

Freedom: The Miracle of Liberation

A fear-filled parent pleads for his son's health. Jesus calls out a great evil and leaves us understanding obstacles to real faith: Sign-demanding faith, Second-hand faith, and Self-centered faith.



Mark 9:14-27 (NIV) 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." "O 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 him 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 evil 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.

Reflections

Remembering the early days of my adult faith journey, I often sought signs from God. Inspired by the way God had led the Israelites with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, I was looking for the easiest way to live a mistake-free life. It seemed to me that God's signs would take the guess work out of a life of faith.

One time I was praying to God during my drive time, asking him to give me a sign about a decision; asking Him to tell me which way to go. Immediately as I turned the corner there was 10 foot green & white road sign that said "This is your signal." You could almost hear the two by four whack me on the head! God was saying "I'm right here." It's not about the decision — it's about the relationship with him.

Over the years my prayers for God's direction have matured. When my parents became frail several years ago and my mother was diagnosed with

Alzheimer's Disease, I honestly didn't know what to pray for—Long life? Short suffering? For it all to be healed? It was beyond me to know what was God's will.

"We can become sure and certain as we come to know God's true character, and as we trust that he will be true to it."

As I talked to God about my doubts and confusion, the Holy Spirit gave me one word to pray: "Mercy." We serve a merciful God. This is one of the many extraordinary attributes of his character.

We are able to call on God's character at all times because his character is unchanging. This prayer for mercy has brought me peace in the most difficult of times. It has relieved me from trying

to figure out his plan, or agonizing over the "what ifs." Instead, I have witnessed the miraculous ways of his mercy.

Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." We can become sure and certain as we come to know God's true character, and as we trust that he will be true to it. As you read through scripture examine the character of our God and the ways of Jesus. What does it tell you about the one relationship on which you can rely?

Jesus showed compassion on the father of an ailing boy not because of the man's great faith, but because of his willingness to exercise the faith he did have. That simple step resulted in a great healing. What attributes of God do you recognize in this story? How does the nature of God offer you hope in life's struggles?

— Karen Heist

Readings

Sunday, April 26

Mark 9:14-32

The father and the disciples demonstrated imperfect faith. Many of us can relate to this. What do you have the most trouble believing God will do?

Monday, April 27

Matthew 17:14-20

Why were the disciples not able to cast the demon out of the boy? What encouragement does Jesus give them? How can you apply this encouragement to an area where you struggle in faith?

Tuesday, April 28

John 20:24-25, 29-31; Romans 10:17

Miraculous signs simply point to Jesus. It is on Him we must rely. What are you doing to actively *hear* the word of Jesus and stir the seed of faith within you?

Wednesday, April 29

Hebrews 11:1-13; 2 Corinthians 4:18

This Hebrews text recounts faith stories found in the Old Testament book of Genesis. What stories of faith have you personally witnessed or experienced? How does remembering what God has done strengthen your faith and your relationship with Jesus, our source of strength and hope?

Thursday, April 30

James 2:14-26

In what area is God asking you to exercise faith *in* Christ? What action will you take this week to demonstrate your belief in who Christ is, what He has done and/or what He will do through you?

Friday, May 1

James 2:14-26; John 6:26-30

Why is it important to keep our faith focused on who Christ *is* rather than what we want Him to do? In what area of faith do you need to check your motives?

Saturday, May 2

John 14:12-13; John 15:7-8

What miracle will you begin to trust God for this week? What is your biblical basis for your faith? How will you act on your belief? What faith risk are you willing to take?

Don't have a Bible? Access these scriptures at biblegateway.com.