

The old song “I Believe I Can Fly” espouses a message that is familiar to our culture, that we can do anything if we just believe in ourselves. The Bible also similarly emphasizes the importance of believing (Mark 9:23), but this is a different kind of belief. Biblical faith is different than the popular idea of believing in one’s self, which is pervasive in movies and self-help books. In today’s passage, through this story of people who lack faith, we see two aspects of Biblical faith that differentiate it from that of the world. First, Biblical faith is Christ-centered. Second, it is expressed in prayer.

Previously, in chapter 8, Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah. But immediately after that, when Jesus predicts His death, we see that Peter doesn’t understand what it means to be the Messiah. Then Jesus reveals His glory to Peter, James, and John when He is transfigured. Jesus’ revelation of Himself to the disciples climaxes at His transfiguration, where the disciples glimpse His glory. But after this, the disciples still do not respond as one would expect from those who have witnessed Jesus in His glory. In 9:14 we see the disciples arguing with the scribes after failing to drive out a demon from a boy. These scribes, who previously accused Jesus of driving out demons by the prince of demons, likely sought to use the disciples’ failure to discredit Jesus. Jesus’ response in v. 19 reveals the nature of the disciples’ failure, and the general problem of how Jesus is received during His ministry. This is the problem of unfaithfulness. The teachers of the Law rejected Jesus outright, the people don’t believe in Jesus enough to be sure if He can heal (in v. 22 the boy’s father asks Jesus for help **if** He can do anything), and even the disciples don’t have enough faith to drive out the demon. This lack of faith is the main issue in this story.

The faith that the Bible tells us to have is God and Christ-centered. It is not a matter of believing in our own human strength, but rather believing in Jesus. Faith is not merely aimless belief in that which is unseen. In the Bible, faith means trusting in God. It is personal and relational. We believe in what God says and promises, and we trust in Him. In v. 23 Jesus says that everything is possible for him who believes. This is because God, the object of our belief, can do anything, not because we can do anything. And in v. 24 we see that we even have to come

to God to ask for faith. Even faith does not come from ourselves. The boy's father has some faith, but it is shot with unbelief. We all have moments when our faith is weak and we doubt. We sometimes question the truth of Scripture, the purpose of suffering, our own salvation, and even the existence of God. In these times we must turn to God for more faith. He is the only one that can help us. And the very act of turning to God for more faith, is an act of faith. Our faith perseveres because of God's strength, not because of our own. When we are weak, we are in the best position to put our trust in God. The world tells us to believe in ourselves, but the Bible tells us to believe in God. Human strength fails us, but God does not. The disciples failed to turn to God, so they failed to cast out the demon. But when Jesus healed the boy, His power still shone through the disciples' lack of faith. 2 Timothy 2:13 tells us that even when we are faithless, God is faithful. So how do we turn to Jesus? We can meditate on His resurrection. Because Jesus conquered death, we can trust Him to be sufficient for us. We can remind each other of God's word and encourage each other to turn to God when we are weak.

This passage also tells us that faith expresses itself in prayer. When the disciples ask Jesus why they couldn't drive out the demon, He replies the demon can only be cast out by prayer. This implies that the disciples didn't pray, because they trusted in their own power rather than God to drive out demons. Their failure to pray was a result of their lack of faith. Trust in God is not just in our own heads; but it spills out in our speech, thoughts, and prayers. Prayer is faith in action. Just like in our relationships with each other, if we trust someone, we will come to them with our problems. It starts by asking Jesus to save us, so we may have life in Him. But it continues every day, by trusting God in all areas of our lives. This passage doesn't tell us all the details about how to live out our faith, but it gives us a starting point. We should pray in faith about all aspects of our lives, even our lack of faith. We may not get answers right away, but the more we pray through faith, the more we will learn to trust God with our lives, and the more we will see Him work in our lives. This is what it means to have Biblical faith.