

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Ministry: A Study of Matthew 14–20

STUDY ELEVEN

Micro-Faith and Mountainous Obstacles

Matthew 17:14–20

So, you're facing a mountainous obstacle . . . learn where to point. Your need is not an enormous amount of faith. That's nonsense. All you need is enough faith to point to the One who can handle the situation and to leave it with Him.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN was your last *mountaintop moment*? The kind of moment when the weight of God's glory and character knocks you over like wind from a screaming monsoon. You see His nature in a fresh way or feel His embrace so strongly that you have no doubt you're *His* child. These brief moments create a ripple effect of joy and faith that often lasts a lifetime . . . just as they're meant to.

You see, no matter how badly we want to stay on that high spiritual peak to savor the surreal experience, God takes us back down into the valleys. He does so because He designs these mountaintop moments to change our *perception*, not our address.

For example, Peter, James, and John had one of the greatest mountaintop moments with Jesus, as recounted in Matthew 17:1–13. They hiked up the mountain with their humble teacher but witnessed Him at the summit as the God of glory. Peter wanted the experience to last. God, however, gave them that moment, not to keep them in the moment but to keep the moment in them.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll explore just how vital it is to keep these moments at the forefront of our thinking, locked within our minds, to draw upon them as we make our way through life's valleys.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Matthew 17:14–20



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you mine the riches of God's Word today, thank Him for the ways He's powerfully made Himself known to you in the past, and ask that He would do so again through this passage. Write your prayer below.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Mountaintop moments provide significant spiritual benefits because life's valleys often present mountain-sized obstacles. Without an elevated perspective from God, we operate with a perspective limited to seed-sized solutions.

Our elevated perspective, however, doesn't require special ingenuity to conjure up better solutions. The elevated perspective depends, rather, upon faith—and all it takes is seed-sized faith to tackle mountain-sized obstacles. Peter, James, and John would discover this truth almost immediately after they had their own mountaintop moment.

Now get ready for the ebb and flow of the disciples' understanding to surge to new heights!



Observation: Two Questions, Two Responses

In *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck likens Bible study to constructing a building. First, we must set the foundation: "Observation is like excavation, which involves digging into the text to form the foundation of thought."¹



Micro-Faith and Mountainous Obstacles

Matthew 17:14–20

Read *Matthew 17:14–20* a few times. Summarize the two requests presented to Jesus and His two subsequent replies. What do you find surprising in this passage?

As Jesus descended the mountain, He faced a familiar scene: a crowd desperate for His attention. This time, He noticed something different. Several feet ahead of the masses stooped a man on his hands and knees begging Jesus for mercy.² For this man had a son who was possessed and oppressed by a vicious demon wanting nothing more than to see the boy suffer and die.

According to *verse 16*, how did this father seek to solve the problem of his demon-possessed son *before* coming to Jesus? What were the results of this attempt?

How did Jesus respond to the request of the man in *verses 17 and 18*? Pay special attention to His tone. Also, note the contrast between His words and His actions.



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Matthew 17:14–20

According to Jesus in *verse 20*, why couldn't the disciples free the boy from his demonic tormentor?

Once again, Jesus exposed the little faith of the disciples (see *Matthew 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20*). Jesus even portrayed their faith to be littler than the mustard seed, which they considered the smallest seed in the world!

This passage places heavy emphasis on the final saying from Jesus. Restate in your own words Jesus' proclamation in *verse 20*?

"Nothing will be impossible." *What powerful words!* But what did Jesus really mean when He claimed the disciples could do *anything* if they had enough faith? Let's move on to determine what this passage meant for them back then as well as for those who follow Jesus today.



Interpretation: Nothing Will Be Impossible

Now that we've completed our excavation during observation, we can build the foundation of interpretation. *What is the meaning of Jesus' exorcism and proclamation?*



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You may remember that Jesus previously gave the disciples “authority to cast out evil spirits and to heal every kind of disease and illness” (*Matthew 10:1*). In *Matthew 17:14–21*, they couldn’t perform these miraculous deeds because of their lack of faith. Explain how the disciples specifically showed their lack of faith in Jesus? Use your *Bible study tools* for help.³

They’re still trying to do things on their own . . . in their own strength. Sound familiar? In spite of all we have heard over the years, things happen, and we still mess it up by getting in the middle of it, thinking we need to fix it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The disciples may have had “little faith” (*oligopistia*; *17:20*), but the crowd, the generation of Jesus’ day, was completely “faithless” (*apistos*; *17:17*). This difference may seem small, but for Jesus, it was huge. It was the difference between life and death.

Based on this description, how should we define *generation* in the passage? Why is this definition relevant today? You might want to look at Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s comments on page 56 of *Insights on Matthew 16–28* for some guidance.



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Matthew 17:14–20

Based on your interpretation of this passage, what did Jesus mean when He said, “Nothing will be impossible” (Matthew 17:20 NASB)? Why is this theological truth significant for Christians today?

For Jesus’ disciples, the notion of continuing His kingdom ministry without Him felt like trying to move a mountain, and we often feel the same way too. Thankfully, all that’s needed is a kernel of faith, and *it’s that kernel of faith that Jesus uses to do the impossible!*



Correlation: A Father’s Faith and the Son’s Power

Mark 9:14–29 records this same account, but Mark zooms out to give us broader perspective to show us more of the picture. Let’s look at this account and put the finishing touches on what we’ve been building.

Read [Mark 9:21–24](#). How did the father show faith in Jesus? What can we learn from the father’s example?



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Matthew 17:14–20

What does this passage teach us about the spiritual relationship between Jesus and demons? See *Mark 9:20, 25–26*. How should this truth have affected the way the disciples handled this situation?



Application: Facing Mountainous Obstacles

Now that we've done our Bible study groundwork by observing and interpreting the passage, let's develop a blueprint to help us build our lives on this solid foundation of divine truth. Pastor Chuck provides us three helpful steps for doing so:

1. *Never forget what God taught you in the mountaintop moment.* These moments are special. Write down what you learned. Memorize it. Engrave it onto your heart.
2. *Never allow earthly obstacles to eclipse divine truth.* “But you belong to God . . . the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world” (1 John 4:4).
3. *Never think previous failures mean, “It can't be done.”* Satan wants to push us over and pin us down. But Jesus always comes to pick us up, no matter how many times we fall.

Take a few minutes to reflect on a mountaintop moment from your life. You may not remember all the feelings you experienced or the truths you learned, but do your best to recall what you believe God wanted to teach you at that time. How can that lesson help enhance your perspective and strengthen your faith today?



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Matthew 17:14–20

What impossibly tall mountain rests on the horizon of your life right now? How is God calling you to place your trust in Him as you prepare to climb that slope?

Think of something you have considered impossible—maybe recently, maybe for quite a while—and remember, with our God, nothing falls in that category.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

May the lessons you've learned from your mountaintop moments increase your faith and prepare you to face the even larger mountains of life that await you in the future. Remember Jesus' vital promise: *nothing will be impossible for those who place their trust in Him.*



A FINAL PRAYER

Offer to God this prayer from Pastor Chuck as you finish your study today:

Thank You, Father, for the truth that You are able and I am not. Help me find peace in that truth, so I might relax and leave it with You. I point to Your Son, whom I love and adore, to handle the needs I bring before You today. In His name I pray, and for His glory. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 118.
2. The Greek verb translated “knelt” (*gonypeteo*) describes someone kneeling to someone in authority to present some sort of petition.
3. Other tools we recommend are a whole-Bible commentary, such as the two-volume *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Pastor Chuck's favorite Bible dictionary is the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. A variety of versions of the Bible are available at BibleGateway.com, and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at netbible.org.

