

Community Group Materials: Leaders' Notes

Mark 9:14-29

14/15 May 2025

Tee

Have the gifts of the Spirit ceased, including miraculous casting out of demons? Were these events just for the days of Jesus' ministry?

Task

Take time to discuss a time when your faith was strong and a time when you felt your faith was weak. Share these words of testimony in pairs or in the group.

Target

Takeaway

The supremacy of Jesus, announced at the transfiguration (9:7), is now revealed through exorcism. While the disciples try and fail to exorcize the demon, Jesus casts it out with a single command. Jesus is no Hellenistic magician who uses potions, rituals, and incantations to coax spiritual forces to act on his behalf. He is the Son of God, who acts with divine power and authority. Jesus' supremacy is seen throughout the episode. When he arrives, the crowd is amazed and rushes to greet him; while the disciples are powerless against the demon, he easily casts it out. Moreover, he forbids it from returning. This is power over time and place. When the demon leaves the boy comatose after its violent departure, Jesus takes his hand, lifts him up, and restores him. This is power over life and death.

A second theme beside Jesus' authority is the need for greater faith. This is illustrated both in the failure of the disciples to cast out the demon, noted at the beginning and end of the episode (vv. 17, 28–29), and in the father's struggle for greater faith in the middle (vv. 22–24). The father's cry, "I believe! Help my unbelief!" is one Christians have resonated with through the ages. Our genuine faith in God is challenged by difficult circumstances. We want to believe, and we do believe, but that faith wavers when the storms of life arrive. Like Peter, who has faith to get out of the boat but then is distracted by the wind and the waves (Matt 14:25–33), we have initial faith but then slip into the waters of doubt and despair. It is at this point we need to claim Jesus' promise, "Everything is possible for the one who believes." When our faith wavers, it is not because we are not striving hard enough to succeed or are not confident enough in our own abilities. It is because we have gotten our eyes off Jesus. Jesus' words here echo those of Paul: "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Phil 4:13, italics added). We can accomplish anything when we acknowledge that we can accomplish nothing on our own. Mustard-seed faith is a little bit of faith in a very big God. The disciples are right to come to Jesus after the episode. They want to know why they failed in order to avoid such a fiasco in the future. But Jesus'

answer does not focus on procedure. Their failure was not because they said the wrong words or followed the wrong ritual. Their problem was that their past successes had given them confidence in their own abilities. Jesus calls them to more prayer, that is, greater dependence on God, who alone has authority over the forces of evil. The disciples' authority to cast out demons was always mediated authority; they are Jesus' representatives acting in his power. The same is true for us today. The most powerful servant of God is the one who recognizes that "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10). Doing great things for God means seeking his guidance, being led by his Spirit, and allowing his power to work through us.