



MARK 8 + 9

2021 H2O Church Winter Devotional

WEEK ONE

WEEK ONE - Day One

PRAY

God, may I never forget what an honor it is to stand before You in prayer. As I study Your word this week, I pray that You would reveal truths I haven't yet realized, even if I've read the same words countless times before. Give me the wisdom to discover how I might walk closer with You, and give me the courage to reject anything that wrestles my focus away from that. Amen.

READ (Mark 8:1-10)

During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."

His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?"

"How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked.

"Seven," they replied.

He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so. They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away, he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

ENGAGE/REFLECT

In verse two, we hear Jesus tell his disciples "I have compassion for these people..."

It is such a gift that we serve a God who not only sees our needs and our wants, but feels compelled to act by answering prayer, extending forgiveness, and meeting our needs— all through the person of Jesus. Our God is a compassionate God. In fact, compassion is so important to Him that the first time God reveals Himself to Moses in the book of Exodus, 'compassionate' is the first word He uses to describe Himself! Before anything else, He wanted to be known as a compassionate God.

If we're honest though, sometimes compassion is a difficult characteristic of God to practice in our own lives. We often want to make excuses for ourselves while assuming the worst of others. (Perhaps the disciples were thinking things like "Why didn't these people bring their own food?", "I'm hungry, too, Jesus!", etc.) But Jesus doesn't do that. He sees a need, and meets it.

ASK

Where do you struggle to have compassion in your life? Or, who do you struggle to have compassion for?

What makes it difficult for you to have compassion on them?

The disciples willingly gave up what little food they had to give to Jesus so He could multiply it for the benefit of the Kingdom. This is just one example of Jesus using something small and unassuming to accomplish a big task/meet a need. What small offering can you give to Jesus today in the hopes that He will bless it abundantly?

PRAY

Lord, you are a compassionate God. Thank you for having compassion on me so that I may have compassion on others. Help me to remember this truth as I interact with others today and over the next few weeks. Amen.

WEEK ONE - Day Two

PRAY

God, may I never forget what an honor it is to stand before You in prayer. As I study Your word this week, I pray that You would reveal truths I haven't yet realized, even if I've read the same words countless times before. Give me the wisdom to discover how I might walk closer with You, and give me the courage to reject anything that wrestles my focus away from that. Amen.

READ (Mark 8:11-21)

ENGAGE/REFLECT

The disciples in this passage remind us that we are an incredibly forgetful people! Here Jesus was, trying to teach His friends a lesson about the Pharisees and process what had just happened on land and the disciples were concerned with their lunch! It can be so easy to get lost in the details of our every day lives, to-do lists and immediate needs while ignoring the bigger picture of what the Lord is trying to teach us.

This season of advent is just as much about looking forward to a hopeful future as it is about reflecting back on the promises that were kept when Jesus was born. We must never forget the importance of Jesus's birth as a fulfillment of prophecy and a testament to God's faithfulness to His people. Spend some time reading these passages and remembering our God as a promise-keeper!

2 Samuel 7:12-13

Isaiah 7:14

Micah 5:2

Isaiah 35:5-6

Isaiah 42:1-4

ASK

How does Jesus fulfill all of the prophecies above? Think of Biblical examples!

Consider all the ways in which the Lord has been faithful to you in your life. How does this act of remembrance help you in your faith/prayer life today?

PRAY

Jesus I am forgetful! Please continue to remind me of all Your past faithfulness, Your fulfilled prophecies and kept promises so it might build my faith for the future. Give me grace when I question Your goodness or I am slow to remember. Amen.

WEEK ONE - Day Three

PRAY

God, may I never forget what an honor it is to stand before You in prayer. As I study Your word this week, I pray that You would reveal truths I haven't yet realized, even if I've read the same words countless times before. Give me the wisdom to discover how I might walk closer with You, and give me the courage to reject anything that wrestles my focus away from that. Amen.

READ (Mark 8:22-26)

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"

He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."

ENGAGE/REFLECT

What a beautifully intimate story of healing. Imagine the tenderness of Jesus taking this man by the hand and guiding him to a proper place to be healed. Jesus wasn't too embarrassed to touch this stranger, not once, but twice, and to do something a little uncomfortable to give him sight!

There are at least seven records of Jesus healing blind men in the Gospel accounts. In this particular story we see Jesus use a pretty unorthodox method! We don't know why He chooses to heal him in this way, but perhaps it points to our God as a creative and personal God. Maybe by touching the blind man's eyes and using His own saliva, Jesus was communicating something very specific that only this man would understand. Maybe Jesus wanted him to experience a slower healing for some reason. (His sight came back gradually, not all at once.) Whatever the reason, it's safe to assume that there was intentionality behind Jesus' actions.

This story speaks to the reality that we don't all heal in the same way. We are unique people with unique stories and unique needs. It can be easy to look at someone else's life or healing journey and feel jealous or confused about the way the Lord is handling your own healing, but the truth is, He loves us too much to give us a 'one size fits all' solution. We must continue to fix our eyes on the healer and not the others around us fighting their own battles.

ASK

What are some things you believe about the healing nature of our God? Are they true or biblical?

Who in your life needs healing right now and how can you pray for them?

What needs Jesus' healing touch in your own life?

PRAY

Jesus, You are healer. Please answer my prayers of healing for myself and my loved ones. Help me to believe and have faith in the redemptive power of Your touch so I may continue to pray boldly in Your name. Help me to trust in Your methods and Your timing. Amen.

WEEK ONE - Day Four

PRAY

God, may we never forget what an honor it is to stand before You in prayer. As we study your Word this week, I pray that You would reveal truths we haven't yet realized, whether we've read the same words countless times before, or if this is the first time. Give us the wisdom to discover how we might walk closer with You, and give us the courage to reject anything that wrestles our focus away from that. Amen.

READ (Mark 8:27-33)

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

ENGAGE/REFLECT

This is where Jesus is formally recognized by His disciples as the Messiah. In one of the most important and sometimes forgotten statements of His life, Jesus promises He will rise again. He indicates that His death and great suffering will not be final. There is so much mystery and wonder about Christ, but we can repeat (as Peter did) that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the One to come, and there is nobody else to whom we can go!

ASK

Why do you think Jesus warned the disciples not to tell anyone about Him?

Who do you say that Jesus is?

How does knowing that Jesus is the one and only Messiah bring you hope?

PRAY

Jesus, You are the Messiah! The One who was and still is and will be through it all. Help me continue to grow in my love and trust in You as I eagerly wait for Your return. Amen.

WEEK ONE - Day Five

PRAY

God, may I never forget what an honor it is to stand before You in prayer. As I study Your word this week, I pray that You would reveal truths I haven't yet realized, even if I've read the same words countless times before. Give me the wisdom to discover how I might walk closer with You, and give me the courage to reject anything that wrestles my focus away from that. Amen.

READ (Mark 8:34-9:1)

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

ENGAGE/REFLECT

The call to self-denial isn't a call to self-hatred or self-rejection, but it's a call to seek Christ and His ways and His glory above our own. Following Jesus is a high and costly calling. Those who give their lives to Him are submitting to a life of self-denial, sacrifice and suffering, but it's also a life that leads to joy and peace and hope! As believers, we must strive to love Christ above all and be willing to suffer whatever opposition our commitment to Him may bring. We can endure this suffering with hope knowing that there is joy and eternal life for all who are His!

ASK

In what ways can you deny yourself as a follower of Christ?

Are there any idols in your life that are keeping you from living a life of self-denial and cross bearing?

Self-denial and cross-bearing are not easy! We have to make a conscious effort each and every day to live out John 3:30 - "He must become greater, I must become less." How have you experienced joy in the midst of self-denial?

PRAY

Father, I need humility. Help me each day to deny myself and keep You on the throne. I so desperately want control and want what I think is best for my life. Help me to surrender my control to You and fix my eyes on Heaven. Help me see that living my life with You and for You is the best thing I could ever do. Amen.

WEEK ONE - EXTRA CONTENT

Merry Christmas!

Luke 2:1-20

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Take some time to reflect on the story of the birth of Jesus. This is one of the most important days we celebrate as believers! Our King was born, and because of His birth and eventual death and resurrection, we have abundant, eternal life. How incredible! Sit in the presence of Jesus and praise Him for who He is.

ASK

Why is the virgin birth of Jesus important, and even essential?

How does the truth of Jesus' virgin birth inform the right understanding of who Jesus was and what He came to do?

How is this story a demonstration of God's love for you?

WEEK TWO

WEEK TWO - Day One

PRAY

Jesus, as I encounter you today in your Word, teach me how to respond. Teach me how to ask good questions. Teach me how to submit and surrender my feelings for Your glory. Awaken me to your majesty and miracles. Show me how to live by faith. Amen.

READ (Mark 9:2-13)

ENGAGE/REFLECT

Peter “did not know what to say”. It’s easy to imagine the other disciples made a lot of jokes about this moment later on, being that this was one of the only moments we know of where Peter didn’t have something to say! He was dumbfounded and scared as he witnessed two dead prophets of history suddenly appear, glowing next to Jesus on top of the mountain. What a crazy experience!

Then, as Peter, James and John are on their way down the mountain they continue discussing some of the words of Jesus (“rising from the dead”) because they did not understand what He meant by them. Sometimes, God does things and says things that are beyond our understanding, either because we are too young or because we are simply incapable of understanding His wisdom and knowledge.

This week, we will be studying this story known as the Transfiguration from four different authors (Mark, Matthew, Luke and Peter). There might be questions that come up as you continue to study the words of Jesus this winter break and throughout your lifetime. When confusion sets in, slow down. Try not to react like Peter who immediately begins building temples and doing the ‘right religious things’ when he isn’t sure what else to do. Pause and rest in the confusion for a moment. Know that it is ok and even expected to not have all the answers! After all, God is God and we are not.

ASK

Does Jesus ever leave you confused?

How do you typically respond when you come to stories or passages in the Bible that you can’t make sense of? How would you like to respond?

PRAY

Holy, holy, holy are You, Lord Almighty! You are beyond understanding, transcendent and awe-some. Though I am weak, You are strong. I am the clay and You are the potter. Give me rest knowing that You hold the mysteries of all creation together. Amen.

WEEK TWO - Day Two

PRAY

Jesus, as I encounter you today in your Word, teach me how to respond. Teach me how to ask good questions. Teach me how to submit and surrender my feelings for Your glory. Awaken me to your majesty and miracles. Show me how to live by faith. Amen.

READ (Matthew 17:1-8)

ENGAGE/REFLECT

Here in Matthew's account of the story, after God audibly speaks words of affirmation over Jesus, Matthew notes that the disciples are "scared to death" (the Message translation). They were so terrified that they actually fell down to the ground! Can you remember a time in your life when you've been so scared that you've actually fallen over?! Probably not!

But true to form, God does not leave his followers in fear. Like Moses before Pharaoh and the Egyptians; like Joshua before the armies of nations; like Isaiah in the vision of his calling; and like David on the run from Saul, God has not given His people a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

Jesus sees the fear in Peter, James, and John's eyes and He comes over to them, gets down near them close enough to touch them. Jesus is tender with them and speaks words of comfort. "Don't be afraid."

ASK

Does Jesus ever leave you feeling scared?

Christ says some terrifying things in the Gospels for those who reject God, particularly those who are religious and think that they are doing all of the "right things" for God. He says terrifying things about Hell and what it will be like for those going there. Christ even has harsh words for His true followers and the persecution they will endure.

What fears are most persistent in your life these days?

What would it look like to surrender those fears to God and allow His words "don't be afraid" to change your soul?

PRAY

God of gods, You are mighty and strong. You punish the wicked and bring justice to the earth in Your terrifying anger and righteous wrath. Father, You bring comfort when I am frightened. You bring me warmth like a parent wrapping their arms around a child. Show me Your power and Your peace. Amen.

WEEK TWO - Day Three

PRAY

Jesus, as I encounter you today in your Word, teach me how to respond. Teach me how to ask good questions. Teach me how to submit and surrender my feelings for Your glory. Awaken me to your majesty and miracles. Show me how to live by faith. Amen.

READ (Luke 9:28-36)

ENGAGE/REFLECT

Here in Luke's record of this mountain scene, the three disciples are recorded taking a nap. Mark describes Mount Tabor as a "high mountain", which likely took them about 90 min to hike. These men have been traveling with Jesus for a couple years now, walking everywhere they go, sleeping in tents and friend's places. (Can you imagine being away from your bed for three years?)

And it was probably hot! The average summer day (likely when this event took place) in this part of Israel can reach up to 90 degrees fahrenheit. It's no wonder they were tired as they reached the top, not knowing exactly what Jesus' plans were and what they were about to experience.

This story foreshadows what would happen later in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus takes these same three disciples with Him to pray throughout the night before something even more glorious and miraculous would happen. There too, they would fall asleep again and again.

ASK

Does Jesus ever leave you sleepy?

Does it feel like you are just completing tasks, going through the motions and 'doing ministry' without ever receiving rest from God?

What if you knew that Jesus was about to perform the miraculous? Would you wake up and pay attention? How might God want to be getting your attention right now?

PRAY

Jesus, "You are way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper
Light in the darkness, my God;
That is who You are!" Amen!

WEEK TWO - Day Four

PRAY

Jesus, as I encounter you today in your Word, teach me how to respond. Teach me how to ask good questions. Teach me how to submit and surrender my feelings for Your glory. Awaken me to your majesty and miracles. Show me how to live by faith. Amen.

READ (Mark 9:2-13)

ENGAGE/REFLECT

Today, we return again to Mark's account of the Transfiguration, with a slightly deeper level of understanding and familiarity of the story. This time around you might notice that Mark includes a unique detail near the end of the passage. The disciples ask Jesus a question.

"Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

Earlier this week, we saw the disciples in confusion, but in this moment of the conversation they appear to be more curious than confused. God has instilled in us a desire for knowledge and truth. Here, Jesus tries to help these three men see that Old Testament prophecy has been fulfilled in John the Baptist, who came like Elijah, preparing the way of the Lord. Jesus satisfied their curiosity and blessed them with a greater understanding of God's plans.

ASK

Does Jesus ever leave you curious?

What sort of questions do you still have about this story of the Transfiguration after reading it several times this week?

What questions do you still have about God or life that have not yet been answered? Ask the Holy Spirit for understanding. Who knows, he might just give you an answer!

PRAY

Good Teacher, give me eyes to see and ears to hear. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, I cannot discern any truth worth understanding. No university, philosopher, or religion aside from Jesus Christ will show me the way to life eternal. Satisfy my hunger for wisdom and thirst for truth. Amen.

WEEK TWO - Day Five

PRAY

Jesus, as I encounter you today in your Word, teach me how to respond. Teach me how to ask good questions. Teach me how to submit and surrender my feelings for Your glory. Awaken me to your majesty and miracles. Show me how to live by faith. Amen.

READ (2 Peter 1:16-21)

ENGAGE/REFLECT

Later on in Peter's ministry, he writes some letters to Christians who have been scattered and persecuted for their faith, encouraging them to endure through suffering. In the passage above, Peter recalls when he was an "eyewitness to [Jesus'] majesty", as an example of God's faithfulness. At the Transfiguration, the Father spoke to the Son, "You are my beloved Son." Through the holy scriptures, the prophets, the voice from the heavens, and the writings of the disciples, there is no question what God thinks about Jesus.

What do you think Peter's main point is from the passage above? It seems like the big idea is that God's word is trustworthy.

Peter had to learn to trust God when He said things like, "go and make disciples of all nations" and also, "the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected." In his age and wisdom, he taught other churches to grow in their assurance that God's word would not fail, and that no matter how hard life gets, we can trust Him and follow Him.

ASK

Does Jesus ever leave you confident and assured in faith?

Despite our confusion, fear, fatigue, and curiosity, God wants you to be confident in the Son and His work on the cross. What doubts or insecurities do you have that are keeping you from experiencing this sort of confidence?

What truth might God be asking you to believe in full confidence and faith today?

Same question as above, but for the year 2022?

PRAY

Messiah,

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.

Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

The [revelation] of the Lord is perfect."

Give me confidence that can only come from You.

Amen.

WEEK TWO - EXTRA CONTENT

Mark 1:9-11

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Mark 14:32-42

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

WEEK THREE

WEEK THREE - Day One

PRAY

Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.

READ (Mark 9:14-15)

When they returned to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd surrounding them, and some teachers of religious law were arguing with them. When the crowd saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with awe, and they ran to greet him.

ENGAGE/REFLECT

Take a deep breath. Imagine the argument between two rabbis (referenced in verse 14). Picture the flecks of spittle flying from their mouths and landing in their beards. Think what it would sound like for the religious authorities to yell their points and counterpoints, with the audience voicing their support for one side or the other. Imagine the sensation of all those bodies pushed together: the warmth, the smell, the cacophony.

At the top of the mountain, Jesus, Peter, James, and John had just experienced the Transfiguration. There had been a sense of holiness, majesty, and eternal power. At the bottom of the mountain, they entered a scene of complete chaos and confusion. There were large crowds, noisy arguments, and a stampede of people pressing in on every side.

The contrast is striking.

The life of discipleship is constantly swinging between mountaintop experiences of peace and valley experiences of chaos. Jesus is the one certain, clear, awe-inspiring figure in these verses. He steps into the chaos and brings the "peace that passes understanding" (Philippians 4:7) along with him. But it's not a magical spell that instantly settles everything down. It's a process of practicing faith in the midst of the confusion.

ASK

What chaos in your life is currently distracting you from Jesus?

Where is Jesus stepping into your world? You may have to look hard. You may need to pay careful attention. But where is he? What's he doing? What's he saying to you?

What would it look like for you to practice faith in your context of chaos today?

PRAY

Prince of Peace, I am so easily distracted by the chaos and confusion of the world around me. Help me to see You at work in my midst. Let me see you and marvel at You and draw near to You that I may have peace. Amen.

WEEK THREE - Day Two

PRAY

Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.

Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.

READ (Mark 9:16-22)

ENGAGE/REFLECT

The father in this story seems to have been doing his very best to deal with the challenges that had come into his (and his son's) life. He had endured years of difficulty, hoping and praying that it would go away. He had tamped down the flames that threatened his son's life. He had scooped him out of the water to keep him from drowning. And, on this particular day, he had sought out Jesus (or at least His entourage) and put the boy forward for supernatural healing.

But when Jesus finally entered the picture, the solution to all of that family's problems came down to one simple imperative: "Bring the boy to me."

ASK

What is the biggest ongoing challenge that you've had to deal with in your life?

How have you tried to deal with that problem, previously?

How can you call on Jesus directly today? Not just through the people in your Life Group, not just through an H2O staff member, not just through a counselor or special event... How can you bring that challenge directly to Jesus right now?

PRAY

Lord, I come to You as the author and perfecter of my faith. I want to make direct reliance upon You my first priority. I submit my struggles to Your healing power and presence. Please rescue me. Please save me. Amen.

WEEK THREE - Day Three

PRAY

Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.

READ (Mark 9:23-24)

"What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes."

The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"

ENGAGE/REFLECT

There might be more in these two lines of the story than in all the rest of the story combined. Read them again: slowly and deliberately. Jesus' challenge and the father's response, which demonstrates his ongoing development of faith, represent the central challenge of living by faith in the midst of a chaotic world.

"Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see" (Hebrews 11:1).

Sit in silence. Seriously: take off the headphones. Close the door. Take a few deep breaths. Repeat the words from Mark 9:23-24 and/or Hebrews 11:1. Commit these verses to memory. Turn these thoughts into prayer for your own heart.

ASK

What is stirring in your heart as you meditate on these verses?

What does your response reveal about your own faith?

How will you walk with Jesus to develop deeper faith in this today?

PRAY

Jesus, I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief! I want to walk by ever-increasing faith with You through every circumstance in my life. Amen.

WEEK THREE - Day Four

PRAY

Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.

READ (Mark 9:25-29)

When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. "Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak," he said. "I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!"

Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up.

Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, "Why couldn't we cast out that evil spirit?"

Jesus replied, "This kind can be cast out only by prayer."

ENGAGE/REFLECT

This violent exorcism and the shocked response of the crowd are dramatic elements of Mark's Gospel narrative. But the real point of these verses is the power of prayer.

Our view of prayer is often limited to a person sitting with their eyes closed, hands folded, head bowed. But prayer can be so much more than this! Prayer can take the form of reading a Psalm out loud. It can be something that happens on a walk without any words whatsoever. Writing in a journal or working on an art project can also function as a form of prayer. Really: anything that allows our hearts to connect with the heart of God is an expression of prayer. It's the way we invite God into our circumstances and into our hearts.

When we pray, we come before the throne of God. The writer of Hebrews expresses this as follows: "So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." But it doesn't even have to be a verbal exchange! Read Romans 8:26-27 to understand more about this special role of the Holy Spirit.

Choose a posture or practice for prayer that is less familiar to you. Take ten minutes to pray right now to read out loud... or kneel... or walk... or journal... or paint... or sing... or lie on your back in silence. You might not know what to pray for, but can you trust the Holy Spirit to comfort you and guide you in that process?

ASK

How did you encounter the Holy Spirit in that time of prayer? (There might be some wisdom in writing down your experiences for future reference).

What is keeping you from experiencing the power of God in prayer? How can you step out in faith to overcome those obstacles?

PRAY

My King! I come boldly to Your throne. I want to receive Your mercy. I want to find Your grace to help me when I need it most. Please help me to overcome my unbelief and enjoy a deep and abiding heart connection with You. Amen.

WEEK THREE - Day Five

PRAY

Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.

Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.

READ (Mark 9:14-29)

ENGAGE/REFLECT

Our focus this week has been on maintaining faith in the midst of chaos. We recognize that we live in a confusing, frenzied, distracted world full of angst, disagreements, and false promises of "quick fixes." Sin and spiritual warfare are very real parts of our daily lives. But Jesus is the same: yesterday, today, and forever.

Think back on these last four days. How have you encountered Jesus? In the same way that Jesus came down from the mountaintop of supernatural revelation to deliver a little boy from his day-to-day demons, he wants to step down into our lives and give us the Holy Spirit to empower us for daily faith.

ASK

How have you encountered Jesus through Mark 9:14-29?

What are some practical ways you can freshly commit yourself to spiritual disciplines such as prayer and meditation that provide ongoing connection with God?

PRAY

Jesus, thank you for entering my world and making me whole. Thank you for inviting me to ongoing interaction through prayer. Please help me to continue walking by faith. Amen.

WEEK THREE - EXTRA CONTENT

Matthew 17:14-21

At the foot of the mountain, a large crowd was waiting for them. A man came and knelt before Jesus and said, "Lord, have mercy on my son. He has seizures and suffers terribly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. So I brought him to your disciples, but they couldn't heal him."

Jesus said, "You faithless and corrupt people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." Then Jesus rebuked the demon in the boy, and it left him. From that moment the boy was well.

Afterward the disciples asked Jesus privately, "Why couldn't we cast out that demon?"

"You don't have enough faith," Jesus told them. "I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible. But this kind of demon won't leave except by prayer and fasting."

Luke 9:37-43

The next day, after they had come down the mountain, a large crowd met Jesus. A man in the crowd called out to him, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, my only child. An evil spirit keeps seizing him, making him scream. It throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It batters him and hardly ever leaves him alone. I begged your disciples to cast out the spirit, but they couldn't do it."

Jesus said, "You faithless and corrupt people! How long must I be with you and put up with you?" Then he said to the man, "Bring your son here."

As the boy came forward, the demon knocked him to the ground and threw him into a violent convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit and healed the boy. Then he gave him back to his father. Awe gripped the people as they saw this majestic display of God's power.

WEEK FOUR

WEEK FOUR - Day One

PRAY

Holy Spirit, I submit this time in the word to You. I ask that You would help me push away distractions and have a clear focus on what the Heavenly Father might be saying to me. Bless me with peace, humility, and joy as I ponder the scriptures! Amen.

READ (Mark 9:30-32)

They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

ENGAGE/REFLECT

Sometimes it's easy to read through a passage of scripture containing one of the core ideas of our faith and forget just how earth-shattering these concepts were at the time. The disciples serve as a beautiful example of what it was like to be human and attempt to understand Jesus for the first time. They had seen Jesus heal sicknesses, drive out demons, and even raise people from the dead who had recently passed away (5:21-43), yet they couldn't grasp the idea of His death and subsequent resurrection.

Rather than looking down on the disciples for not "getting it," a more helpful thought might be to ask ourselves whether our approach to the resurrection is appropriate, now that we're on the other side of it and have a little more context than the disciples did. We know now what Jesus meant when he predicted His death and resurrection- do we live like it? If we understand what He says here and it is true, nothing in our lives should remain the same! Our relationships, work, habits, schedules, and thoughts should all be fundamentally changed by the idea of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The disciples did not understand the weight of Jesus' words in Mark 9, but they experienced the reality of what He was saying better than anyone by the end of their lives. They physically encountered the resurrected Jesus, and our faith in Him means that we will, too, someday! This is good news that changed the world and should change you and I continually!

ASK

In your own words, what does Jesus' life, death, and resurrection mean to you, and what does it mean for the world?

What is an area of your life that has seen significant change after placing your faith in the resurrected Jesus? If you aren't a follower of Jesus, how do you think your life would change if you began following him?

PRAY

Jesus, how easily I forget the impact of your life, death, and resurrection! When I leave this space of reflection and enter the cares and concerns of the day, please help me to continually remember who You are and what You've done for Your people. I pray that the Good News would change who I am and how I view my life each day! Amen.

WEEK FOUR - Day Two

PRAY

Holy Spirit, I submit this time in the word to you. I ask that You would help me push away distractions and have a clear focus on what the Heavenly Father might be saying to me. Bless me with peace, humility, and joy as I ponder the scriptures! Amen.

READ (Mark 9:33-37)

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

ENGAGE/REFLECT

As mentioned in yesterday's devotional, we can have a tendency to look down on the disciples for their moments of stumbling. Here, we might easily shake our heads and wonder why on earth the disciples would argue among themselves about greatness! Wouldn't they know that Jesus isn't a huge fan of that? Don't they know who He is?

We must take a small step back to realize that we are missing the plank in our own eye with this line of thinking. We live in one of the most self-centered and self-focused cultures in history! If we aren't always on our guard, we will fall into making ourselves an idol, even if it's through more subtle phrases, like "legacy," "brand," or "pursuing my truth."

Luckily, Jesus speaks very explicitly about how to combat this building block of our culture. We must seek to serve others above ourselves! He uses the example of a child because little children have nothing to offer us in return for our sacrificial love- no money, no career opportunities, no social standing, nothing. And yet that type of love, the love that gives and expects nothing in return, is exactly how Jesus calls us to love the world around us. When followers of Jesus seek to be "last" through sacrificial love and service, it shines brightly in our individualistic culture!

ASK

Why do you think Jesus felt it was important to address His disciple's argument over greatness?

How can these thoughts and discussions about greatness be harmful to a follower of Jesus?

What is one small thing you can do today to sacrificially love someone around you? It could be as simple as running an errand for your mom or going to get coffee for your roommate. Do it after you finish your quiet time or make a plan to do it tomorrow!

PRAY

Jesus, thank you for calling me to love others without expecting anything in return. This is just a small reflection of what You did for me through your life, death, and resurrection! Help me to look to You and Your character as an example of how to love those around me today. Show me opportunities to be sacrificially loving, and help me set aside what I'm doing to answer those opportunities! Amen.

WEEK FOUR - Day Three

PRAY

Holy Spirit, I submit this time in the word to you. I ask that you would help me push away distractions and have a clear focus on what the Heavenly Father might be saying to me. Bless me with peace, humility, and joy as I ponder the scriptures! Amen.

READ (Mark 9:38-41)

"Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

"Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward."

ENGAGE/REFLECT

If anything, the past two years have shown us that there are deep divides in our world. These divides can be political, cultural, economic, or even in how we receive information or who we trust. This isn't anything new, though; humans have wounded each other in their personal relationships since the beginning of time.

As we continue to walk through life, the list of people who have hurt us, who we distrust, or we just don't see eye to eye with is ever-growing. There is a deep tension in our hearts when these people also happen to be Christians. If we're honest, we might prefer that Jesus not extend grace to these people in the same way that He does to us. But if Jesus' selection of His disciples is any indication, we can expect that there will be people on both sides of any "aisle" in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus' call here is to pursue unity with those who are also seeking Kingdom growth, even if their methods look different from ours. To be clear, Jesus doesn't mean that we cannot disagree on certain things, or that we will necessarily receive full restoration of every relationship where we've felt wounded, or that we should turn a blind eye to false teachers, but we must consistently check ourselves to see if there are any individuals or groups who are working "in his name" that we've discounted because of interpersonal conflict or non-essential ideological differences!

ASK

Is there a group of people from which you differ ideologically, culturally, or politically that you have trouble seeing as potential workers for the Gospel? Be honest!

Are there any fellow Christians with whom you have unresolved personal conflict or that have wounded you?

Spend some time asking the Father what He would have you do with these thoughts toward that people group, or what He wants you to do with the tension in your personal relationships.

PRAY

Jesus, I know that you see and care about my personal woundings more than anyone. You also know the harmful thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that humans can have toward each other. I ask that You show me how You are working to bring the Gospel to all people, even the groups and individuals I have a hard time loving. Help me pursue peace in my relationships and comfort me in the deep wounds I have from others that might not be fully healed in this life. Amen.

WEEK FOUR - Day Four

PRAY

Holy Spirit, I submit this time in the word to you. I ask that You would help me push away distractions and have a clear focus on what the Heavenly Father might be saying to me. Bless me with peace, humility, and joy as I ponder the scriptures! Amen.

READ (Mark 9:42-50)

"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where

"the worms that eat them do not die,
and the fire is not quenched.'

Everyone will be salted with fire.

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

ENGAGE/REFLECT

Today's passage is full of vivid imagery and language! Let's spend some time engaging with the text through the Lectio Divina method of study, which means "divine reading." Start by clearing your mind and space of all distractions (it could be helpful to change to a better location, or write down everything that could be distracting you from the text). Then, do two full and slow read-throughs of the passage:

First, read through the passage silently, noting any words or phrases that stick out to you as you read.

Second, read through the passage again, either out loud with your voice or listening to it through a Bible app like YouVersion or Dwell. Highlight any additional words or phrases that you noticed.

After you've given ample time to both methods of receiving the passage, answer the questions below.

ASK

What word or phrase caught your attention? Why do you think that is?

How does this passage relate to your current life or what you're walking through spiritually?

How is the Father inviting you to change, or what truth is he showing you to take from this passage?

PRAY

Jesus, I trust that You speak life and truth to me through Your Word. Help me receive wisdom from Mark 9:42-50. I pray that I would ponder and think about this passage throughout the rest of my day. Thank you for the goodness of scripture! Amen.



WEEK FOUR - Day Five

PRAY

Holy Spirit, I submit this time in the word to you. I ask that you would help me push away distractions and have a clear focus on what the Heavenly Father might be saying to me. Bless me with peace, humility, and joy as I ponder the scriptures! Amen.

READ (Mark 9:30-50)

ENGAGE/REFLECT

After re-reading all of the passages from this week, we can list many examples of Jesus sharing what is truly important for His followers to believe and pursue: humility, unity, righteousness, and of course, the belief in the necessity of His death and resurrection. All of these core beliefs are what allow us to know the Father better, serve our church community well, and live as an example of Jesus' love to non-Christians. Jesus was sacrificial, humble, righteous, and grace-filled, and we should be quick to let our belief in the Good News of his death and resurrection shape us to be the same way!

ASK

Do any of these teachings of Jesus feel difficult or rub you the wrong way? Why do you think that is?

Which of these teachings of Jesus are most encouraging to you? Why?

Which of these teachings that we've read throughout this week might be a good point of growth for you as you continue to walk with Jesus? Or, if you aren't currently following Jesus, which of these teachings or characteristics would you like to learn more about?

PRAY

Jesus, You are the great teacher. You want your followers to know more about You each day, and to use that knowledge and relationship with the Father to love others well. Continue to speak to me and grow me daily through Your teachings! Amen.

WEEK FOUR - EXTRA CONTENT

Take some time today to re-read through all of Mark 8 and 9. This may seem like a lot, but it can be accomplished in about 10 minutes!

When you've finished reading, spend some time journaling through the following prompt:

After spending your winter break in Mark 8 and 9, what might God be asking you to do, change, or believe as you begin the Spring semester or 2022? Is there a truth he wants you to internalize, a discipline he wants you to adopt, or an act of faith he wants you to take? Read through or reflect back on your answers to previous weeks questions and let your answers guide your thoughts!