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DEMONS



What do you typically do when you feel afraid?

QUESTION #1

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Demonic forces are real, but Christ is greater.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Ever had a hex placed on you? How about a curse? I have.

My father is an evangelist. I was there the night his preaching was disrupted by a couple, all dressed in black, praying out loud to Satan. They were reciting the Lord's Prayer—backwards. It didn't stop there. I learned Satanists had been sending letters decorated with pentagrams to churches where my dad was preaching. We also learned the Satanists were putting hexes on our family.

I was afraid—but my dad wasn't. When I asked him about it, he said: "Son, truthfully, I was afraid at first. But Jesus is greater than any spiritual power, and He said He has given us all authority in Him to defeat the enemy."

Wow. That answer brought me peace because it proved to be true. In the Gospel of Mark, we read of another father and son facing demonic attack. They were also afraid. Yet, when Jesus entered the situation, the people became amazed and the demons trembled.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Mark 9:17-22a

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. ^{22a} “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him.

In Mark 9:2-10, Jesus went up a high mountain with three of His disciples—Peter, James, and John—where He was transformed before them into His glorious appearance. When they came back down, they found a crowd gathered around a father and son. An evil spirit clearly had control of the boy, and the terrified father described how the spirit would often seize the child, forcing him to do terrible things.

Such an encounter would frighten most people, but surely not the disciples, right? They’d already seen Jesus exercise His authority over evil spirits. (See vv. 1-13.) Plus, under Jesus’ authority, they themselves had cast out demons. (See 6:7-13.) But in this case, the disciples were powerless. We’ll focus on their lack of power when we study Mark 9:28-29, but notice that Jesus called them an “unbelieving generation.”

The apostles were powerless to help because of their lack of faith—but not Jesus. He was unfazed by the situation. Right in the middle of that desperate moment, Jesus offered the father and the gathered crowd the most welcoming of words: “Bring the boy to me.”

What have you been taught about demons and demon possession?

QUESTION #2

Mark 9:22b-27

^{22b} **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!”**²⁵ **When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”**²⁶ **The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.”**

²⁷ **But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.**

It’s easy for many of us to relate to the father in this encounter, since we’ve also felt defeated by the enemy at times and bewildered about what to do. In the quicksand of our experiences, we turn to Jesus. That’s what this father did. His faith was pretty wimpy, but at least he was looking in the right direction.

Perhaps Jesus smiled when He heard the father’s doubt: “If you can?” In other words: *Think about what you just said. Of course I can!* Jesus didn’t criticize the man, but He did want the father to realize he had no reason for weak faith. Then the Lord uttered one of the most powerful sentences in the New Testament: “Everything is possible for one who believes.” Everything you do in life—relationships, marriage, family life, work, and decisions—will only be “successful” to the degree you are able to flex your muscle of faith and trust Almighty God. Our only escape from spiritual attack is through faith in a God who can do everything possible to come to our aid.

Unfortunately, Jesus’ declaration is often misused. When people hear, “Everything is possible for one who believes,” they sometimes interpret that statement as a blanket promise that, if we just believe hard enough, we’ll get whatever we ask for.

*What strikes you
as most interesting
about these verses?
Why?*

QUESTION #3



Other Scriptures passages clarify the truth:

- ▶ “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14:13-14).
- ▶ “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

God is not a genie in a bottle. As long as we are centered in Christ and His will, God will provide everything we need (i.e., all things will be possible for us). What does He ask of us? Faith. He will move the mountains in our lives, and He will remove us from spiritual bondage and confusion, but we must trust Him to do it.

In Mark 9, the issue wasn't Jesus' ability—He is all-powerful. Instead, the issue was the father's faith. To that end, the father responded to Jesus with one of the most transparent statements in the gospels: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

The next moment is touching. After Jesus forced the demon out, the boy “looked so much like a corpse.” Jesus took the boy's hand and “lifted him to his feet.” That term, “lifted him,” is the same one used throughout the New Testament to speak of God raising Jesus from the dead. (See Acts 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; Eph. 1:20.) Our God, who raised Jesus from the dead, works powerfully to raise us out of our darkest situations.

***When have you felt like the father in these verses—
wanting to believe but struggling to do so?***

QUESTION #4

Mark 9:28-29

²⁸ After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” ²⁹ He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

Jesus had helped the father with his faith; now He needed to help His disciples with theirs. In a private discussion, the disciples wanted to know why they’d failed. We should applaud their self-evaluation, but in their introspection they were still looking at themselves. “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” (emphasis added). Their mistake was in looking only at their own abilities and strength.

Just like the boy’s father, the disciples also needed to continually exercise faith. They had failed to match up with the enemy because they failed to trust in and depend on God.

When Jesus said, “This kind can come out only by prayer,” He wasn’t making a distinction—as though only certain demons require prayer to cast them out, but others don’t. The truth is that *whenever* we engage in spiritual battle, we need to pray and express our faith in the One with all the power. (See Eph. 6:18.) Only prayer moves us from relying on our strengths (which are actually weaknesses) to trusting the all-powerful God who desires to set us free and has the power to do so.

Prayer is an expression of our total dependence upon God; it shows we need God’s intervention in something we can’t do on our own. Prayer is indispensable in spiritual warfare, and our faith is strengthened when we pray earnestly. It’s in response to prayer that God unleashes “his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength” (Eph. 1:19).

Unfortunately, many Christians are not aware of their authority in Jesus Christ, which means we often lack confidence to stand against spiritual attacks. We’ll study in a later session the armor God has given us to stand and engage in battle, but let’s note for the moment that any confidence we have to stand against the enemy is not self-confidence; it’s confidence in Jesus Christ—the One with all power and authority on whom we totally depend.

Why is faith in Jesus essential when dealing with evil?

QUESTION #5

PERSONAL ASSESSMENT: PRAYER

Prayer is a critical tool in our battle against evil. Use the following questions to get a sense of how deeply your prayers reflect your faith in God.

Do you primarily pray during moments of crisis, or do you pray regularly throughout each day?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(Crisis) (Regularly)

Do you pray primarily for your will to be accomplished, or for God's will?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(Your will) (God's will)

How often do you express your trust and confidence in God's authority?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(Rarely) (Regularly)



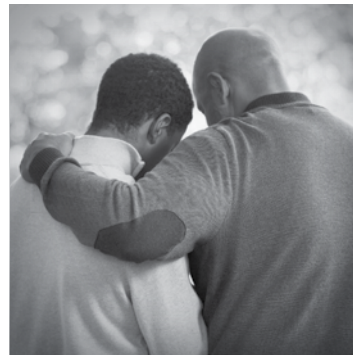
LIVE IT OUT

What steps can you take to ground yourself in Christ as preparation for the enemy's attacks? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Pray often.** Ask God to increase and strengthen your faith. Make it a habit to ask God to strengthen your faith and guide you into a deeper truth in Him.
- ▶ **Pray daily.** Stop relying on yourself as you face difficulties and spiritual attacks. Express your total dependence on God through prayer at the beginning of each day.
- ▶ **Pray constantly.** Invite the presence of Jesus into every situation. Form the discipline of continually conversing with God's Spirit as you encounter new situations and circumstances throughout each day.

As disciples of Jesus, we don't need to look for a "demon under every bush"—but neither should we be unaware or unprepared. Use prayer to keep yourself intimately connected with God's power through Jesus Christ.

My thoughts



Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLdarkside**