

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME TWO

STUDY FOURTEEN

Confronting an Unclean Spirit

Mark 9:14–29

I want all of us to realize the incredible source of power. And it doesn't come because you have a position or a name or a reputation. In the working of God, power comes only from Him, and we glean it through prayer.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

On the nights we spend awake, looking at the clock, tossing and turning, and worrying about some humanly impossible situation. A difficult problem threatens our marriage. A health issue torments our loved ones. Hopelessness hijacks our feelings! We turn to the left and to the right, longing to find solutions, but we find none.

Though we've heard many sermons on prayer, sung beautiful songs about its importance, and even memorized verses on laying down our burdens, we sometimes wonder if prayer works. Can God do all these impossible things? Will He? Or does it even matter that we go to Him and make our requests known? All these questions lurk in our minds in the middle of the night.

Perhaps the disciples wrestled with these questions too. When a storm struck, their first response was to panic and row harder, not pause and pray. When faced with an overwhelming problem, they looked first at their meager resources rather than looking into God's abundant storehouse. Like us, their natural reaction to stress was to act first and pray later . . . if they prayed at all.

In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll watch a desperate father, whose son has been tormented by an evil spirit, come to Jesus' disciples for help. We'll feel the anguished frustration of this man as he wrestles with his own faith. And we'll see the disciples try to manage the problem on their own. The lesson Jesus teaches when He arrives is a truth we can apply every day, particularly on those nights when we can't sleep: *some problems can only be solved by prayer.*



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

*The grass withers and the flowers fade,
but the word of our God stands forever. (Isaiah 40:8)*

Express your appreciation for the Word of God that reveals profound truths about His great power, His sovereign will, and His incredible mercy. Thank the Lord for His constant guidance as you turn your heart to the Scriptures.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus had just taken Peter, James, and John up “a high mountain to be alone”—most likely snowcapped Mount Hermon (Mark 9:2). On the mountain, Jesus was “transfigured before them” (9:2 NASB). The disciples witnessed the brilliant light of Jesus’ divine glory as Elijah and Moses stood beside Him. They heard God declare: “This is My beloved Son; listen to Him!” (9:7 NASB). What an unforgettable experience!

Peter wanted to build shelters and stay with Jesus on the mountaintop. Wouldn’t that be wonderful? But real life with all its pressures beckoned. When they came down from the mountain, it wasn’t long before reality met them head-on. Let’s see what crisis awaited Jesus when they returned.



Observation: Jesus Confronts an Unclean Spirit

Step into the scene to observe the action.¹ Try to sense the intensity in the voices and watch the fearful expressions on the people’s faces. Above all, feel the desperation of the father seeking to free his son from the terrible grip of an evil spirit.

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Encountering a Large Crowd—Mark 9:14–16

Read [Mark 9:14–16](#). What was happening when Jesus, Peter, James, and John came down from the mountain? Who was there? Describe the tension in the air. What picture of the crowd did Mark paint when they saw Jesus?

Facing a Desperate Father—Mark 9:16–24

Read [Mark 9:16–24](#). Out of the hubbub, who stepped forward, and what did he say? Describe his anguish. What emotion did Jesus express in 9:19? When they brought the boy to Jesus, why do you think he went “into a violent convulsion” (Mark 9:20)? Summarize the dialogue in 9:21–22.

Let your emotions run when you read verses like this. Put yourself in the sandals of this father. Feel the boy’s hand in your hand. Imagine what it is to have shared years of your life with an uninvited guest that has invaded your boy’s life.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Observe 9:23–24. What did the father say, and what did he imply? What was Jesus’ reply? What impresses you about the father’s answer?

Jesus asks, “So do you believe I can?” “Oh, I do believe,” the father responds. One of the great expressions of faith: “Help my unbelief.”

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Relieving a Tormented Boy—Mark 9:25–27

Read [Mark 9:25–27](#). What is important about Jesus' command to the evil spirit? What happened to the boy?

Two commands: Exit, never reenter. The first is a command of deliverance; the other is a command of protection. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Answering the Disciples' Question—Mark 9:28–29

Read [Mark 9:28–29](#). Finally, alone with their Master, the disciples were troubled and confused! What question did they ask Jesus, and what was His response? What central point was Jesus making?

“Get out! Get out! Come out of him.” It didn’t work. It’s time for them to say, “Dear Father, we haven’t the power in ourselves to make anything happen supernatural, and this is a supernatural creature that only You can handle. Remove this thing from this boy.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Realizing an Incredible Source of Power

When Jesus arrived, some scribes were “arguing” with the disciples who didn’t go up the mountain (Mark 9:14). Look up the Greek verb [syzeteo](#) in the Greek dictionary at billmounce.com. What does the meaning of this term say about their conversation? What do you think they were arguing about?

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So, we come from the transfiguration to an argument. Scribes are here, and they're fussing with the nine disciples about why they're not able to cast out an unclean spirit from this man's son. "You're just as phony as your Master is! No wonder you can't do it. He couldn't do it either no doubt." Syzeteo is the word. It's the idea of "fighting with each other verbally." It's the ugly stuff of life.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Peruse the interesting article "[What Does the Bible Say About Demon Possession?](http://gotquestions.org)" at gotquestions.org. Explain the father's hopelessness and his son's misery. Why did the spirit throw the boy into a convulsion when they brought him to Jesus?

Because this evil cannot bear the presence of such deity. He is the presence of the living God in bodily form, and the evil within him feels it and is repulsed by it.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Note in the original appointment of the Twelve in Mark 3:13–15 that Jesus gave them the *exousia*, meaning "authority," to cast out demons. Read [9:23–29](#) in the MSG and the J. B. Phillips translations. Now, look up 9:29 in [Constable's Notes](#) at netbible.org. What is the meaning and significance of Jesus' statement that this kind only comes out by prayer?

"No, you've got to understand, men, you may have the authority, but you need Me for the power." What a great moment. You know why? Because you get power in prayer. They had done everything but pray. Their motive was right, their hearts were right, their compassion was sincere. They wanted to do the right things, but they couldn't do it. Why? Because they did it in themselves!
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: Prayer—A Means to Access God’s Power

Prayer is a means to access God’s power. Let’s compare our passage with other passages of Scripture to see how prayer works. How do the accounts in [1 Kings 17:17–24](#) and [Mark 7:24–30](#) illustrate God’s power and prayer? Which of these accounts do you relate to the most and why?

How do passages such as [Job 42:2](#); [Proverbs 16:9](#); [Jeremiah 10:23](#); and [2 Corinthians 12:1–10](#) emphasize God’s power, His unstoppable purpose, and His independent will? How can you pray in faith while acknowledging God’s sovereignty?

Say to the Lord, “I will not be disillusioned if You say no. That’s Your call. I have no right to claim it. That’s presumption.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What simple but profound truth does James convey in his letter that echoes Jesus’ teaching and is repeated in Paul’s writing ([Matthew 7:7–11](#); [Philippians 4:6–7](#); and [James 4:2](#))? Why is prayer a privilege?

We are simply creatures with authority but no power. Furthermore, prayer serves as a filtering system, where we change—where our wills begin to submit to the will of Him who has the power. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: Stop Worrying . . . Simply Pray

Pastor Chuck suggests four questions we should ask ourselves to help us apply the principles on prayer that we've learned from our passage. These questions are a checklist we can use as we seek God in prayer:

1. *Do I believe that God can do anything?*
2. *Am I willing to leave the “anything” up to Him?*
3. *Will I stop worrying, quit interrupting, cease striving, and simply pray?*
4. *Can I accept the answer He chooses to give?*

Like the desperate father, are you pleading with God for yourself or someone you love? What is your urgent prayer? Write your prayer below, and as you do, express to the Lord your answers to the four questions. Let them help you refine and strengthen your faith as you pray.

Will you stop worrying? Will you cease striving and simply give yourself to the most exacting discipline in the life with Christ? Will you just pray? And when you do, it's amazing how you change. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I surrender all to You. I believe You can do anything. Nothing is impossible with You. Help me to simply give myself to the discipline of prayer as I trust Your loving-kindness and submit to Your sovereign will. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page “*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*” at insight.org.

For the 2026–2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2011, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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