

Hitting the Wall

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Lessons from someone who hit the wall.....	3
Solutions for when we hit the wall.....	4

READ - *Mark 9:14-29, Matthew 17:14-27*

TEXT - *Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. (Matthew 17:21, KJV)*

THEME - Some situations the Christian faces in life are harder than others, and require a disciplined and hard-working approach to get past.

Introduction

In sports, there is a phenomenon sometimes referred to as "bonking." (DISCUSS - Does anybody know what this means?)

Bonking is, of course, what happens to the physical body when you it reaches a limit and can go no further. A runner can run no further. A cyclist can cycle no further. It is the point where the physical body "hits the wall."

QUESTION - Is there a parallel in our Christian life? Is there such a think as "hitting the wall" spiritually?

QUESTION - I would suggest that "hitting the wall" spiritually might equate with those times when we face problems or difficulties in our lives which are great enough to make us question our faith. Have you had such experiences that you would be willing to share with the group? Has there ever been a time when your faith was shaken and you "hit the wall" spiritually? How did you handle it?

I believe our scripture text for today gives such an example. Here we see several people who had "hit the wall" spiritually. They had encountered a problem that seemed to have no answer, and for which the claims of Christianity seemed to be failing.

Lessons from someone who hit the wall.

Several people or groups of people had a problem.

The man who brought his son had a problem (QUESTION - what was it?), the son had a problem (pretty clearly!), and the disciples had a problem (QUESTION - what was it?).

QUESTION - What results came from these problems in each of these individuals or groups. In other words, how did the problem affect them and their faith?

QUESTION - What did the man do wrong? His initial approach apparently failed - why?

DISCUSSION - As a possible answer to that last question, could we say that he failed because he relied on the wrong thing? By bringing his son to the disciples, rather than to Jesus, Himself, is it an illustration of times when we rely on "church" rather than "Christ?" If so, is that approach a reason we believers sometimes "hit the wall?"

The man had faith, but did not think he had enough.

QUESTION - Was his faith deficient?

QUESTION - What does *Matthew 17:20* seem to indicate about the level of faith required?

QUESTION - He had "a little" faith, which Jesus said was enough, so why then did Jesus question his level of faith in *Mark 9*?

I have taught a lesson from *Mark 9* several times, and always concentrated on the words of this man, "*Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief.*" It is a state in which we all find ourselves from time to time. I believe that the reason Jesus appeared to rebuke the man's faith was not because of it's volume or amount, but rather because

it seemed misplaced. He came to the disciples, rather than to Jesus, and when they failed Him, he turned to Jesus and said, "can you do anything?"

QUESTION - Does this provide any kind of warning to us as believers, concerning how our actions affect the lives of others?

ANSWER - We need to take great care that our actions do not hinder, hurt, or in any way shake the faith of other believers.

The disciples thought they had faith, but did not have enough.

Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, "Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. (Matthew 17:19-20)

DISCUSSION - What was wrong with their faith?

DISCUSSION - Some issues in life are very serious. Is it possible that at such times, we approach those situations too flippantly? Could this be a reason we sometimes "hit the wall" spiritually?

They all FELT like they had "hit the wall," but Jesus was still in control.

Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. (Matthew 17:17, KJV) (also cf. Mark 9:19)

When we come to such times in our lives, it is good to remember that failures on our part - our weak faith and tendency toward doubt, do not change the capability of our Savior. He is still in control. Neither do the failings of the church, an institution filled with weak people who often fail just as the disciples did in our text, change the abilities of our God. He is still in control. He is always able. When we hit the wall, He does not.

Is anything too hard for God?

Solutions for when we hit the wall.

It is a matter of FOCUS

Consider our earlier discussion about reliance upon the church, rather than reliance upon Christ.

I believe that Jesus' emphasis here on "bring him to me" is instructive.

Reliance on the church, other Christian institutions, or even Christians, themselves, may prove disappointing. When those institutions or people fail, we find ourselves let down, and our faith shaken - just like the man in our text.

This DOES NOT mean that we turn our back on the church, or that we use this as an excuse to disobey the Scriptural instruction to be faithful to church! Some will interpret it that way, but they will be wrong. No matter what happens in our lives, we need to hold the church, and faithfulness to the church, in high regard. As long as God allows us to, we need to be there, as His Word teaches.

Hebrews 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

The issue, though, is FOCUS. When our spiritual life becomes difficult, when we encounter serious issues or problems, we need to FOCUS on our savior, and our relationship with Him. "BRING HIM TO ME!"

ILLUS - Golf immortal Arnold Palmer recalls a lesson about overconfidence: "It was the final hole of the 1961 Masters tournament, and I had a one-stroke lead and had just hit a very satisfying tee shot. I felt I was in pretty good shape. As I approached my ball, I saw an old friend standing at the edge of the gallery. He motioned me over, stuck out his hand and said, 'Congratulations.' I took his hand and shook it, but as soon as I did, I knew I had lost my focus. On my next two shots, I hit the ball into a sand trap, then put it over the edge of the green. I missed a putt and lost the Masters. You don't forget a mistake like that; you just learn from it and become determined that you will never do that again. I haven't in the 30 years since." (Carol Mann, *The 19th Hole* (Longmeadow), quoted in *Reader's Digest*)

The next time you find yourself "hitting the wall" spiritually, consider your focus.

It is a matter of faith.

In this story, faith was listed as a part of the problem, by both the man, and by Christ. Jesus said it was a problem for the man and for the disciples.

QUESTION - How can we have enough faith to deal with those times when we "hit the wall?"

The Bible teaches at least two techniques for increasing your faith:

1. Ask for more faith:

READ - *Luke 17:1-5, esp. vs. 5*

2. Dig deeper into the Word of God:

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17, KJV)

It is a matter of fasting

Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. (Matthew 17:21, KJV)

And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting. (Mark 9:29, KJV)

I have read these passages many times in my Bible reading, but the Lord never emphasized this verse to me until now. As I read it this time, this verse seemed to jump off the page at me. (That's one of the reasons why we never stop reading the Bible. The Lord uses it to speak to us in different ways. He gives us just what we need when we need it.)

QUESTION - How important did Jesus say fasting was to the outcome? (He said it was the ONLY WAY.)

QUESTION - Does this mean, then, that we as Christians need to fast? What does it mean?

Certainly fasting is a good and vital discipline to the Christian. There is much in the Bible on the subject, and I suggest you look in your Bible concordance and do a personal Bible study on fasting.

However, I believe that the meaning here relates more to attitude than to activity. I may be wrong in my interpretation, but I think Jesus was telling the disciples that they had approached the situation with way too flippant a heart.

Hitting the Wall

There will be times in our Christian lives where we will face difficult situations. At such times, we might be tempted to feel like Samantha, on the old TV series "Bewitched" and just wiggle our nose, or breathe a quickie prayer, and expect results. At such times, though, we may find we need to engage in the hard work of prayer. Maybe we need to deny our physical bodies, spend time on our knees until it hurts, stay away from food and drink and the other pleasures of this life, as we concentrate wholeheartedly on seeking God for the solution to the problem.

Hitting the wall spiritually might necessitate hitting our knees with everything we have, for hard situations require us to do hard work as Christians.

DISCUSSION?