

## *Week 4*

### **Admit Your Struggle**



**Start**

**Welcome to Session 4.**

**As you worked through the personal studies last week, what's one doubt you found that you needed to bring to Jesus?**

In the last session, we examined the actions of the father in this story. We saw how he approached Jesus and the context in which he did so. His actions spoke loudly of faith and dependence. It was a clear example to us of how to respond in times of doubt and struggle. It's the father's words, though, that stand out the most in this passage, one prayer in particular.

Why is it so hard for us to admit what we're struggling with?

In this session, we'll examine this prayer. We will see it as an invitation to doubters, an encouragement to believers, and a standard up to which we can live.

**USE THIS PAGE TO TAKE NOTES DURING THE VIDEO TEACHING.**

## Discuss

Read Mark 9:14-27.

The father in this story could be described as a humble seeker. Jesus expects this same attitude from us. He wants us to come to Him with humility. But He wants us to come with clarity too. Humility isn't hesitance; it's an attitude of belief that acknowledges His greatness, our need, His perfection, and our sinfulness. When we come to Jesus as the father did, we can make requests and express our needs with boldness—not demanding but open and clear.

Read Luke 18:9-14. What does this show us about how we should approach God and speak to Him?

What's the difference between pride and boldness when we approach Jesus with our needs?

What leads us to approach Jesus with pride as opposed to boldness?

In what false or inappropriate ways do you come to Jesus?

Why is the prayer, "I believe; help my unbelief" actually a statement of faith?

Where do you need to utilize this prayer in your own life?



**Know**

Personal Study 1

**READ MARK 9:14-27.**

And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

## MARK 9:14-27

Notice how the father spoke to Jesus in this passage. First, the father was forthright and transparent. There was no hemming and hawing and trying to make his situation sound better than it is. He didn't hold back or beat around the bush. He made his need known.

What obstacles do you face in being honest about your needs, either to other people or in prayer to God?

Second, he wasn't brash or demanding, but humble. Often boldness and clarity are expressed in a demanding way like we are owed something. The father didn't speak that way. His honesty was actually detrimental to his own image. He wasn't making demands or seeking to be seen as strong. He was bold in his need for help, that is, for childlike faith, and it honored Jesus.

How can we be clear and forthright in our expressions of need without being selfish, prideful, or demanding?

Third, he was self-aware. The father knew his weakness and inability to save his son. He recognized his need for Jesus. If he had harbored any sense of strength, power, or ability to resolve the situation, he couldn't have asked what he did. But because he looked at himself and saw utter inability, he was able to pray the prayer that stands out so much in these verses.

How do we cultivate an understanding of our limitations so that we turn to Jesus readily? What does it mean for our relationship with Jesus?

Verse 24 is where we find this prayer: “I believe; help my unbelief.” For every other notable thing we’ve seen about this story—the father’s actions, posture, and tone—this simple sentence is the cornerstone for understanding doubt. He could have said, “please help me,” “I believe you can help me,” or “I’m struggling and need help.” Those would have been true words, genuine prayers. But they wouldn’t have captured the full spectrum of what it means to believe when we aren’t sure.

How does this short prayer encapsulate our relationship with the infinite, perfect God?

In five words, the father prays a prayer on which faith hinges. All faith, no matter how great or small. Think back on session one, where we saw that doubt stems from the reality of an infinitely perfect God and finite, sinful people. At its beginning, doubt is, “I don’t know.” This prayer lives in that reality because it expresses belief in the powerful God and admitted struggle with what he didn’t know how to believe.

This prayer resounds with conviction and assurance: “I believe.” And it’s rife with things hoped for and not yet seen: “Help my unbelief.” It’s a lived-out, embodied expression of what the Bible defines as true faith. And that means it’s a prayer for each of us.

Compare Hebrews 11:1 with Mark 9:24. How do both point to the coexistence of doubt and faith?

When you read the word “confession,” you likely think of sin or something shameful because it’s most commonly used to be just that—admitting guilt. But confession has a second meaning: to express clearly what you believe. In this verse, we see a double confession. The second half is what we usually think of, an admission of something undesirable—help my unbelief. It’s a confession both of need and unbelief. The first half of the verse, however, is a confession of the other sort as it declares belief. It’s a confession as a profession of faith.

This tension is so rich and vital for us to understand as we seek to grow in faith. Faith isn’t the absence of doubt but the right response to it. This prayer models that by first confessing belief in Jesus and second confessing doubt, struggle, and need. “I believe; help my unbelief” is a prayer of faith, for and from faith. It’s a prayer for those mired in doubt and for those in a place of peace. It’s a prayer for you.

In the next study, we’ll explore how to pray this prayer and what it means in the life of a believer.

When you reflect on the prayer, “I believe; help my unbelief,” which confession do you resonate with more—“I believe” or “help my unbelief”?

Which do you struggle with more? Why?



Be

## Personal study 2

How far can a five-word prayer take you? It seems like it might use up its meaning pretty quickly. Or maybe it will turn into a mantra and be rotely repeated. We can get bored with whole books of the Bible, so what chance does a prayer like, “I believe; help my unbelief,” stand in staying pertinent, fresh, and applicable?

What’s the difference between meditating on the words of Scripture and repeating them like a mantra—speaking them over and over again in the hope they become true?

This isn’t a prayer like any other, though. It’s a paradigm as much as it’s a request. It’s a framework for faith and belief in the midst of anything. And for that reason, “I believe; help my unbelief” is always pertinent, fresh, and true.

How does this prayer help you understand the very nature of faith?



We see in this story an instance of when this prayer can be prayed: at wit's end, when all else has been tried and proved wanting, and there are no more answers except Jesus. It's a prayer for desperate times when your faith is on the brink of failing. It's a prayer for exhausting times when you are not sure you can hold on to belief much longer. It's a prayer for those times of fog when you can't see the truth of God's Word or sense His presence. It's a prayer for times of temptation when sin seems so appealing, and you aren't sure it's worth resisting.

And it's a prayer for when things are good, and you're grateful because in those moments you should celebrate "I believe," and acknowledge there's still unbelief in your heart. Because good times are when we're most prone not to rely on God. Remember, the prayer is a double confession, one part proclamation of what we believe and the other an admission of where we have need.

How does this prayer help you when your faith is weak?

How does this prayer help you when your faith is strong?

The first two words, "I believe," are a statement to God that you do trust Him, His Word, and His character. It's an affirmation you believe He keeps His promises and that He is who He says He is. To pray this, you don't have to believe all of this perfectly (in fact, you never will this side of heaven). You just need to believe it as well as you can in the moment. To pray this prayer at all is an act of belief because it shows you believe there's a God who hears you and might act on your behalf. That's a seed of faith.

How is it encouraging that we won't believe perfectly in this life?

The last three words, "help my unbelief," are a plea for help. None of us ever believes as we ought. And often, we barely believe at all. We struggle to see the truth of God's Word or to trust that He will do what He says He will do. We struggle to understand what the Bible says, and we are tempted to believe lies and walk headlong into sin or give up on Christianity all together. So we need the prayer, "help my unbelief." We need it today, tomorrow, the next day, and the day after that. We need it constantly because we regularly struggle with unbelief.

What does your struggle with unbelief look like? In what areas of your life do you particularly need to apply this prayer?

This prayer is a paradigm for faith because it relieves the pressure of having all the answers. Often we feel like we must know what to think and what to do in every situation. We think we must be able to explain every mysterious thing about God or complex passage from Scripture. Faith says that not only do we not have to do these things, we are not able to. We can't have all the answers because we are not God. So we have faith. And we have this prayer.

How might praying this prayer ease a burden for you?

When we pray, "I believe; help my unbelief," we are doing the most faithful thing a person can do. We are expressing the assurance and confidence we have in God—sometimes much, sometimes little—and we are confessing that we are limited, sinful, and need Jesus' help. What else is there for a Christian? We believe, and we need Jesus. Constantly, in all situations and every struggle. And so God gave us this prayer and showed us how it can be spoken to Jesus whenever and wherever we need.





**Do**  
**Personal Study 3**

**This session revolves almost entirely around five words. But it also draws on the beliefs and attitudes the father exhibits as he speaks to Jesus. “I believe; help my unbelief,” is more than just a sentence; it’s reflective of the entire journey of growing in faith as a Christian. It’s a constant prayer for us, no matter what stage in life we’re in or the health of our faith.**

**If we are a follower of Jesus, we do believe, even if it’s feeble sometimes. If we can pray, we do believe God hears our prayer. We may struggle to trust. We may not be clear on what we believe or how to express it. We may not even always be sure we’re Christians, but if we can sincerely pray this prayer, then it means there’s belief in us, and Jesus won’t reject or push us away.**

**As human beings, we need help with our unbelief. We can’t overcome it ourselves. We need the Holy Spirit to help us see and believe the real, magnificent Jesus. God loves when we pray this prayer because it ‘s an invitation for His Spirit to work in us.**

**In what areas of life do you need to grow both humility and boldness?**

What aspects of God and His Word do you need to reflect on to bolster your belief? What do you need to cling to when you pray, “I believe”?

In what particular areas of life or thought do you need to pray “help my unbelief?”

How has this study helped you live comfortably in the tension between faith and doubt?

**We all need help with our unbelief.  
We cannot overcome it ourselves.**