

Small Group Discussion Guide

Mark 9:14-29

“What Do You Mean ‘If I Can?’”

Based on Sunday's
Sermon 7/26/26

Background

This is the last exorcism that Mark recorded. His narration of this story includes more detail than either Matthew's or Luke's. The disciples' lack of glory in this story contrasts with Jesus' glory in the Transfiguration.¹

The father said “If You can,” but Jesus replied that it was not a question of if He could help the boy, but of if the father believed that He could help him. This pinpointed the father's understanding of who Jesus was (cf. 1:40). The issue was not how strongly the father believed Jesus would heal his son. This is an important distinction. Modern “faith healers” usually stress the amount of faith that the person coming for help has, rather than the object of that faith. Later, Jesus revealed that the disciples' failure to heal the boy resulted from lack of faith in Him too (v. 29).²

Evidently the nine disciples were ineffective because they believed that the power to cast out demons, that Jesus had given them, was now inherent in themselves. It was not. It was still God's power, and it came directly from Him. Therefore they needed to acknowledge their dependence on Him, for power, in order to be successful.³

Discussion Questions

Getting Started

1. “Describe a time you tried to fix something with confidence... and made it worse. What happened?”

Observation

2. Who are the main characters present, and how does each respond to the situation?
3. What details does the father give about his son's condition?

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mk 9:14.

² Ibid, Mk 9:23.

³ Ibid, Mk 9:28.

4. What attempts have already been made to help the boy, and what was the result?
5. What private conversation happens afterward between Jesus and the disciples?

Interpretation

6. How does the father's statement, "I believe; help my unbelief," capture the tension between faith and doubt?
7. What does Jesus' response to the father teach about the nature of faith—especially imperfect, struggling faith?
8. What does the violent reaction of the spirit suggest about Jesus' authority and the nature of spiritual conflict?
9. Read John 5:1-5. How do both stories show Jesus meeting people right where they're at and calling them to trust Him?

Application

10. Where do you resonate with the father's cry, "I believe; help my unbelief"?
11. What would change in your week if you approached challenges with the posture Jesus describes—prayerful dependence rather than self-reliance?

Prayer List: