



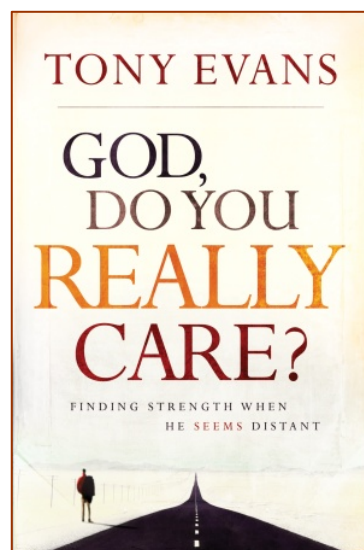
DEAN WELCH - TEACHER

TALKING THE TALK—BUT AM I WALKING THE WALK?
[GOD, DO YOU REALLY CARE ... WHEN I DON'T BELIEVE?]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON


JULY 6, 2008

LESSON #6 FROM THE **MASTER WORKS** SERIES STUDY OF:



TALKING THE TALK—BUT AM I WALKING THE WALK?

[GOD, DO YOU REALLY CARE ... WHEN I DON'T BELIEVE?]

 read about a man who fell off a cliff. But he managed to grab a tree limb on the way down. He held on for dear life. Then he yelled, "Is anyone up there?" Then he heard a thundering voice say, "I am here. I am the Lord. Do you believe me?" The man said, "Yes, Lord, I believe. I believe with all my heart. But I can't hang on much longer." "That's all right. If you really believe you have nothing to worry about. I will save you. Just **let go** of the branch." "Did you say let go?" the man asked. "Yes, just let go and I'll save you." There was a moment of silence. Then the man looked up and said, "Is anyone else up there?"

As we finish up Week Six of our study from Dr. Evans' *God, Do You Really Care*, let me read a statement from Day One and get you to respond to it: [We have trouble believing God truly loves us and is working for good when we are crushed by tragedy, pain, heartbreak, and loss.](#) **Would you say that is a fair statement?**

How many of you have a microwave in your kitchen but you never use it? What about a regular stove? Why do we use microwaves instead of stoves and pots the old fashioned way like we used to do? Simply, the microwave has given us the flexibility to speed up cooking. If we need a quick meal, the microwave gives us what we need in minutes. In the same way, we have grown accustomed to getting what we want with microwave speed—even when we think about how we expect God to respond to our needs and wants. We want a microwave response, not a slow cook on the stove.

As you know, our focal scripture for this entire series is from **JOHN 11** when Mary and Martha send word to Jesus about their brother, Lazarus, getting sick and eventually dying. What kind of response they were looking for from Jesus. Why do you suppose Jesus responded the way He did? Look at **JOHN 11:15 (NLT)** as

we begin: ¹⁵*And for your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there, for now you will really believe. Come, let's go see him."*

Jesus was going to help grow the faith of the Mary and Martha as well as His disciples and others so they could believe. Do you recall the story about the man in the wheelbarrow? *Billy Graham tells the story about a man some years ago who was rolling a wheelbarrow back and forth across Niagara Falls on a tightrope. Thousands of people were shouting him on. He put a 200 pound sack of dirt in the wheelbarrow and rolled it over, and then he rolled it back. Then he turned to the crowd and said, "How many of you **believe** I can roll a man across?" Everyone shouted! One man in the front was very excited about his professed belief. The tightrope walker pointed to the excited professor and said, "You're next!"*

*You couldn't see the man for dust! He said he believed it—but was not willing to get in the wheelbarrow. Just so with God. There are many people who say they believe in Him, who say they will follow Him. BUT THEY NEVER HAVE GOTTEN INTO THE WHEELBARROW. What do you think it means to **believe**? [TO TRUST, HAVE CONFIDENCE IN; TO FEEL SURE OF; TO ACCEPT AS TRUE]*

Did you hear that one of the definitions of "believe" was the word trust! Our level of trust in God is a monumental issue in the life of every believer. *As Louisa Stead, her husband, and their young daughter were enjoying an oceanside picnic one day, they noticed a young boy struggling in the surf. As the drowning boy cried out for help, Mr. Stead rushed to save him. Unfortunately, he was pulled under the waves by the terrified boy and both drowned as Louisa and her daughter watched helplessly from the shore.*

In the sorrowful days that followed, the grief-stricken widow began to put pen to paper and the result was a hymn now known to millions: "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, Just to take Him at His Word, Just to rest upon His promise, Just to know, 'Thus saith the Lord'." Trusting Jesus, Louisa went as a missionary to Africa, where she served the Lord for 25 years. When we place the

tragedies of our lives into God's hands, and trust in Him, He can turn them around for His glory and our gain.

So, as we work through believing and doubting, let's define another word—FAITH. How do you define it? The writer of Hebrews gives us the definition in **HEBREWS 11:1** (TLB). Listen to this from The Living Bible: ¹*"What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see up ahead."* We are to **believe** God, not just believe **in** God. Is there a difference between believing **in God** and **believing God**? What? (Listen to these words from **JAMES 2:19**: ¹⁹*You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! **Even the demons believe this**, and they tremble in terror.*

So, how's your belief this morning? Do you believe God can do what He says He can do—ALWAYS? Do you believe you can do what He says you can do? Believe you are who He says you are and that He is who He says He is. When you are tempted to **doubt**, DON'T! Just like oil and water don't mix, **NEITHER CAN YOUR DOUBT MIX WITH FAITH!** Get rid of it, and have a simple, strong trust that God is going to work everything out. But how, you ask?

Do you recall how he did this for Mary and Martha? Jesus gave a command to open up the tomb. Look at **JOHN 11:39**, *"Roll the stone aside," Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man's sister, protested, "Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible."* All poor Martha could think about was how bad death would smell. Instead of making a connection between what He had already said—both in His message from Perea and when He first spoke to her upon His arrival in Bethany—and what He was about to do, she focused on the bare facts of the situation. *Lazarus was dead. Dead bodies decay. Rolling the stone away would be offensive.*

Look at the beginning of verse **40**, where Jesus prods Martha by asking her, *"Did I not say to you..."* He was challenging her to pay closer attention to His word, to recall what He had already told her. That's the same challenge God gives us today; particularly in those times when we're hurting and life doesn't make much sense.

Believing means taking action. Jesus told Martha to roll the stone away and if she believed, she would see the glory of God. In other words, when we BELIEVE GOD, we take action based on what we KNOW—that His word is truth. It's not based on what we can physically see, hear and touch, and it's not based on what we can emotionally feel. There will be times in the life of every believer when FEELINGS CONTRADICT what God is saying, when our emotions—as well as our rational minds—tell us that He's not really in control, that He's not really involved in our present situation, that He doesn't really care when we are sick, hurting, confused, or lacking the faith it takes to believe He will do what He promised.

This reminds me of a similar situation. Turn to **MARK 9:14-16**, as we pick up a story that I believe can help us wrestle with our doubts. ¹⁴ *When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them.* ¹⁵ *Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him.* ¹⁶ *And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?"* The disciples were arguing with the religious leaders and things were probably not going very well. I bet the teachers of the law who were arguing with the disciples were disputing over things of more substance when Jesus came on the scene and asked, "What are you arguing with them about?" This is when the story really begins to unfold.

A father speaks up, *"Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."* (**MARK 9:17-18, NIV**) It

must have been very embarrassing for the disciples to be so powerless in the face of their detractors. They were unable to free this boy from the demonic grip in his life. They believed they could and had done it before with others but now they couldn't. The paralyzing force of doubt had crept in and it was like a fire hydrant, distinguishing their faith.

Jesus replies, *"O unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."* (Mark 9:19, NIV) Unbelief has no power! Jesus' disciples had failed. He had chosen them, trained them, gave them authority over the powers of darkness, gave them personal experience and when He was gone for just a little while, they fumbled the ball.

Jesus still comes to confront us in our unbelief. He comes grieving that we have such little spiritual power and victory. Remember His response in JOHN 11:38 (...still angry as He arrived at the tomb"). Unbelief cannot succeed against Satan. Unbelief does not and cannot please God. **HEBREWS 11:6**, *"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."* (NIV) Please believe me, times of testing will always come. They are opportunities of faith. **How can we say we have faith when we have blue skies and a warm breeze? How can we say we have faith when everything is going our way?** It is only when we can't see, when we don't know how things are going to unfold, when things are really looking bad that we find the real substance of our faith. It is only in those times when it's beyond our own abilities can we measure our faith.

I don't know why these disciples came up short. Perhaps they had gotten too busy with ministering to others. Maybe they thought because they were with Jesus so much that they didn't need to pray. Not only did this power failure affect their own spiritual lives, it affected their ability to minister to those around them.

So let me ask you, **“Have you ever experienced a spiritual power failure in your life?** Have you ever felt powerless against temptation? Have you ever wondered, “Where’s the power?” You are not alone. Great men of God throughout history have had high and low points in regards to their faith, times of anguish having doubts about God – like Jacob, Job, David, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Thomas, Peter, etc. people who questioned, faltered, doubted and yet in the end remained faithful.

For me, one of my favorite stories was that of **Elijah** who had the audacious faith to go before the wicked king Ahab of Israel and say, *“As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”* (1 Kings 17:1, NIV) After 3 years, he arose to a big showdown against the prophets of Baal to determine exactly who is the true God. We know the story how he built an altar, dug a trench around it, soaked it with barrels of water and with one simple prayer, called down fire from heaven and it consumed the offering and the altar. What a bold demonstration of faith, you talk about mountaintop experience. He killed the prophets of Baal and things looked like they were on a roll.

Then Jezebel, the king’s wicked wife, sent a message to Elijah, basically saying, “I’m going to kill you.” And Elijah, the man who had the faith to hold off the rain for 3 years, who faced off against 400 prophets of Baal, able to call down fire from heaven, suddenly became weak-kneed and took off running and became suicidal. What a rollercoaster ride. He went from an incredible high to a deep and powerless low in record time. However, God still used him and grew him in his faith. Listen to these words from **1 KINGS 19:3 (NIV)** *³Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴while he himself went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”*

At this point in my life, I am closer to God than I have ever been, yet, at the same time, I've never been so aware of my spiritual shortcomings. I struggle with my powerlessness and lack of faith. I still have a lot of growing to do. I believe, but there are also times of doubt? I struggle as to why.

Let's return to **MARK: 9** again. This father with a demon possessed son is desperate. It's an awful feeling to be a parent and watch your child goes through any kind of sickness. I don't think there is any feeling so desperately intense as a parent who cannot help their child. Try and imagine what this father was going through as we read **MARK 9:17-24**. *¹⁷And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; ¹⁸and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it." ¹⁹And He answered them and said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!" ²⁰They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth. ²¹ And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²² "It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" ²³And Jesus said to him, " **If You can?** All things are possible to him who believes." ²⁴Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief."*

Listen to those last few words from verse 24 again" *"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"* First of all, this father was honest. He was as honest and sincere as he possibly could be. You can criticize him if you want for a lack of faith, but at least he was honest. I have found that before growth can take place, before faith can be increased, before we can make it to the next level, we've got to be honest with ourselves and with God. Which is the greater sin? Faltering in our faith, or faking our faith? If the doubts are there, you're not fooling anybody but yourself.

Honesty with our doubts can lead us to discovery and greater faith. We may not have the faith to move a mountain, to fully see the unseen, but it doesn't take a lot of faith to get you started down the right path. That's why I love this father's response, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" He's saying, I believe, I don't understand it all, but I'm willing to learn and hang in there until I do.

God delights in increasing the faith of His children. Let me reinforce this truth – "trials, difficulties and sometimes defeat are the very food of faith." (George Mueller) Doubts cause us to search and often it leads us to discovery. If we look back on our lives, I believe that we would realize that it was only after a time of questioning and doubt that we grew in faith and understanding. It motivates us to search and explore, pray, read and at times forces us to trust when we can't see the answer or it doesn't make sense. We come away with an even greater faith.

How do you grow faith when everything is fine? It's easy to say, "Oh Lord, I have great faith in You!" It is only when tragedy or heartaches or trials come that we find what our faith is really made of and like steel being tempered when placed in the fire, it becomes stronger.

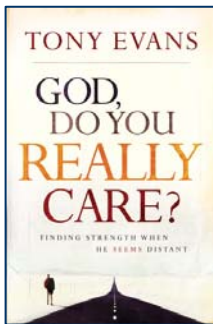
The bottom line, as we saw with Martha and Mary, was that after the stone had been rolled away, Jesus was ready—but before this spectacular miracle, notice what he did. It's in verses 41-42 of JOHN 11. He prayed! Jesus knew who He was. He knew He was the chosen one, the Son of God sent into the world to be our Savior. And He knew He had the Father's ear. He went before the Father in *intercessory prayer*. That's the same thing He does for you and me today.

It is not God's intention for us to have doubts and unbelief. It is certainly not His intention for us to stay there. However, He can use it for good and make us stronger through it. Don't stay in the land of doubt, with God's power, push through to greater faith.

So how do I overcome unbelief? Put your faith into action. The book of James tells us, "*faith without works is dead*" (*James 2:20*). Faith without works of faith is dead, it's just talk. But a genuine faith will produce works of faith. And when you see God move in your life, it will assist you in overcoming unbelief.

You may read the Word, but do you believe it? If you believe it, are you doing it? If you are here this morning and you are struggling with doubt or unbelief in an area that God is leading you into, PRAY! That's one of the offensive weapons we've learned. The other is reading GOD'S WORD. It's up to you!

Let's pray!



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