

Many years ago we had a camping holiday with our kids which we often did beside a beautiful river in a peaceful forest. It was a good holiday and we had had a good time together. We were relaxed and feeling good.

We got home to find the front door of our house wide open. Someone had broken into our house and stolen things. After the high of our time away we came crashing back to reality and had to deal with this situation.

Perhaps you have had something similar. You have a babysitter look after your children for the evening and you have a wonderful night out together. You get home expecting that the kids will be asleep but they are still awake and upset. Your quiet night together has been shattered.

Well it was like that for Jesus, Peter, James and John. They had just been up on the mountain. They had seen Moses and Elijah and heard God's voice! It must have been a great uplifting experience. But when they get back to the other disciples not only have these disciples failed to cast out a demon, but now they have become involved in an argument with the teachers. Jesus and his three disciples came crashing back to the realities of life: failure, conflict, and evil that was tearing this boy's life apart.

1. Crisis

A man had brought his son who had an evil spirit. The father explains, *"Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.*

¹⁸ 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." (9:17-18)

You can understand the father's desperate anxiety. He has brought his son who has this terrible affliction but Jesus wasn't there. The other disciples had tried to cast out the spirit but failed. Now a crowd had gathered to see what was going on. Some teachers of the law had arrived and were now arguing with the disciples.

No doubt this is a theological argument about the right procedure for casting out spirits. You can imagine how the father feels with all this going on

Then Jesus arrives back from the mountain. There is an obvious sense of relief, a real sense that Jesus is the one with the answers. The people all run to meet Jesus and they bring the boy to him.

2. Faith

Probably the father hoped that Jesus could help. So he brought his son, but then Jesus wasn't there and his disciples have failed to cast the spirit out. Perhaps he is starting to doubt that Jesus can do anything. He says, *"If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."*

How confident are you when you come with a prayer? Perhaps you have prayed about something, some need, but nothing has changed. You start to doubt: Does God really answer prayer? Perhaps I don't have enough faith? Perhaps I'm not good enough?

Well the father says, *"If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."* Jesus replies, ²³ *"Everything is possible for one who believes."*

"Everything is possible", God can do anything. He is all-powerful. But our faith in him is also important for answered prayer.

Maybe we can feel that our faith is not strong enough. But here we can see here that it doesn't depend on how strong our faith is. The father says, *"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"* He knows he has weak faith. He's not sure what is going to happen. He knows he has doubts but we see that Jesus answers his prayer.

It is not a case of how much faith we have but of who our faith is in. It is not the quantity of faith but the quality. It is trusting Jesus. True faith is coming to Jesus for help. Sometimes it is to say, "Help my unbelief." It is to be weak and helpless ourselves and to turn to Jesus for help.

In Matthew's account of this same event Jesus said, *"Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."* (Matthew 17:20)

A mustard seed is something very small. This man's faith is weak but it is true faith, it is faith that turns to Jesus for help. When we trust Jesus and turn to him in our weakness all the power of God is available to answer our prayer. ²³ *"Everything is possible for one who believes."*

This doesn't mean God will always do what we ask. Trusting him means trusting him to know what is best. He may say yes, he may say no, or not now. He may answer in some other way we don't expect. But his will is perfect. Trust him.

In this case Jesus casts the evil spirit out with a command, *"You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again"* and the spirit has to obey.

Jesus' power over evil is demonstrated in language of resurrection. The boy looks dead but Jesus raises him. Jesus has all power over evil and death.

3. Prayer

So why couldn't the disciples cast the spirit out? Jesus says to them, ¹⁹ *"You unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?"*

It wasn't that they had weak faith. Jesus says that they had no faith! They were an *"unbelieving generation."* In what way were the disciples "unbelieving"? Did they doubt that they could do it? No, they seem to think they could cast the spirit out. They tried to cast it out but nothing happened.

Later the disciples ask Jesus, *"Why couldn't we drive it out?"* Jesus replies, *"This kind can come out only by prayer."* The problem was that they hadn't come to God in prayer. Their lack of faith was a lack of turning to God in prayer. They trusted that they could do it in their own strength.

How often do we do that? How often do we teach a C4K group, SRE class or go into some other ministry without really praying about it? Perhaps we put in good time for preparation but only give a moment to prayer. How much

attention do you give to praying for the work of the church? Or do we think we can grow God's kingdom in our own strength? Do you pray about the different ministries here?

Do we really rely on God by faithful prayer? At the last prayer day we had very few people come to pray. Does that mean we don't see the importance of prayer?

A literal translation of two verses is:

²³ *"Everything is POWERFUL for one who believes."*

²⁹ *"This kind is EMPOWERED to come out only by prayer"*

It is a question of power. We are weak but God has all power. We are empowered when we rely on him in prayer.

I couldn't help thinking about the car we had when we got married. It was a Hillman Minx. I had paid \$200 for it! We took it for a drive to Bathurst one June long weekend. It was freezing cold with snow on the ground and the car kept conking out. It would just stop. Finally I found what the problem was. I took the fuel line off the bottom of petrol tank and nothing came out! It was completely blocked with rust. The engine was cut off from the power of the fuel. I cleared the fuel line and it went fine. Later we made a trip to Bourke and Lightning Ridge with no problems.

Just as a car won't go without the power of the fuel so we cannot achieve anything without God's power. Nothing will happen if our prayer line is blocked.

In the beginning the disciples were arguing with the teachers of the law. No doubt this was about the correct way of casting out spirits, what words should be used or what methods would work. But ministry doesn't depend on human words or methods.

Sometimes we think because we have the right method God will work. This program worked in another church. If we use that program here our church will grow. But we mustn't depend on programs but on God. It all depends on his power and his mercy.

It is not a question of using the right words but of coming to God in our weakness and doubts. It is God's power that acts not the power of our faith. We need to come to him and depend on him. That is true faith even if it is small faith.

Psalm 104 says that God provides everything for his creatures.

²⁷ *All creatures look to you
to give them their food at the proper time.*

²⁸ *When you give it to them, they gather it up;*

*when you open your hand,
they are satisfied with good things.*
²⁹ *When you hide your face, they are terrified;
when you take away their breath,
they die and return to the dust.*
³⁰ *When you send your Spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.*

We, like all God's creatures, depend on God for everything, food and for life itself. If we believe that we are creatures of God we will express that in prayerful dependence.

To try to do things in our own strength as the disciples did here is to be "unbelieving". It is to fail to acknowledge our complete dependence on God. When we don't pray it shows that we don't have a real sense of dependence on God.

What does your prayer life look like? Do you have a time each day for prayer? Do you pray when you make big decisions or at times of need? Do you gather to pray with other believers?

Does your prayer life show a dependence on God?
Does our prayer as a church show we depend on God?