

How to Build Your Faith (Part 2)

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Calvary Chapel Ontario

Mark 9:14-24. It says, beginning of verse 14:

“When they (and, they, refers to Jesus, Peter, James, and John) came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

¹⁶ *“What are you arguing with them about?” he asked.*

¹⁷ *A man in the crowd answered, “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.”*

¹⁹ *“You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”*

²⁰ *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.*

²¹ *Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?”*

“From childhood,” he answered. ²² “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.”

²³ *“If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”*

²⁴ *Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (ESV)*

Stop there, if you would, please. Pray with me.

Father God, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Spirit here today, and give us ears to hear, for we ask it in Jesus’ name, amen.

I decided I wanted to read the Mark version of this story because it enlarges and expands upon the story as it was given to us in Matthew, and particularly that conversation between Jesus and this very anxious father who brings his son for healing and so forth.

You'll notice that Jesus confronts the man's lack of faith. He catches the man saying, if you can do anything about this, please do. And Jesus said, really? If?

Now He wasn't offended. Please understand He was questioning the man. He was basically saying to the man, do you believe? You brought your son here, but do you believe? The man comes back immediately, realizing he's been confronted and busted with this area of unbelief in his life, and he says, I do believe, but help me with my unbelief.

I think we can all relate to that statement. There's probably not one of us in this room who feels like we are just the quintessential picture of faith. But there are times we believe God for things; there are other times we melt into a pool of wax. But it's this idea of overcoming our unbelief that we've been talking about, and in fact, strengthening our faith, that we've been dealing with for the last few weeks.

A few weeks ago, I gave you four things that I believe are tools that God can use in our lives to strengthen our faith. I'll put them back on the screen for you.

- The Word
- Prayer
- Fellowship
- Obedience

Those 4 things are The Word, which we covered last week, Prayer, Fellowship, and Obedience.

We're going to deal with Prayer this evening, but let me quickly remind you why we're doing this series. I have a microphone, but sometimes it's still not loud enough.

Okay, why are we doing this series? Why am I emphasizing for you—why am I taking time out of our Matthew study to talk about how your faith can be built up? Well, boy, I tell you, every week I've been reminding you of this, and I've been bringing a different Scripture that talks about how important our faith is. Let me show you this one from Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 1:24

... it is by faith you stand firm.

...it is by faith you stand firm.

That's it right there. Why are we emphasizing you having a strong faith? Because it is by faith that you stand firm, and we all want to stand firm – at least, I think we do. I mean, I sure do. I want to be able to stand firm when life presents all of its challenges and difficulties and tests. I want to stand through those. Don't you?

Well, how do we stand? We stand by faith. So what does that mean? We need to strengthen our faith. We need to be making sure that our faith is strong. So, we're going to talk about prayer as it relates to strengthening our faith.

I don't think you would argue with me if I said to you that prayer is one of the most wonderful blessings that we as children of God have, and yet is probably the most neglected of all the tools that God has given us in our life to use in the kingdom of God.

When I talk about prayer, when I say to you, prayer, what's the first thing you think of? Don't say anything, obviously. Just think about it in your own heart and mind.

I think that most people think, well, asking God for things. That's really the first, and many times, the only definition that people have when they think about prayer. Well, it's going to God and asking for things. I go to God and I ask for things. And that's part of what it means to pray.

But there is an even greater aspect to prayer that can go a long way toward building our faith – and that is, using prayer to know God; not just to petition God, but to know God. I'm talking about using prayer to develop a deeper, more intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Okay—and let's face it. Let's face it, guys. Let's just be completely honest, okay? Most Christians have little or no relationship with God—I've said this before. It's kind of like somebody we meet in an elevator, and it might even be a pretty powerful meeting. But after that elevator ride is over, and the doors open, and we get out, and we go our way, it's done. We might send Him notes from time to time using prayer to reiterate somewhat of that initial relationship with Him.

But ultimately there's not a whole lot of intimacy there. There's not a whole lot of relationship there. We just go to Him when we need something, and when we don't need something, we often don't go to Him. That's the fact of the matter, and we just need to be honest and say, yeah, that's pretty much the way it is.

Can you imagine getting married and only talking to your spouse when you needed something, and that's it? Can you imagine? I mean, think about that for just a minute. What kind of relationship would you have? Probably wouldn't be very intimate or detailed or warm or even necessarily friendly. It's just very fact-of-the-matter. I need something. I need something from you; could I have it, please? Thank you. And you go around, walk away, and go do your thing.

Would you be surprised if I told you that I think the majority of Christians have that kind of a relationship with God? One of the reasons is that prayer for them is nothing more than going to the spiritual equivalent of Santa Claus. I mean, we lay our list of wants and desires before him, but we never really get to know him. We never draw close to him and so forth. And that's where a lot of people live; that is the extent to them of prayer.

Then we wonder why we go through difficult seasons of life, and we bottom out, or our faith isn't as strong as it should be. It's pretty tough to have faith in someone that you don't know. On the other hand, the more you get to know God, the more you trust Him. The more you know not just about Him, know Him, the more you learn to trust Him. That is why we need to take time to get to know God, and I believe that is facilitated largely through coming to Him in prayer.

In fact, let me put this passage up from James chapter 4:

James 4:8

Come near to God and he will come near to you.

Come near to God and he will come near to you.

Did you notice that James doesn't call it prayer here? He calls it, coming near. So, he's not just saying petition God, and there would be nothing wrong if he did say that necessarily, but that's not what he's saying here.

He's not saying, hey guys, why don't you petition God? He's saying, go near to Him. You only go near to a person with whom you want to have a relationship. Go near to Him. And what is the promise? He will come near to you. In other words, draw close to Him and He will draw close to you.

I like that. Wouldn't it be interesting if we stopped talking about praying and we started calling it just going near to Him? Somebody comes to you with their problem and you say to them, well, have you prayed about it? And they go, well, no. Well then come on, grab my hand. Let's go near to God. Wouldn't that be interesting? What if we started calling prayer “going near to God?”

It would give us a whole new mindset about what it means to approach God, wouldn't it? It puts it more in a relational sort of context rather than just like, let's go to God. Hey God— I'd write out my prayer request and give it a hand, and then walk away with really no personal exchange or connection, no intimacy, no warmth; just this quick Okay, well let's— and that's what we do many times— let's just pray about that. Father God, just pray, take this way. Thank you. Amen. Okay. Yeah, we're good. You're good.

This assembly line of prayer thing we got going on, just moving on instead of crying out to God, hey, let's bring that to God. Let's come near to God with that problem that you have. Let's draw near to Him because His promise is you draw near to Him, I will draw near to you. I will come close to you, and so forth.

The Old Testament parallel of this promise that we read there in James is given to us in Jeremiah chapter 29. I love this verse:

Jeremiah 29:13

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Love that verse. But did you ever notice that the promise at the end of this— that's the wrong way to put it—the by-product, the result, the payoff at the end of this promise is God Himself?

Did you notice that? He says, “*when you seek me with all your heart,*” He doesn't promise you're going to get exactly what you asked for, you're not going to have to go any through problems, you're not going to— He doesn't sit and make a whole bunch of promises about specifics. He says, “*when you seek me with all your heart,*” here's what you're going to get: Me. You will find Me.

That's someone who wants to have a relationship with you, wants to be close to you, wants to be intimate with you. “*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart.*” That's coming near, right? Come near to Him, and He will come near to you. Draw close to Him and so forth.

Of course, the key to the passage there in Jeremiah 29 is the whole concept of seeking Him with all of our heart. What exactly does that mean? Seeking God with all my heart. I don't get that. I hear that in the Bible and I'm like, what does that mean anyway?

Yeah, we know exactly what it means. Think of something in life you've wanted more than anything. Just think. Maybe it was a relationship. Maybe it was a thing like a car. Maybe you, women, might not as much relate to that as maybe some of us dope head guys.

Oh man, there were several cars in my life that I wanted so bad I could taste it — like my 1969 Roadrunner that I bought back in 1977 or something like that. I wanted that car so bad, and I got it. Never had more speeding tickets and higher insurance prices either. And the thing just— money just flowed through my pocket into the gas tank. Yeah, but I wanted it, and I wanted it with all my heart.

And I know what it means to want something with all your heart and to run after it with all your heart—and I'll bet you do, too. So just put God now in that place, that same energy, that same fervency, that same desire with which you wanted this person or this situation or this circumstance or whatever it is. You want God that much? That's what God says: You seek me like that, you'll find Me. You will find Me.

It's kind of convicting, isn't it? — a little bit for us, because we realize that the things of this world are things that we often seek with greater fervency than we do the Lord, God of the universe. I think about how much I wanted that 1969 Roadrunner, and good grief, I've wanted many things since then with all my heart, and I think to myself, do I put that much passion into knowing God? I'm ashamed to say, I don't think so. When I think of all the time and energy and effort that I'll put into something that I'm passionate about, that I want, I look at my walk with God, I look at my seeking the face of the Lord, and those things overshadow them.

Anyway, the problem is, we rarely see God with that same umph! —whatever. One of the reasons is because sometimes it's not very convenient. I was reading back through an incredible book that I've told you guys about many times. It's actually available in our bookstore. They've got this little shelf that's like Pastor Paul's Favorite Picks or something, and Amber has a copy of it over there. It's George Müller's Autobiography. It's absolutely one of the most amazing books I've ever read in my life.

George Müller was a man who was born, I think in 1805, in what was Prussia back in those days. Moved to England where he ultimately started an orphanage to take care of some young people. I think it was just boys, if I'm not mistaken. But anyway, he died just before the turn of the century, just before 1900, I think it was like 1895, so he lived a long life - 90 years, during that time.

But he had a determined attitude toward the Lord's provision. (Those of you that have read the book know this already.) He made a determination going into his ministry that he was never going to ask for help – only going to pray, only going to trust in the Lord, only going to seek God's face. Many, many times, seeking God's face was extremely inconvenient, and yet the burden of feeding these children became such that it drove him again and again to his knees.

Let me read an excerpt from his journal. And I say journal—the book is an autobiography but it's written almost in journal form with dates. Actually, that's not the one I'm going to do, Jane. I'm going to read this one myself. I'll come to that quote here a little bit later. In the journal, he writes this:

“September 29th. Last evening, when I said good night to the family, I wanted to go to sleep at once. The weakness in my body and the coldness of the night tempted me to pray no longer.”

Can you relate to that first statement? He says: I said good night to everybody; everybody's tucked into bed; I wanted desperately to go to bed. My body was just spent. I have no more energy. It's cold outside. It's going to be warm under the covers. I just want to go to bed.

However, he writes:

“The Lord helped me to kneel before Him. No sooner had I begun to pray than His Spirit shone into my soul and gave me such a spirit of prayer as I had not enjoyed for many weeks. I enjoyed that nearness to God and fervency in prayer for more than an hour. My soul had been panting for many weeks for this sweet experience. I went to bed especially happy and awoke this morning in great peace. Then before breakfast, I again had real communion with the Lord for more than an hour. May He in mercy continue this state of heart to His most unworthy child.”

I share that with you because it illustrates, if you will, that passion to know God and to be in His presence, even when it's inconvenient, even when everything around me says, go to bed, and your body just aches with the weariness, and the exhaustion, and the fatigue of the end of the day. And yet, he knows and longs

for something deeper in his walk with God. But what does he do? Instead of giving into the flesh and giving the flesh what it wants, he decides to resist the flesh and the weakness thereof, and to instead feed his spirit with a time of communion and prayer and intimacy with God, and he talks about just this sweet fellowship that he has with the Lord, and so forth.

And that's what brings me to that quote, actually, that we put up there just for a moment ago from George Müller. He talks about the fact that:

“Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of God's willingness.” – George Müller

“Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of God's willingness.”

Now this is one of those amazing statements in God's —it's not in God's Word; it's just a man making a quote. But it's an amazing statement, nonetheless, because it's tied to Scripture and I'll show you that in a moment.

I truly believe that one of the reasons we struggle so much in prayer is because we feel like prayer is a wrestling match with God, almost like an arm-wrestling match with God, where I have to convince Him to do something good for heaven's sake, where I have to coax Him out of His shell or out of His place of hiding, and draw Him out into the real world where the rest of us live. Why don't You come out here and do something? We wouldn't say that necessarily, at least, not to anybody else. But in our hearts and minds, prayer is this burden; it's this thing where I've got to convince God; I've got to prevail upon Him. God, why don't you do something, for heaven's sake?

And George says here that it's not a matter of overcoming God's reluctance to do something. It's laying hold of His willingness. As I just even sat and meditated on this quote, I had a Scripture just come to my mind about this, and it's from earlier in our study for Matthew chapter 8. Here's what it says:

Matthew 8:2-3

...a leper approached, and bowed low before him, saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” He stretched out his hand and touched him saying, “I am willing. Be clean!” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

...a leper approached (Jesus), bowed low before him, saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” He stretched out his hand and touched him saying, “I am willing. Be clean!” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

I think, people, that to get a hold of this, to get a hold of this idea that God is willing - that God is willing - will radically change the way you approach prayer. It will change your relationship with God, and ultimately it will build up your faith.

Now I don't think many would argue that one of the biggest challenges to prayer is our own impatience regarding the answers that we are looking for God to bring and so forth. That is a challenge. Waiting on the Lord has never been easy. You can read about it in the Bible. You can read other people. You can read about David. You can read Asaph. You can read about various other people who prayed about things and then cried out to God and said, okay, let's do this thing. Where is it, Lord? How long, O Lord, must I do this and cry out to you? And so, this waiting thing has never been easy even for those whose faith is healthy.

But to all things, there is a season, right? Isn't that what the wisdom of Ecclesiastes tells us? And sometimes, even most times, we do have to wait for the seasons to take place. Sometimes that applies to prayer. Now in the natural world, if you ever noticed, that when we pray, we're always looking for a supernatural reaction from God. Always. We always want a miracle. How often do we pray for things that are just going to come in season or as God brings them in season?

See, the seasons are something God set up. How many times— have you ever known a farmer to go out and plant his field and then expect to wake up the next morning and find it all grown up and ready to harvest? No. What does the farmer do? Well, actually James tells us what the farmer does. Let me put this on the screen for you. James says:

James 5:7-8a

See how the farmer WAITS for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm...

See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. (And then he says) You too, be patient and stand firm.

Be patient and stand firm in your faith. But sometimes like the farmer, you and I have to wait because what he is doing is he is bringing about his answer in season. To all things there's a season. You may be in a time sowing in prayer. Maybe that's where God has you right now. Maybe you're planting right now in

prayer and you're getting all frustrated with God because it's not happening and you're not getting what you thought you should be getting and so forth.

But what you're doing is you're saying, God, I want a miracle. I want to plant today and reap tomorrow. That's what you're telling God. And I've told him that many times myself; I'm not pointing a finger just at you. But we're denying the seasons. We're saying, I'm not willing to wait for the way that this thing is going to be naturally brought about. I'm not willing to wait for your timing in prayer. And so we get frustrated.

I've talked to so many people that say, I tried praying once, didn't get what I wanted. So, I forget that. And that's what they did; they prayed. Yeah, they prayed once, and they asked for a miracle, and they didn't get their miracle, and so they gave up on prayer. They didn't try to get to know God. They didn't draw near to God. They didn't seek His face. They didn't seek to know His will. They just asked for a miracle, and then that was it, and then bowed out of the thing.

But waiting is so hard. Why though? Why is waiting so hard? It's just because we are so naturally inclined to rush out and fix things in our own strength to take care of whatever the issue is. People, you just have to know it's just what you and I are wired to do. We pray about things, but we just won't rest. We won't trust and we don't wait. We just rush out to go take care of it in our own strength, don't we? Sure we do. It's exactly what we do.

I'm going to give you one more quote from George Müller in his book, his autobiography. I will put this one up on the screen for you. He says:

...when the trial of faith comes, we are naturally inclined to distrust God and to trust rather in ourselves or in our friends or in our circumstances. We will rather work a deliverance of our own somehow or other than simply look to God and wait for His help. But if we do not patiently wait for God's help, if we work a deliverance of our own, then at the next trial of our faith... we shall again be inclined to deliver ourselves and... our faith will decrease; we stand still in order to see the salvation of God, trusting in Him alone, then our faith would be increased... - George Müller

...when the trial of faith comes, we are naturally inclined to distrust God and to trust rather in ourselves or in our friends or in our circumstances. We'll rather work a deliverance of our own somehow (and that's his way of saying, fix it yourself) or other than simply look to God and wait for His help. But if we do not patiently wait for God's help, if we work a deliverance of our own, then at the next trial of our faith... we shall again be inclined to deliver ourselves and

our faith will decrease; (whereas if) we stand still in order to see the salvation of God, trusting in Him alone, then our faith would be increased...

Now this is a quote from a man who, over the course of his life, took care of over 10,000 orphans, and never one time in his entire ministry ever asked for help. Never told people. Even if they asked him if he needed help, he wouldn't tell them. Even if he had nothing to feed the orphans with the next day, he would not tell them. He decided he was going to trust God.

But how many times do you think he was tempted to go out and work a deliverance on his own? How many times? He learned something over his 90 years on earth. He learned that if you do that, if you go out, if you follow that natural inclination to fix it yourself and to make it happen on your own, then the next time a challenge of faith takes place, you will be that much more inclined to go do it yourself.

And then the next time you're even more inclined to do it yourself, pretty soon you're not living by faith at all. You're living in the power of your own wits, abilities and circumstances – and it really has nothing to do with faith. You're no longer living by faith because you've stopped waiting and trusting and putting your hope in the Lord. Why? Because you slowly, over time, just fixed it yourself.

Some of you are fixers, and you know who you are, and the inclination is maybe even a little bit stronger in you than it is in some of the rest of us. Oh, let me tell you something. I'm exhorting you but I'm exhorting myself at the same time. I know that waiting is about the hardest thing in the world to do. I hate waiting – and I can't emphasize that enough, so in your mind that came out with a capital H. All right? I just despise hating, or waiting. I don't like hating either, but that wasn't the point of what I was saying. Yeah, waiting is big fat drag.

But what is the promise? What is the promise for those who wait? Just so happens I decided about a week-and-a-half ago to start reading through the book of Isaiah, and I came across this: Isaiah chapter 40 – this is out of the New King James.

Isaiah 40:30-31 (NKJV)

*Even the youths shall faint and be weary,
And the young men shall utterly fall,
But those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.*

*Even youths shall faint and be weary,
And the young men shall utterly fall,
But (look at this) those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not to be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.*

The prayer that I am talking to you about that builds our faith, you guys—remember that's what that was the reason we were talking about this in the first place—the prayer that builds your faith is the prayer that says, God, I trust you and I'm going to wait for you.

It builds your faith because it teaches you to persevere, not to get in and mess it in the thing with your own hands, your own ability, but to wait for God. When you see His hand of deliverance, it is one of the most faith-building things that you can imagine in your life – for you to wait on God and just wait on Him with a reckless abandon. “God, I'm waiting on you. I am waiting on you. I have prayed about this. I'll continue to pray about this, but I'm waiting. I'm waiting. I'm waiting.”

One of the things you'll notice, if you do happen to pick up a copy of that book by George Müller, because it's written in journal form where he dates it, you read about sometimes how long—he'll actually say how long he's been praying for something. He'll say this is the 335th day of my praying for such. I'm like, what? I would have given up long ago! No, he's still bringing it to the throne of grace every day; and probably, because he kept a prayer journal of some sort, he was able to do that with some consistency. But he kept going. He kept pressing.

And guess what God kept doing? God kept providing. God kept providing because George kept pressing. He wouldn't give up, and he would not rely on himself. Prayer is getting to know God and learning to wait on God more than just asking Him for things.