

Marked

Scripture and Background Information for August 27-September 2.

To prepare for your group discussion each week, group members should use the **Community Group Discussion Guide** to complete the **GOD'S WORDS** and **MY WORDS** columns using the scripture below.

Some of Jesus' last words, what we know as the great commission, provides us with a glimpse at His vision for what the life of a Christian disciple is meant to look like. Those who follow Jesus are supposed to be marked by certain qualities that are central to who we are as believers. As we reflect on Jesus' commission to us, let us take steps to live out these "MARCS" by being missional, accountable, reproducible, communal, and spiritual.

Background for Matthew 17:14-20 (Mark 9:29):

In the last part of the great commission Jesus promises to always be with His followers as they go and make disciples. It is through the recognition and remembrance of Jesus' continual presence that we are able to experience a strong spiritual connection to Jesus. Right before our passage for today, a few of the disciples witnessed the transfiguration and saw Jesus for who He truly was in all His glory. Their spiritual connection to God and their faith was at an all-time high and, because of this, they didn't want to leave. However, this high didn't last.

In Matthew 17:14-20, as soon as they step off the mountain, the disciples were tasked with healing a demon-possessed boy, but they find out that they cannot do it. Jesus tells His disciples that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed, they would be able to move mountains. In a sense, Jesus is saying that, through faith, the same type of spiritual connection that enhanced their faith on the mountaintop was available to them wherever they went. Then, in the account of this same story in Mark 9, we see the application of this type of faith as Jesus tells them that they needed to pray to be able to cast out this demon (Mark 9:29). In these passages Jesus is teaching that faith and prayer are uniquely intertwined. Both are necessary aspects of carrying out God's will by making disciples because they help us recognize and act upon the presence of God in our lives. Therefore, Jesus' promise to always be with us encourages us that it is Him who empowers us as we carry out His work by making disciples of others.

Insights and questions to engage with the text:

1. Jesus emphasizes faith and prayer in this story. Why are these things so important to God?
2. How can faith and prayer help us have a deeper spiritual connection to God?
3. How can faith and prayer assist in our efforts to make disciples? What can we do to give them a more prominent role in our lives and our disciple-making?

*Your Bible may have Matthew 17:21 included in the text with brackets. This means that the words were not likely a part of the original manuscripts and is why we are using Mark 9:29 to talk about Jesus' response in this passage.