gives assures you that you don't have to get through the storm because God's voice is calming the storm and making a way through impassable waters.

2. What is God's peace based on?

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3. Why is God's peace able to sustain us in the midst of trials and tragedy?

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4. Have you experienced God's peace in the midst of difficulty? Explain.

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Mark 9:22 says, ***“And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us.”***

Look again in the Mark 9 passage where we have been studying about a father who has a son possessed by a demonic spirit. Nothing can be more daunting than seeing your own flesh and blood beleaguered by the enemy, especially when you are powerless to do anything. But God comes to bring hope to the hopeless.

In this verse you see a cry of hope. In reality all hope of seeing his son live a normal life had all but evaporated. The only resource left to him was God.

Hope and faith are closely intertwined. You cannot have true life-changing faith without hope. Yet the full realization of what is hoped for is only obtained by faith.

Using an acrostic, HOPE can be described in four ways that spells out faith:

**H—HELP** (Mark 9:22): In the Greek it means “to bring aid” or “to relieve the oppressed from the oppressor.” The Old Testament is full of amazing stories of how God came to rescue His people. In fact, throughout the Scriptures, God’s people were encouraged to come to Him when the enemy was oppressing them, and He would deliver them. The source of hope is a desire that God will come to the aid of His people.

**O—OVERCOME** (Mark 9:22): The devil has one agenda, and that is to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). This child was being thrown into the fire and water in repeated attempts to kill the child. Yet with one command from Jesus we enter into the power and victory of Christ. The outcome of hope is faith. This faith leads you to an overcoming life.

**P—PEACE** (Mark 9:24): When you’ve exhausted all your own resources and have come up empty, the place to go to find perfect peace is with Christ. This father appealed to the only One who could help. It would be here where he would find the peace he needed in the midst of the storm. The result of hope manifested is an undeniable rest in God’s power.

**E—EXPECTATION** (Mark 9:24): We have already discussed that the greatest cause of discouragement is unmet expectations. If any expectation of freedom for the possessed child was going to be achieved, it would have to be on God’s terms. He never disappoints because He is God. He does, however, have an expectation on us. He expects us to believe on the One He sent. The continuing hope is that God will be there for us all the days of our lives.

5. In your own words, what does the “H” stand for in the acronym above?

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6. In your own words, what does the “O” stand for in the acronym above?

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7. In your own words, what does the “P” stand for in the acronym above?

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8. In your own words, what does the “E” stand for in the acronym above?

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### **So what is involved when we commit to praying for peace—for ourselves and for others?**

#### ***When Praying for Peace—HOLD ON TO HOPE***

Our world is filled with people who have given up! They had hope for the future; they had dreams and aspirations that now seem irretrievably lost. The enemy of our souls is always trying to confirm our feelings that all hope is lost—but it's not true! As believers, we are never without hope. Yes, we experience what seems to be setbacks and great loss, but the truth is that even these difficult situations in our lives are all part of God's plan—a plan that brings about His good and peace, not evil.

#### ***When Praying for Peace—KNOW THAT GOD IS WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES***

When we understand that God is working behind the scenes, we can let go of our fear and constant attempts to control our circumstances and instead trust Him to bring His good will to pass in our lives.

#### ***When Praying for Peace—TRUST GOD'S GOODNESS***

The Lord will work out all things for our good. Hope is always a part of our lives because God is the One holding on to us and directing our paths. Time and again, in His way and in His timing, the Lord always brings us through the darkness to the sunlight.

Jesus said, ***“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”*** (John 16:33).



# PRAYING FOR FREEDOM

I know what it's like to feel poor. I know what it's like to grow up with very little hope. I know what it's like to walk the streets as a teenager intoxicated and angry. I know what it's like to look into the future and see emptiness. I know what it's like to be completely bound by fear. I know what young people feel in our generation. I know how the poor man feels. I too was beaten up by the enemy, and I was deeply wounded in my heart.

In my former angry, sullen, drunken adolescent state I recall often walking past a particular church with white siding in my hometown. I only found out years later that it was a born-again Baptist congregation. They once had outdoor meetings and exciting worship, but the city shut them down and even threw the pastor in jail. The church went to court to fight the prohibition against their outdoor meetings and won. But for some reason, even though they won the legal right to worship outdoors, they refrained from doing it.

That church never knew that there was a depressed and drunk kid walking past its doors on a regular basis, but no one came out to reach him. The kid never knew that there was eternal life and joy inside those doors until he would eventually be converted by a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman named Irv.

I was that kid. Maybe you were too.

I was left on the road half dead. But somebody came to me and opened his heart. He opened his home and began to speak words of life into my heart. He poured the love of God into me. Because of it I found Jesus Christ as my Savior. I found the life that God gives to those who trust in Him. And God by His mercy has called me into ministry. But I've never forgotten where I came from, and I've never forgotten what the gospel is all about.

The Scriptures show us that the congregation that followed Jesus wasn't made up of the most religious or the wealthiest people. In fact, the religious could not understand Him. But the poor, the blind, the prostitutes, the lame, the lepers, and those whom society didn't want—they became Christ's congregation. And He loved them and poured His life into them. Most importantly they knew He loved them.

Have you experienced the freedom that only Jesus Christ can give? Has the Lord poured His life into yours?

**READ MARK 9:1-29**

(If you have the book, It's Time to Pray, also read Chapter Nine)

**THE SON HAS SET YOU FREE**

Far too many people live in bondage to so many things—Depression, anxiety, poverty, substance abuse, worry, fear, pornography, and more. And believers are not immune from these things or others like rebellion, divorce, loneliness, and uncontrolled emotions.

I have some good news for you. Jesus broke the chains that hold you in bondage. Luke 4:15-21 says, *"So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.' Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'"*

Jesus said that today (right before your eyes) this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing! Everything that is mentioned in this passage can be yours. Your heart can be healed. Your prison doors can open. You can understand the treasure of heaven that now belongs to you. Today, His very presence can come alive in your heart!

1. Is there something in your life that you just can't get rid of, though you have prayed and you have tried?

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2. What did the prophecy say the Messiah would do?

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3. How would you define “freedom”?

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The people of Israel had been waiting and looking for the time when the Messiah would come. They had been anticipating the day of their salvation—the day they would be set free. And here Jesus declares their day has come—their freedom is right before their eyes. How did they respond? Did they jump up and down and praise God for their day of visitation? No, they did not recognize their moment! They had memorized this specific scripture—they knew what the Bible taught, but they did not recognize the day of their freedom. The Son of God was standing right before them, and in spite of all their biblical knowledge they did not recognize this moment of truth.

Knowledge of God alone is not enough. The demons had knowledge of who Jesus was—they knew He was the Son of God, and they knew He had power over them, but they did not follow Him.

There is a difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge. There are many Christians who have not come to the knowledge of the truth within their hearts. They are still living in bondage to behaviors, sins, habits, and feelings because they have not come to the place of recognizing the reality—the truth—of the Word of God in their lives.

It’s one thing to know about the Lord and another thing to see Him—to come to the realization of who He is and what He has done for you personally.

Today, as a believer, you are in a place where your knowledge of God and His Word can be experienced. The truth that you see in God’s Word and have believed for salvation can jump off the page (and out of your head) and truly come alive in your heart and in your sight.

4. Why do you think the religious leaders did not recognize the Messiah?

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5. How would you define "heart" knowledge versus "head" knowledge?

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6. Have you experienced Christ's freedom in your life? Do you desire to be set free from habitual sin?

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John 10:10 says, ***"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"*** (NIV).

We have been looking at the story of the father and his demon-possessed son in Mark 9 throughout this study. The boy was being involuntarily held captive by the devil, and Jesus was the only One who could set him free. Freedom from such satanic strongholds was at the heart of Christ's ministry, and it must remain the message of the church if it wants to remain relative to a confused world. The father of the possessed boy didn't want to hear a message that gave him ten steps on how to live with a demoniac son; he wanted to see the power of God set his son free once and for all. Sadly, just as the religious leaders did not recognize the Messiah was right in front of them in the Temple, they did not recognize Him EVEN when Jesus set the boy and his father free! It reminds me of Moses and how God sent him to Pharaoh with just one message on his lips: "God says let my people go." Acts 7:35 says, ***"This Moses whom they refused, saying, 'Who made thee a ruler and a judge?' The same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush"*** (KJV). The word deliverer in the Greek is *Lutrotēs*, which means to set at liberty or to set free by the means of a ransom or atonement. God said to Moses to take the message of freedom to the Israelites; God and not the hand of man would deliver them.

Write out the following Scriptures regarding freedom:

2 Corinthians 3:17 \_\_\_\_\_

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John 8:36 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Galatians 5:1 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Acts 13:38–39 \_\_\_\_\_  
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In the Gospel of John, in chapter seven, Jesus was attending the Feast of the Tabernacles. It was an important tradition that celebrated the time when the people of Israel were finally set free from the bondage of Egypt. Remember how God used Moses to free His people? And though they were set free from the captivity they suffered under the Egyptians, they still had yet to enter into their full inheritance of the Promised Land.

The people of Israel were more or less halfway between their former bondage and their future promise. Now that identifies with a lot of people—including Christians!

It was on the last day of the Feast that Jesus stood up and cried out, saying, ***“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”*** (John 7:37–38).

Jesus is crying out today as He was crying out then! Are you tired of just living halfway to victory?

The Lord is calling you to Himself. It is by His power that you are given victory—not of yourself. God wants to release His full provision into your heart.

**So what is involved when we commit to praying for freedom—for ourselves and for others?**

***When Praying for Freedom—THIRST FOR GOD***

What the Lord requires of you and me is a heart that thirsts for the kingdom of God—a heart that recognizes that we are bankrupt and without strength to live the Christian life apart from God. The Lord has promised to be an everlasting source of supply so that when we are at the end of ourselves, it is the beginning of God doing the work in our lives.

**When Praying for Freedom—RECOGNIZE YOUR MESSIAH**

When Jesus was on earth preaching, most of those who were strong in themselves stood in the distance watching and analyzing Him from afar. Listen, it was the sinners, the weak, the lame, the blind, the poor, and the captives who pressed through to be near Jesus and to have Him touch them! And it was this same group of people who received God's touch and were set free!

**When Praying for Freedom—SEEK HIM WITH YOUR HEART**

All you need is a heart for God. The Lord wants to speak to your heart and be the power source for everything that you need to bring you into victory...to bring your family into victory...to bring your friends into victory...to bring your neighborhood into victory...to bring your community into victory...The Lord says to you today, "I will be your God. I will be your power. I will be your authority. I will be your life."

**Closing Assignment!**

Follow the three ways to pray for freedom above for yourself and for three people that you know and list below:

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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

# PRAYING FOR AWAKENING

When African-American and forward-thinking white pastors in Alabama streamed the services live from Times Square Church, they were astonished to see over one hundred ethnicities worshipping together in peace and Christian love. One glance at our choir loft confirms that. So the Alabama pastors contacted Times Square Church and asked me to come speak in Selma and bring our ethnic multinational choir.

The evangelical rally in Selma was packed, the message God gave me to deliver was powerful, and there appeared to be genuine breakthrough. But afterward, when the mixed group of white and black pastors gathered together in the home of a prominent Selma socialite for a meal, the white pastors ate in the elegant dining parlor, and the black pastors ate on the screened porch.

It was as if no one heard the message—they simply left it behind when they left the auditorium. I was shocked at the seating arrangement and took my plate out to the porch and sat with the black pastors. This, I was told, offended our white, socialite hostess.

One lesson I learned from the evangelistic rally in Selma, Alabama, was that the need for spiritual awakening and unification exists in our own backyard in the United States. A pastor from Rwanda whom I know would have nodded his head and said, “You see? Preach and celebrate without carving the Word into people’s hearts, and the old evil comes back.”

## **READ MARK 9:1-29**

(If you have the book, *It’s Time to Pray*, also read Chapter Ten)

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD'S VOICE

What is spiritual awakening, and why do we need it so much? In simple terms, spiritual awakening is when a person's heart is open to the voice of God, is tuned in to hear Him speak, allows Him to rule over her life, and does not resist the words God speaks.

We live in an era where there is a lot of religion but very little relationship with God. There are a lot of Christian churches but not a lot of early church power and testimony. And there are a lot of "salvations" but not a lot of "Lordship" and walking the walk.

Considering the fact that we live in a place with religious freedom, there are Bibles and books and resources everywhere to help us in our walk, and there are an immense number of Bible-believing churches and megachurches spread throughout the nation, we are profoundly weak in the faith and making little, if any, impact on our culture.

It's time to have a spiritual awakening...and it starts with you and me.

1. Why do you feel that the church in America is weak?

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2. How would a spiritual awakening benefit us and our culture?

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3. Though we have so many resources, good churches, and very little persecution, why is our Christian faith lacking in substance and commitment?

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Think about the significance of God's voice in your life.

John 1:1-4 says, ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."***

Word in the Greek New Testament is logos, which means intelligent speech. I find this so refreshing. When we look around at our society today—especially the airways with all of its talk shows and the pundits sharing their opinions—we realize how much we could use intelligent speech in our culture. The Word of God is intelligent. When God speaks, it is filled with intelligence, truth, goodness, and knowledge.

God’s words are not only intelligent but also powerful. Think about the creation of the world. In the Book of Genesis we are told that the world was just an empty void until God spoke. The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters, and God began to speak, and light was created, piercing the darkness. God spoke again, and dry land was divided from the waters. Then the Lord commanded living beings to come to life, and animals of all kinds, including birds and sea creatures, rose to life on the earth.

And then ultimately God spoke right into the dust of the earth and with His own breath created man in His own image. Nothing in creation resisted the voice of God. God spoke, and the elements obeyed. There was an awakening at the time of Creation. There was darkness on the face of everything until God began to speak, and out of nothing, the writer of Hebrews says, things began to be formed.

Would you be surprised to know that God still works that way today?

4. What is the significance of God’s voice in the Creation of the world?

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5. Can you think of another time in Scripture when the elements obeyed God’s voice?

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6. How do you think we hear God’s voice today?

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When God finds a heart that does not resist His spoken word, the miraculous begins to happen. Things begin to be created—life comes where there was only death. Spiritual awakening takes place when we choose to believe God rather than our circumstance, when we choose to believe what

God's Word says rather than what we see in the mirror, and when we choose to hear and believe the voice of God rather than what people tell us.

The Son of God, who by the power of His voice created the weather patterns when He created the world, has authority over the elements He created. You see, with the exception of mankind, all of creation can't resist the voice of God. When God speaks He has both the power to stop certain action and the power to start other things in motion.

God's creation recognizes their Creator.

Out of all that God created, it is only human beings who can choose to resist God's voice. You and I are the only created beings who were made in the very image of God. The Lord has given us free will—we are not robots; we are able to choose how we respond to our Creator. But it is Jesus' desire that His people, who are called by His name, would recognize His voice and obey, believe, and trust His Word!

### **If You Can Do Anything?**

In the Mark 9 story the father of the demon-possessed son asks Jesus if He can do anything for his son. Little did this dad know that he was asking the Creator of the universe and of mankind if He could do anything—if He had the power to help. Actually, as we have seen with the children of Israel in the wilderness who were guided by the word of God, this father simply needed Jesus to speak the word over his son, and the boy would be set free.

In Hebrews 4:12 the Bible says, ***“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart”*** (NIV).

There are many voices in the world, and they are not without significance. But only the established word of God is able to cut through all the voices in your head and give you the true voice of God. This father had heard the voices of the powerless disciples trying their best to cast out the evil spirit. Then there were the incessant voices of the scribes and Pharisees arguing with the disciples. I'm sure he had the voice of his own conscience speaking to him, not to mention the voice of the devil whispering lies.

Jesus, who is the word of God, cut through all of the voices and commanded the evil spirit to come out and not enter the boy again.

The Lord had called the multitude that had gathered around the father and his demon-possessed son a ***“faithless”*** generation (Mark 9:19). Jesus, in the same verse, immediately identified that their main problem was not only that they had a lack of faith in God and the One He had sent but that

they refused to accept Him as their prime example of faith. Listen to what Jesus declared next in the same verse, **“How long shall I suffer you?”** (KJV). The term to suffer in the Greek literally means to lose patience. Jesus had continuously set Himself as the perfect example of faith, but that generation refused to accept His example. Jesus knew His physical presence was soon to end and they had but a short time to observe His life and accept Him as the One sent from God.

The Lord also knew that there would be subsequent generations after His resurrection that would believe the word concerning Him and experience a true spiritual awakening. This father of the possessed child had begun to believe the words of Christ and in a moment of an awakening cried out with tears, **“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief”** (Mark 9:24, KJV).

7. Do you find it interesting that the demons recognized God’s voice but not the religious leaders?

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8. In your own words, write out the meaning of Hebrews 4:12

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9. How is Jesus’ life the perfect example of faith?

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Jesus tells us in John 16:13 that **“when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”**

The Bible is God’s personal letter to you. It’s your lifeline as a Christian. The words in this book are not just a historical account of God but the voice of God speaking personally to you. Every word in this book, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is yours. You have, with the power of Christ within you, the ability to receive these promises and to be changed more and more into the likeness of Christ!

The Scripture says to ask for the Holy Spirit, as He will teach you all things. You don’t have to run to somebody for a word; God has given you all you need to know and hear in His Word. Dive into your Bible, and ask the Holy Spirit to make it real to you—to open your eyes and wake you up spiritually.

Don't live in darkness any longer, don't live in spiritual poverty, and don't live behind prison doors—God has set you free through the power of His Word and His spirit, which resides in you. You're not called to lie in a corner and lick your wounds until Christ returns. You are called to be a victorious testimony of Calvary.

Pick up your Bible, and immerse yourself in God's powerful Word—I promise you, your life will change. Realize and grasp the incredible truth of God's voice speaking to you. This same voice that speaks to you is the voice that all of creation heeded. The same powerful voice of God who called the universe into existence is the same voice that speaks to you and creates a new life within—a life that is born of the Spirit. Don't resist of the voice of God in your life.

10. The One who spoke all of creation into existence, is the same Jesus who speaks to you personally through His Word and His Spirit. How does that make you feel?

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11. Why did God choose to give mankind freewill, unlike the rest of Creation?

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12. How do you recognize God's voice from the voices in our culture?

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**So what is involved when we commit to praying for spiritual awakening—for ourselves and for others?**

***When Praying for Spiritual Awakening—SOFTEN YOUR HEART***

God is the one who changes our heart, but as believers, we know when our heart has fallen away from God. The only way to move away from the flesh is to move toward the Lord! Take the temperature of your walk with God and then humble yourself before the One who not only created you, but who loves you so much that He went to the cross to set you free from sin and to reconcile you back to God.

**When Praying for Spiritual Awakening—IMMERSE YOURSELF IN HIS WORD**

The only way to stop resisting the voice of God is to heed it instead! And the only way to discern the voice of God is by reading His Word consistently. If you want a spiritual awakening in your life, you need to embrace God's Word as the very life flow to your Christian walk of faith.

**When Praying for Spiritual Awakening—COMMUNICATE WITH GOD; PRAY!**

Can you imagine if you never spoke to your spouse? What kind of marriage would you have if you never communicated with them? Whether it's your marriage, your friendships, your family, or your co-workers, you would not have a close relationship if you did not communicate! The Lord wants to talk with you. He wants to hear from you. Besides His Word, PRAYER is a vital life force when it comes to your walk with God. If you are not praying, you don't have much of a relationship. If you are not praying, you are operating in the natural and not in the supernatural. If you are not praying, your flesh is ruling your life! Commit to daily prayer and your spiritual life will awaken!

**Closing Assignment!**

Take an honest assessment of your walk with God. Write down what is lacking, where you feel defeated, what is missing, and how pliable your heart is at this time regarding the things of God:

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Now write down what steps you are going to take to get back into God's Word consistently; to set aside time daily for prayer; and to connect with other believers in fellowship:

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Buy a journal or use a notebook. Record your journey and then go back after a few months and see what difference there is in your life. Go back again in another 6 months and see what the Lord has done in bringing about a spiritual awakening in your life!

