

MYTHBUSTING – Turn to **Mark 9**

When it comes to discipleship, especially in the modern church, sometimes we need what Chip Gaines calls “**demo day**.” We’re attempting to topple the half truths in order to make room for truth in its fullness. Because while the truth sets us free, half truths hurt.

GALATIANS 5:9 (AMP): “*A little leaven [a slight inclination to error] leavens the whole batch [it perverts the concept of faith and misleads the church].*”

The question we should ask ourselves in light of this verse:
How many of our missteps are the result of being misled by misconceptions?
How much of our headaches are the result of half-truths?
How many heartaches do we hand out when we speak them to others?

50% of the Fixer Upper episodes they have to call the buyers and reveal a problem that effects the budget. The prime plot twist for all HGTV shows is when sacrifices have to be made due to a busted budget. ***Things aren’t quite as you planned because your budget wasn’t big enough.***

At the end of the sermon on the mount Jesus parallels the life we live to building a house. We’ve got dreams and plans. Yet in our lives there’s almost always things we would renovate. Relationships that need repairing. Pain we’d love removed. Situations that need a miracle.

Faith is our budget. If we have enough faith we can do or fix anything.
The equation we operate from is ‘*if you have enough faith, the prayer will be answered*’
“*If the object of your prayer isn’t answered, then you didn’t have enough faith*”

Jesus himself says: “*If you believe, you’ll receive what you ask for in prayer.*”
If I don’t receive it, I must not have had enough belief and faith?

Mark 9 - “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

Mark 9:20-24 (READ)

Imagine if Jesus hit the father with the churchy cliché:

“God never gives you more than you can bear”

When we say it it’s meant to encourage, and reassure us that life won’t be *too* hard.

Yet you can only imagine the psychological turmoil this father is in.
Maybe you look at the image of his son being thrown around...
And you may think of peers thrown into the fire of addiction- pornography, alcohol, or opioids.
You may think of loved ones thrown into the dirt of chronic pain or degenerative conditions.

But “***God never gives you more than you can bear***” right?
Often those words don’t land for those on the receiving end.
What’s problematic is the unspoken emphasis: **Your strength.**

We have this picture of **strong faith**: It stays positive in the face of panic. It has mastered positive thinking. It's skilled at picturing positive outcomes. And if you have this name it claim it, doubt-free, count it as done faith you can fix anything. We can also act like God's reputation is reliant on our ability to look like we have it all together in public, even when it isn't true privately, as if that's strong faith.

Only that's not what this father does. The father doesn't fake his trust. He doesn't put on a strong façade. He comes in his spiritual brokenness and poverty, and takes what little faith he has and attaches it to Christ.

What can happen if we aren't careful is we put our faith in our faith rather than our faith in God. But the father in this passage reminds us that we may have a small, weak faith but its not faith in our faith that we're supposed to have, it's faith in Jesus. The strength of our faith isn't what saves us, it's the object.

What does this mean? The good news is not that God won't give us more than *we* can handle, it's that he won't give us more than *he* can handle.

"Everything is possible for one who believes" isn't some blank check to change everything. God doesn't become our genie or spiritual Chip and Joanna Gaines. Everything is possible to the one who believes because he puts no limits on God's strength. Make HIM and HIS strength the object of your faith. Not the strength of your faith.

When we have this picture of strong faith, the opposite of faith becomes weakness. Weakness is not what you and I should be afraid of. We should fear our delusion of strength.

Sitting in the hospital like Steph for the better part of a month for multiple brain surgeries reminded me of a simple reality that I'm often blind to: there's so much in life that I don't control. Too often our good health feeds our self-reliance & pride, rather than our worship & gratitude.

Every once in a while weakness or suffering comes and knocks over our self-reliance in our own ability. But weakness is an opportunity to take the faith that's become self-confidence and place it in Jesus again.

It's how Paul could **BOAST** about his weakness, because God's power works best in weakness. In weakness you come to know strength you've never known before because you come to know God. (*Not to mention the entire sermon that could be preached about how God uses trials to GROW us*)

What else does Jesus not say to the father:

"Come back when you have more belief"

"I'm sorry, I'd love to help you out, but you need more faith before I can do anything"

The equivalent of the call in the middle of the Fixer Upper episode that there's an issue with the budget.

Instead, he heals the boy in the midst of the father's struggle with doubts and unbelief.

Another flawed equation we operate from: ***Either one has faith, or one is stuck in unbelief.***
There's no in between. No grey area.

I think we get afraid of doubt, like it's the nemesis of our faith.
The opposite of faith isn't doubt (it's clarity). Doubt isn't what you should be afraid of.

But just a couple chapters prior to this Nazareth was disqualified by doubt.
It says Jesus was amazed by their unbelief and lack of faith in Mark 6:6.
They didn't see a move of God or any miracles because of it. They were disqualified by doubt.

So what's the difference between the unbelief of Nazareth and the unbelief of the father?
Nazareth **refused** to believe. Their doubt was one of cynical conclusion. Jesus wasn't all that.
The father **asked** to believe. His doubt was a doubt of bewilderment. Seeking answers.

You have to ask yourself:

Does your doubt drive you to cynicism that suffocates your faith?

Or does it drive you to ask questions and dig for answers?

- That digging makes room for a foundation that's not built on the sand of half truths, but on the rock of God's full truth.

Kahlil Gibran, the Syrian-born mystic poet once wrote:

“Doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is his twin brother.”

Both faith and doubt are birthed by and related to the unseen.

Faith softens our doubt with reverence, and doubt properly dealt with strengthens our faith.

God all but asks for our questions. How? God only reveals but so much of himself.

All of himself is infinite and eternal, and understanding Him would be like trying to arrive at the end of a road that never ends.

Augustine - “If you comprehend it, it is not God.”

If you've never wrestled with doubt, you've probably only gone surface level in your faith.

God won't always make sense to you, and when he doesn't, taking your questions to him is good practice. The name of God's people, “**Israel**” means “**wrestles with God.**”

“I believe, but help me in my unbelief” isn't a statement for those with “weaker” faith.

It's for those with a wrestling faith, engaged with God.

Ray Ortlund:

My capacity for belief is not measured by my certainty but by my need. Faith is not my bringing the great questions of existence under my control; faith is turning to the Lord, in his all-sufficiency for my desperate need, to hear and receive what he has to say to me.

Romans 8:28 – *we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

The echoed cliché: ***“Everything happens for a reason.”***

It’s our remix of all things work together for good. Whatever is happening, there’s a good reason, and Romans 8:28 becomes an assurance that everything will have a happy ending. Reasons will be revealed. Everything you go through will turn out all right in the end

Then we collide with chronic pain. Clinical depression. Degenerative conditions. Life altering accidents that leave you forever changed.

We either quickly get weary trying harder to do faith gymnastics hoping for a positive turn, or we become disenchanted with God thinking He didn’t hold up His end of the deal.

But if we keep reading Romans 8, verses 29 and 30 give us context. The GOOD he’s speaking of is our redemption. Nothing can intercept your eternal security.

But presently? Romans 8 tells us:

Creation is subject to decay... All creation groans

This groaning creation subject to decay is our present reality.

It’s counterintuitive, but there’s comfort in this reminder that we live in a fallen world.

When we subscribe to Romans 8:28 promising a happy ending, and we don’t see that happy ending, we think there was an accident or worse massive failure in God’s plan.

But scripture prepares us to be ready for the things we will face.

Not so we will live in fear.

But so we can meet life’s groans with faith.

“More than conquerors”

Context? You have to conquer something. You don’t have to conquer comfort.

Faith isn’t meant to help you avoid life’s problems. It helps us conquer them.

“Nothing can separate you from his love”

Context? The statement is indicative of the fact some things in life will make you feel like it.

Hebrews 11 – The Hall of Faith – It’s the Hall of Fame for people that walked in faith.

Reading the first half of the chapter is like blowing wind into your sails, as it paints a picture that the Christian life is one of triumph and confidence.

But faith leads many not off of, but onto a path of suffering.

Think of the early church or the persecuted church today.

The author of Hebrews doesn’t sweep this reality under the rug. After going through a who’s who of faithful living through scripture, he takes a turn and says:

But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open

with whips. Others were chained in prisons. Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

These people didn't lack enough faith. They are commended eternally in scripture FOR their faith. What did their faith look like: ***"They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection"***

Where Romans 8 reminds us of our **present reality**, fortifying our faith,
Hebrews 11 reminds us of our **coming hope**, fueling our faith.

We are called to build God's church, usher in his kingdom, share the good news, and be dispensers of grace in a broken world.

But creation will be just that- broken- until Christ's return and restoration.

What's powerful in Mark 9 is that Mark uses **resurrection language** to describe the boy coming to new life. Essentially it says in the Greek that Jesus took him by the hand and raised him up, and he arose. These verbs in the Greek are the same used to describe Christ being risen.

Hebrews 11 – there's a resurrected cloud of witnesses. People who endured suffering, now in glory, cheering you on. One risen witness is key among them all– **Jesus Christ.**

Hebrews 11 reminds us that sometimes instead of God delivering us from our trials, HE joins us in them. This doesn't mean that God won't do things on our behalf in this world, as he did for many in Hebrews 11, and still does today. It just means the full deliverance and redemption doesn't happen in this life.

No longer does suffering sucker punch our faith, it just pushes it back toward faith in our final destination – eternity.

"Help your unbelief" by...

God's Word – *"faith comes by, hearing... the Word of God."*

Don't be a statistic –The 82% that never opens it at all.

Prayer - During prayer I recognize that I am dependent on one greater, that I need someone else and I am not self-sufficient. Prayer reminds me that I'm weak, so I tap into God's strength.

When the disciples ask why they couldn't cast out the demon, they're looking for the right key of words, phrases, or actions that they missed. Jesus says ***"this kind can come out only by prayer."***

(Some tag fasting to Jesus' statement and point to that as the key, but Jesus himself says it wasn't fitting for the disciples to fast while they were with him)

The key was prayer. But not the prayer and the words in the moment. Jesus doesn't offer up a powerful prayer to expel the unclean spirit, he simply tells it to beat it. The prayer he speaks to as key isn't some magical incantation but an enduring relationship with God.

The disciples wanted some technique. God wants our time.

The people we know in life who “**master**” prayer haven’t mastered some technique, they just relentlessly show up over and over again. Sometimes in weakness. Sometimes awash in doubt. But always returning.

Obedience - “**Obedience is the opener of eyes.**” – George MacDonald

Faith is more to do with obedience than we often make of it. In the end what matters isn’t how many doubts we had, or whether we felt weak or strong in the moment we moved.

What matters will be whether we moved forward in obedience.

1 Peter - the Church had suffered so much. It was in the midst of violent persecution.

Not doubt they felt weak, they had doubts, and they were shaken. If they bought the half truth that enough faith would fix any and everything they would have crumbled. Satan could mock their belief and attack the character of God who promised a happy ending.

Peter’s letter comes across strongly as marching orders. A call to obey God’s commands and pursue God’s promises even in the MIDST of the mess. To base their response and actions not based on **WHAT** they were suffering, but **WHO** they were in the midst of it. Restored their sense of identity. Their sense of agency.

Suffering tried to rob you of your identity? Your hope? Your enthusiasm?

Has it tempted you to confess that you’re forsaken? Has doubt paralyzed you?

Let’s like the father, come to God as you are – I believe. Help me in my unbelief.