

MARK

Week 5: Mark 9:14-12:44

How to Use This Discussion Guide with Your Group

Start with a prayer and read the portion of the text from your Bible or an app (use whatever translation you're comfortable with, but we suggest the New Living Translation (NLT) or the English Standard Version (ESV)). Then read the summary paragraph(s) and talk through the questions for that section. You can work through this guide in one session or spread it out over several – whatever works for your group. As you read and discuss, consider how what you're reading applies to your life today. Don't forget to close with prayer!

9:14-29: A DIFFICULT HEALING

The crowds are astonished at the sight of Jesus. Like Moses, he may have had an afterglow from his encounter with God. However, he is soon down to earth with a bump!

The disciples have been struggling to deliver a boy from an evil spirit. Jesus traces the fault to their lack of faith. They have forgotten that this is God's work, and have focused instead on whether they can do it themselves. The boy's father begs Jesus to help him break through the barrier of unbelief.

As Jesus banishes the evil spirit, the boy is left for dead. But Jesus takes him by the hand and lifts him up – just as he did with Jairus' daughter. It is a gesture of resurrection.

When the disciples ask Jesus why they have failed, he tells them that prayer is the key to deliverance. It is through prayer that we admit our need of God and access his power to help.¹

1. While the three disciples were up on the mountain, what problem were the other nine having? How did they deal with it? What do you think the argument was about in verse 14?
2. As the boy's father, how would you feel during the argument?
3. Jesus' words, 'Everything is possible for him who believes,' sometimes have a triumphalistic interpretation placed upon them. What did Jesus mean, and how does this encourage those who identify with the plea of the boy's father: 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief'?
4. When have you felt like the father in this story – one moment saying, "I do believe," and the next moment saying, "Help me overcome my unbelief!"?
5. What do you believe that you wish you could believe more intensely?

10:46-52: BLIND BARTIMAEUS

They come to Jericho—the lowest town on the earth's surface. The last person in the lowest town is Bartimaeus. He is blind and a beggar.

¹ Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 458.

James and John are blinded by ambition; but blind Bartimaeus can see who Jesus is. He greets Jesus with a political slogan: 'Son of David!' He may as well have come straight out with it and shouted 'Messiah!'

Jesus stops and asks him what he wants. Bartimaeus says, naturally enough, that he wants his sight. Jesus heals him and Bartimaeus uses his newly healed eyes to follow Jesus.²

1. What is significant about the way Bartimaeus addresses Jesus? How does Bartimaeus show his faith (while the crowd does not)?
2. Why is there no "order of silence" here (as there was in 7:36)?
3. Verses such as 52 are sometimes quoted to suggest that if we only had more faith, we would be healed. What are the pitfalls in that interpretation? How do you think we should understand such passages?
4. If Jesus asked you, "What do you want me to do for you?" what would you say?

12:28-34: THE KEY COMMANDMENT

After the trick questions comes an honest one. A teacher asks Jesus about the most important law. It is a good question, because the Jewish law has become very elaborate. On one estimate, the Ten Commandments have spawned 613 lesser laws—248 of them positive and 365 negative. The ordinary person needs a clear path through this jungle of legislation.

Jesus says there is one central commandment from which all the others spring: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength' (Deuteronomy 6:4–5). It is used as a daily prayer by every pious Jew. Then Jesus adds another commandment, which he says is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18). For Jesus, love for God goes hand in hand with love for others.³

1. Why are these two commandments the greatest? How do the Ten Commandments relate to these two?
2. How was this teacher's attitude different from that of many others who questioned Jesus (11:28; 12:13-14; 12:18-19)? What does Jesus' response to this man teach you about Jesus? About the kingdom of God?
3. In the three possibilities of love relationships (with God, neighbors, and self), where are you the strongest? The weakest?

² Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 460.

³ Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 462.