

Help My Unbelief !

✎ **worn down by grief** (vv.14-24)

✎ **in Christ – relief !** (vv.24-27)

In the name of Jesus, our powerful, loving Lord and Savior, dear disciples set free:

How much do you know about demon possession? Would it surprise you that one of our pastors was called out of Bible study in China and asked to perform an exorcism? I have a picture of a father and his daughter delivered from demon possession by 316NOW teaching of God's Word. Some in our fellowship of European Lutherans have exorcism rites in their hymn book.

Our culture denies that Satan and demons even exist. Yet isn't it strange how many movies feature these dark forces from hell? American prefer to play with fire. Some neighborhood teenagers were shooting off bottle rockets. As if that weren't dangerous enough, the two girls and a boy were jumping over the fireworks just in time! A neighbor went out and asked them, "Do you guys want to get married someday and have kids?" Sheepishly, they all admitted they did. "If you don't time your jump just right, you may destroy one of God's greatest gifts of children and marriage." Danger is real.

Our Savior Jesus wants us forewarned and forearmed against the reality of Satan and his demons. Learn a classic prayer from this grieving father: **Help My Unbelief !**

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Why don't we hear more about demon possession in America? Two reasons come to mind. First, Satan would rather keep unbelievers denying his existence as mere entertainment. Then he's got them for an eternity of torment with him in hell. Second, Jesus has given us weapons that totally defeat the evil foe. "**Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you,**" says James the brother of Jesus (4:7 EHV¹) How do you *resist*? The Bible passages you children learn in Sunday School and Catechism will be yours for the rest of your life. Review the weapons of the Spirit in our Second Lesson today: "**Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil...the belt of truth buckled...the breastplate of righteousness...the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals...the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One...the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints.**" (Ephesians 6:10-18)

How terrifying this was for the father with his only child (Luke 9:38) demon-possessed, unable to speak. How frustrating for Jesus' disciples who had driven out demons before, but were failing this time. Then Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, from shining in all His glory as God. Jesus descends to the nitty gritty dirtballs of life against Satan making misery for the boy and his father. Jesus too is frustrated. After nearly three years of teaching, His disciples still lack faith to help (Matthew 17:20) this father and his son **worn down by grief**. Disciples need to learn total dependance on God's power.

He did the right thing by coming to Jesus' disciples, just as coming to your fellow Christians in Sunday School and Bible Class, Worship and fellowship, are all good encouragement and strengthening. But we have to learn something that husbands and wives also need to know. You may be married to a very devout Christian. Your Christian friends may be faithful disciples of Jesus. But no one can be Jesus

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for you or take the place of the Holy Spirit. Expecting friends or your spouse to give you God's peace can only leave you anxious and empty. But here in God's house is the gently flowing river of God's Word and sacraments. Here is constant blessing of memorized Bible passages with our magnificent Lord Jesus already answering your prayer. Learn from this father especially when **worn down by grief**.

It's easy to fall into the trap of this tiny, two-letter word. It's like a gopher hole on the far end of a football field we played in high school. Not good to literally break a leg – like this father, spiritually speaking. **Worn down by grief** it's so natural to question *if* Jesus is really listening. *If* Jesus has the power to help? Doubt and fear can leave us wondering *if* He wants to. So we might fall with this grieving father, ***“If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”***

Faith healers constantly tell people they can only be healed *if* they believe strongly enough. They give fearful Christians a double dose of doubt. First, you're **worn down by grief** from long prayers over troubled times. Then you have to carry their burden of guilt on weak faith?

in Christ – relief! (vv.24-27)

Jesus is so much more kind and loving, tender and patient than false religious leaders. Notice how firmly Jesus corrects this man and us when doubt descends: ***“If you can?” Jesus said to him. “All things are possible for the one who believes.”*** God wants to bless your heart with the cooling rain of His grace and forgiveness. But if you've suffered from a long drought, you don't want to spread a clear plastic tarp over your lawn or garden, do you? Stop the rain from falling? Burn every plant underneath by magnifying the heat of the sun? Jesus is basically pulling off that tarp so His rain can get through.

Like all Jesus' disciples, He wants us and this father to reach the end of ourself. There we find forgiveness waiting in loving kindness and tender mercy for our prayers. Unless my dear Savior empties me of myself, how can He fill me with Himself? Unless I realize how powerless I am by myself, how can I appreciate that I'm never by myself alone? Jesus is always with me in His Word and sacrament. How much closer can Jesus bring forgiveness than to give you His true body and blood to eat and drink in His sacrament of Holy Fellowship with God and like-minded Christians? **In Christ – relief!**

The father's fervent prayer is one to memorize. Since the dear Holy Spirit inspired it in the Bible, rest assured that you can say it over and over again – to the great pleasure of our forgiving God who is standing by to help you in every need. Jesus does not want a big show here. The fact that the crowd is gathering makes Him go right to work and rebuke the unclean spirit: ***“You mute and deaf spirit...I command you to come out of him and never enter him again!” The spirit screamed, shook the boy violently, and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many of them said, “He's dead!” But Jesus took him by the hand, raised him up, and he stood up.***

It may not be obvious right away, but God's help is near. God's help is here! He does not mess around with the enemies of our bodies and souls. Life is not a game for jumping over fireworks. Warnings we need, but when we fall, Jesus does not give up hearing and helping and saving us. This is our dear Savior – **in Christ – relief!** And when it seems as if it's taking too long for help to come, rest assured that God's power and love are not failing you. He loves you best for time and eternity. If His help seems delayed, He's just using trials to strengthen your faith like tempered steel, purified like gold.

*When we seek relief From a long-felt grief,
When temptations come alluring, Make us patient and enduring;
Show us that bright shore Where we weep no more. (CW 422:3)*

Help My Unbelief! – with patient, enduring faith. Amen.