

THE REAL JESUS
A Series on the Book of Mark
“Overcoming Power Failure”
Mark 9:14-29
New City Church of LA
February 15, 2008
Speaker: Kevin Haah

I. Vision of New City

Welcome to New City. We are a multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic come-as-you-are church. Share our vision about being gospel-centered.

II. Introduction

We’ve been going through the Book of Mark in a series called the REAL JESUS.

Read Mark 9:1-13

This passage tells us: (1) about our power failures; (2) the first step to overcome our power failures; and (2) the second step to overcome our power failures.

III. First, about our power failures.

Peter, James and John are coming down from the mountain after a mountain top experienced where they witnessed the glory of Jesus. He was enveloped by the cloud and God affirmed: “This is my son whom I love. Listen to Him.” I am sure they were pretty psyched! Floating in cloud 9. Feeling like nothin’s gona stop us!

I remember coming back from a retreat where I experienced the mountain top and the power of the Holy Spirit in a mighty way, and feeling like I never want to go back down. But, I had to go back down to the valley.

Well, Jesus and the disciples came down. This passage starts out by saying in verse 14: When they came to the other disciples. They came down to the valley. And in the valley, there were power failures.

The father and his son lived in power failure. The boy was possessed by a spirit that robbed him of speech. He was mute. He went into seizures from time to time foaming at his mouth, gnashing his teeth and becoming rigid. It was like this for a long

time. It had often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. He probably had to restrain his son, maybe even tie him up just to make sure he doesn't kill himself. When you love your son, and your son is so out of control, you feel like you're experiencing power failure. You what can you do? There's nothing you can do. He felt pessimistic even about Jesus' ability to help—if you can do anything, he said.

Sometimes our lives are like that. We are going through stuff in our lives where we feel like we are at the wit's end.

The disciples also experienced a power failure. The disciples were in an argument with the religious leaders. The disciples had tried to cast out the evil spirit from the boy, but they couldn't. And that created a pandemonium. Now, you have to remember that earlier in the book of Mark, Jesus sent them out to cast out demons and heal the sick, and they came back rejoicing and telling stories of how God worked mightily through them. So, they did this before, but for some reason, they couldn't cast out the demon from this boy. They experienced a power failure.

Have you experience power failure in your life?

Have you felt like the father feeling like there is no way things are going to improve? "I am stuck. I'll never get my kids back. I'll never amount to anything. I'll never get better. No one will ever hire me. I'll never find someone who will love me. I feel like a failure."

Have you felt like the disciples where you felt like things were going well, but bam! There're temptations all around us. Just when we think we can stand, we find temptation that's strong than we expected, and we fail to stand against it.

We see spiritual battle going on. We see attacks going on. We want to stand against it, but we are unable.

We see grips of evil on a person or on a society, and we want to do something, but we feel powerless against the forces of evil.

How do you overcome power failures?

III. The First Step to Overcoming Power Failure Is to Take a Step of Faith.

The boy's father felt powerless and the condition was desperate. He asked the disciples, but they couldn't do anything. But he said to Jesus, "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Jesus says: "If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes." Then, the boy's father said: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

We learn two crucial things about faith, the thing that gets us on the path to the presence and power of God.

(1) First, it's honesty.

Jesus says if you believe, everything is possible. So, the father says: I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief. He's saying: I am trying to believe, but I am riddled with doubts. He was completely honest.

Then, Jesus says: How dare you come to me with doubt. Do you know who I am? Go home and think about that and when you have enough faith, you come back to me and you'll see if I can heal your son. NO! Jesus didn't say that. Jesus healed his son right there. But, Jesus didn't encourage doubt either. He said: "Everything is possible for him who believes."

I think there are two types of people regarding doubts:

- A conservative person thinks of doubt as evil and failure. No one is allowed to express doubt. If you create a community like that, you can't be a Christian who's intellectually authentic. If you have doubts, you are scared off. But, in Scripture, when you express doubt, God gives us more. He comes to us. He addresses us without condemnation.
- A liberal person's approach to doubt is to think that it is intellectually sophisticated and mature to be skeptical and to have unresolved doubts about everything.
 - I think that view was the prevalent view when I was in law school. I remember that most humor came from cynicism.
 - People love to be cynical about everything. Doubt everything. But, you can't be doubtful about everything unless you are willing to be doubtful about your own doubts. Because being doubtful about everything means

you should be doubtful about your doubts; and if you aren't, then you are giving yourself an exemption that is not fair.

- Maybe you're just cynical because you're afraid that the truth will change you. It's a way of keeping yourself distant or keeping yourself above others without getting your hands dirty and engaging with the issue.

God doesn't do the conservative thing and say, how dare you doubt! God doesn't do the liberal thing and encourage doubts. The father's faith was the kind of faith that admitted his weaknesses. **So we learn this important truth: Being intellectually and emotionally honest is the way to have this faith relationship with God. Honesty and authenticity in front of God is first thing about faith that we learn.**

(2) Second, we learn that helplessness, not holiness, is the first step to faith.

Jesus didn't chastise the father for his lack of faith. Saving faith is not getting everything right, becoming faithful, and saying: save me now that I am faithful. Real faith is saying, I don't have what it takes—I am full of doubts, I am a failure, I am faithless—but please save me and have mercy upon me. He's essentially saying, please save me not for what I am but because of what you are.

The essential difference between religion and Christianity is this: religion says: I am faithful, I have obeyed, so save me. But, Christianity says, I am helpless, but save me, and because you saved me, I obey out of gratitude. So, it's I obey therefore I am saved vs. I am saved therefore I obey. It's utterly different.

It's like the first step in the Twelve Steps: admit that you are powerless. They got this from Jesus. Jesus is saying: admit that you are powerless. Admit that you have failed. Admit that you are struggling and that you will not be able to change yourself no matter how hard you try.

[Say something to people who want to take the first step]

V. The Second Step to Overcoming Our Power Failure Is to Seek the Presence of God in our Daily Lives.

When the disciples came to Jesus and asked him why they couldn't cast out the demon from the boy, Jesus said you have to pray. They experienced all kinds of stuff in the past. They knew they could cast out demons because they've done it before. But, in a small way, they lived in the past. They didn't seek the presence and power of God through fellowship right now.

Sometimes, we get on a rut and think about all the experiences we've had with God when we were young, or when we were in college, or when we went on that mission trip. But, our lives now are a power failure. There is no vitality to your spiritual life right now. There is no zeal. There is no passion.

I've heard a story of this man who hasn't been to church for a long time, and a pastor came to visit his home. He was telling the pastor about his spiritual life in the past, how he used to be all gungho, how he used to go out on mission trip to help the poor in developing countries, how he used to pray and mediate and read the bible and journal everyday. Then, he said, in fact, I have my spiritual journal up in the attic. Honey, can you go up to the attic and get my journal? It's got all my spiritual life in it. Then, his wife came back from the attic, and said: honey, the rats have eaten your spiritual life.

When we rely on the past, the rats will have eaten your spiritual life.

You've got to seek the Lord in the present. Now! You have to learn to live your life daily in the presence and in the reliance of the Lord. You may have taken the first step, but that rats have eaten you faith. You are spiritually powerless.

Prayer is a source of power. When we pray, we bring up there down here. We submit to the reality that we don't have what it takes to lives down here, that we need the power of up there to come down here.

Prayer also communing with God. It is the way to approach God. It's the way you communicate with God. It's the way you seek the presence of God in your daily life.

I want to teach you how to bring the presence of God into your life. I've been learned this from Brother Lawrence, a 17th Century monk who was a cook in his monastery's kitchen. He taught me about practicing the presence of God even when we are doing ordinary things.

- I want to give you a homework; on Monday, let's make it our primary goal that day to be with Jesus.

- It doesn't mean that you will do anything different. You don't have to go to a prayer mountain, a monastery, or become a monk.
- You don't have to do anything heroic or noble. Do what you normally do, but for just one day, do those things with Jesus.
- When most people think about God, they think about church, reading the Bible, maybe a religious activity. We don't think about Him having to do with largest portions of our lives—our work, our chores, our routines. What we're going to talk about today is that at the absolute heart of spiritual life is finding God in the ordinary moments, because God wants to be with us.
- **I have some props to help us along.**

Let's Start with Waking Up (Alarm Clock):

- For some of us, the first word that comes out of our mouth when the alarm goes off is an expletive. Then, slamming our hand on the alarm clock's snooze button. Then, after awhile, we say our second expletive as we jump out of bed a little later than we're supposed to.

Instead of this usual routine, I'd like our first thought after we wake up to be a prayer to God. I heard of one guy who decided that the first thing that's going to touch the floor when he gets out of his bed is his knees.

- God, You've given me another day! My eyes are open again, and I get to live! And You will be with me!
- When you wake up, as soon as possible, try to get alone for just a few minutes. Don't try to be heroic about this. Don't try to make it be an hour, if that's *not* what you usually do. Just make it a few moments.
 - Invite Him to be with you when you first wake up.
 - Thank him, praise him, and invite him

Just this Monday...our first thought and first words belong to God.

Then, most of us wash and shower (Here's a Soap to symbolize this):

- Now, how many of you used soap or deodorant or some kind of cleaning agent this morning? Raise your hand up high. Those of you who didn't, don't raise your hand at all!
- Many of us think about washing our bodies because that's what people see and smell.
- But, we also need to wash our minds and hearts every morning.
- Paul says that Jesus wants to make us holy by the washing of the water of the Word and to present us before God one day without stain or wrinkle or blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-27)
- Just for Monday, when you're washing your face or taking a shower, say, "God, just as this soap and water are cleansing my body, may Your Word and Your Spirit cleanse my mind and my heart. Any impurities, any wrong intentions, any destructive desires, any thoughts that would lead me away from love and joy, any bitterness that could choke life out of me...Just cleanse them away."
- You have to wash anyway. Why not do it with Jesus?

Eating (Food):

Then you're going to eat. (Here's a box of cereal) Jesus said that we are to pray for our "daily bread."

- Every meal ought to be a celebration of God's goodness, because it's not something for us to take for granted.
- People can be so preoccupied, so rushed when they eat.
- Just for Monday—have breakfast with Jesus.
- Say: "Thank you Lord for the breakfast, thank you Lord for our family, etc."
- Make mealtime an exercise in gratitude. Stop and notice it, enjoy it, and remember what a good God He is. Remember that He has given you this food and all the other good things in your life—family, home, friends, a job, etc.
- You have to eat anyway, so, why not do it with Jesus?

Then, go on to a reading of the Word:

- Remember, Jesus said:

Men do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God.

(Matthew 4:4)

- Just like our bodies are fed by food, our hearts are fed—for better or worse—BY thoughts, by words.
- When we immerse ourselves in the word of God and the presence of God in our lives, our hearts are fed and the Scripture tells us that “out of the overflow of his heart, his mouth speaks.” It is out of the overflow of our hearts that we speak and we act. So, let’s feed our hearts with good things—God’s presence and word.
- Feed yourself words like this one from God:
 - **I can do all things (I can face anything that life throws at me) through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)**
 - **Or Nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:___)**
 - **Or Nothing can separate me from the love of God. (Romans 8:38-39)** Whatever happens this day, however much I mess up, nothing can separate me from God. Let your spirit get strong.
 - I don’t want you to feel like you have to be extreme about this. Just a few minutes. Don’t spend an hour doing this if you don’t already do it. Start by spending 5 minutes and work up. Just start little and work up. If you can find a quiet place in your home to do it, that’s the best place to do it. If not, find a quiet place somewhere else: at work, library, Starbucks, or in the car before you drive off. If you are a stay at home mom and it’s difficult for you find a quiet time, do it when the kids are taking a nap.
 - Create some intentional and focused time to feed your heart and mind somehow.

Watching or listening to the News or Reading the Paper or News on Internet (Newspaper):

Then, maybe you listen to the news in the morning or read the paper. Don’t give that up if you normally do that. But read it with Jesus or just watch or listen to the news with Jesus.

- Do you ever read the paper or news on the web and find yourself becoming concerned for the world?
- As you read the news, just say to Jesus, “I’m really concerned about what’s going in Iraq. Would you be with the family that’s going through the difficulties from the bombing?”

- [Something about what was in the paper in the morning]
- Wouldn't it be great if all of us watched the news with Jesus and we prayed, God, you know, in those Islamic countries where there is so much unrest, would You pour out love and mercy and justice?
- Who knows what might happen.

You're going to read the news anyhow. Why not go ahead and read it with Jesus? Let it prompt you to pray.

Driving (Car):

Most of you are going to drive from one point to another to get to work, school, an appointment, see friends and families, day care, or whatever.

- I know a lot of you spend a couple of hours a day in the car. That's almost 15 hours a week in the car.
- Continue to converse with him while driving. But, don't close your eyes. In fact, Jesus prayed with his eyes opened. Maybe you can ask God to take over the steering wheel of your life. "Lord, every time I drive my life, I seem to blow it. I mess it all up. Lord, I give you total control of my life. Lord, lead me and navigate me. Lord, you're my GPS system; I'd be lost without you."
- You can pray for various people you know that have a prayer need. Just raise that person up to the Lord. You might want to create a prayer card/notebook with a list and carry it around with you.
- It's also a great time to listen to some great Christian music. I think it puts you in a different mode of mind and heart when you get out the car after listening to great praise music. Get a CD of whomever you like. I love to sing along and dance in the car as I listen to some great Christian music. And I love it when I get to my destination in the middle of a song because the song then continues in my heart.
- If you're going to drive anyway, why not drive with Jesus?

Work (Laptop)

Then, most of you will do some sort of work. Here's a laptop to signify our work.

- When you get to your office, business, warehouse, store, classroom or kitchen, ask God to work *with* you Monday.
- Then, work as if you are working for the Lord. That's what the Scripture teaches. We ought to be the best worker in the company! Be the best teacher, medical professional, student, waiter, artist, business person, parent, or even lawyer and pastor that you can be. Do it for the Lord! Do it for the glory of the Lord! He is the boss! How would the way you do your job change if you were working for Jesus?
- Some of us are looking for a job: The Bible tells us to work so that we have something to share with those who have need. Go around looking for a job.

Lunch Time (credit card)

Most of us get maybe 30 minutes to an hour for lunch. (Here's a credit card to symbolize it since you have to spend money to buy lunch) I think lunch is an incredible opportunity to develop relationships with those who do not have a relationship with God. Be intentional. Very intentional. Make at least one evangelistic lunch appointment per week. Buy them lunch. My NT professor at Fuller told me that in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming back from a meal a majority of the times. Jesus ministered around food. Use lunchtime to build relationships for God. Remember, you guys are God's missionaries and He has sent you to your work place. That's your mission field. Your job may be whatever it is but your calling is to be a missionary for the Lord at your job. I am not saying that you should start preaching to your colleagues during lunch, but see what doors God might open. If He doesn't open any door, then let it go. If He does open a door, then be bold. Share your story. Don't condemn. Share your love. Just as naturally as you might share about your loving relationship with your family, share about your loving relationship with God.

Fun (Remote Control):

Sometime during the day or evening, you'll spend some time doing fun things. Maybe you watch TV or surf the net. Watch TV with Jesus.

- Talk to him about the show as you watch. Ask him what he thinks. If there's something that makes you laugh, just laugh and say, "That was funny." Talk to Him about what you see. I remember Grace saying that her mom used to talk to God when she was doing

dishes. “Lord, I love you!” If Grace’s mom can do it while doing the dishes, we can do it while watching TV.

- If He wants to change your habits, He’ll speak to you about that. If you really are seeking to follow Him above all, and if there is something that He wants to change, He will speak to it. You’ll have to have a tender heart and be open to Him.
- I heard about a man who told his wife that he never wanted to live in a vegetative state dependant upon a machine. He said, “If I ever get in that shape, I want you to pull the plug.” She got up and unplugged the television.

Spending Time with Family

- For those who have kids and work full time, we have some fun time with kids. Talk to Jesus and hear what he tells you about this. The best way to do this might be to unplug the TV.

Sleep (pillow):

- I think one of the best things to do before we go to bed is to spend about 30 minutes reading a good Christian book. There are so many great books and I think it’s a great way to feed your mind and heart for Christ.

Whatever the day holds—household errands, interruptions—every one of them is an opportunity to be with Jesus, to learn from Jesus how to become like Jesus.

- You will not be able to do everything I mentioned. Take just a few ideas and try it.
- And when you forget and mess up on Tuesday—and you will—no beating yourself up! That’s one of the rules: **No beating yourself up**. Just stop and think, This next moment is another chance.
- Every moment is another chance. This moment right here. He’s here. He’s at work. So we watch. So we listen. So we’re open. Every moment is a “Burning-Bush moment,” an encounter with God.

Then when you lie down Monday night, do a little review of the day. Just like the football players do when they watch tapes of a game.

- Look at each moment from when you first woke up. Let those scenes go before your mind's eye and review them with God. Thank Him for all the places where He was with you. If there's anything God wants you to learn or to change, talk with Him about that. Thank Him for spending the day with you.
- Then the last thing you do is to decide if you'd like Him to spend the day with you on Wednesday. If you would like Him to do that, then ask Him:

Lord would you be with me tomorrow? Would you be with me on Tuesday?

If you can spend one day with Jesus, you can spend every day with Jesus—one day at a time. **Then an ordinary life becomes an extraordinary life—one day at a time.** Then “Up There comes Down Here”—one day at a time. You will begin to overcome your power failures. You will live your life with power and filled with the presence of God.