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Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
Faith in What?
Matthew 8:5-13
May 20, 2018, Jeff Germs

How many of you have ever had a time in your life, and maybe you are experiencing this right now, where you have something going on that you have prayed and prayed about and it seems like God is not answering?

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Let's try a live poll and see what kind of results we get. The question is, "Have you ever desperately prayed to God and he seemed to not answer?" You can choose from: "I have in the past;" "I am in the middle of it now;" or "No."

If you have a smart phone or tablet you can open your browser and go to www.menti.com and type in the code 85509 and then click on the appropriate answer. And for those of you watching this on video later, you can do the same thing and then go to our website and see the updated responses to the poll.

Some of you know that Ruth and I spent a couple years in Japan as missionaries. While we were there Ruthie got very sick. That is where she lost weight and has never been able to regain it. She not only lost weight, but she lost energy. By the time we got back to Canada in 1991 she barely had enough energy to get out of bed in the morning.

Prior to Japan she was able to hold down a full-time job plus be involved in ministry and have an active social life. For several years we sought help from medical doctors, with no answers, and then tried every kind of alternative medicine that held some promise of help. And, of course, we desperately prayed to God for answers and for healing.

We went to healing services to get prayer from people who were said to have the "gift of healing." We got counsel from many well intentioned Christians; some of it good and some of it not so good. Some people told us that we didn't have enough faith, so we prayed that God would give us more faith. When God still didn't seem to answer we felt all kinds of emotions. We felt like we weren't good enough Christians. We had heard stories of God healing others, but for some reason we did not rate enough for God to heal Ruth. It was a terribly difficult time for us for many years. It seemed like God was silent.

Ruth never did get instant healing, but through those years of struggle God honed her character. She immersed herself in the Psalms. She clung to Jesus. Probably our greatest lesson was that the object of our faith needed to be in God, not in a preconceived outcome. We grew to believe that God knows what is best for us and we both held steadfastly to Romans 8:28, that "**All things work for the good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.**"

There are some things Ruthie has gained through the experience that I would like her to express in her own words.

Ruthie Germs:

"During that time, as I was asking God what was going on, 3 words came to me:

Different -- worse -- better

My life certainly was different than I had expected or planned. I don't think anyone really has a long term health condition as one of their life goals!

And it looked to me as very definitely worse.

But somehow I felt God was telling me he was actually going to use this to make something better out of it than I could have.

Like Jeff said, I lived in the Psalms for a long time.

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Psalm 34:8 (NIV) says "*Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed are those who take refuge in him.*"

Even though God, and my life, didn't make sense to me and I felt abandoned by him, he was inviting me to just try trusting him, and SEE what he would do, SEE how he would meet me, and that somehow, even in my disappointment and confusion, he would be a refuge for me. And he has done this, way beyond what I could have imagined."

We are going to look at another encounter this morning that someone had with Jesus.

[4]

Matthew 8:5–13 (NLT)

⁵ When Jesus returned to Capernaum,

This narrative happens in the same place as the situation we looked at last week with the paralyzed man who was lowered through the roof to be healed by Jesus, in Jesus' ministry centre of Capernaum.

a Roman officer came and pleaded with him,

This man was not a Jew. He was a Gentile. He was a Roman military officer in the service of the Roman Emperor Tiberius, and yet he sought out Jesus because he had heard that he had the power to heal. Remember, Jesus was very famous at this point. This man must have been feeling very desperate. He was a man of considerable authority. He was someone who was used to taking charge. He was a man who could get things done, but he had gotten to the place where he had no place to turn, so he sought out Jesus and pleaded with him.

⁶ "Lord, my young servant lies in bed, paralyzed and in terrible pain." ⁷ Jesus said, "I will come and heal him." ⁸ But the officer said, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come into my home.

I find this quite amazing, the respect that this man of authority had for Jesus. Jesus' reputation had spread far and wide, not just among his fellow Jews, but the Roman military was talking about him as well. It seemed like the only demographic that didn't respect Jesus was the religious leaders, because he challenged their religious system and brought their hard hearted hypocrisy into the light.

And yet here we have this Roman military officer, who was likely steeped in the pluralistic idol worship of Roman gods, and he recognizes that Jesus has authority to heal. He may have already tried everything else, including pleading with the multitude of gods his people worshipped. Now, with no other recourse he seeks Jesus out, believing he has authority.

Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed.

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⁹ I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, 'Go,' and they go, or 'Come,' and they come. And if I say to my

slaves, 'Do this,' they do it." ¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to those who were following him, he said, "I tell you the truth, I haven't seen faith like this in all Israel!

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¹¹ And I tell you this, that many Gentiles will come from all over the world—from east and west—and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. ¹² But many Israelites—those for whom the Kingdom was prepared—will be thrown into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

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¹³ Then Jesus said to the Roman officer, "Go back home. Because you believed, it has happened." And the young servant was healed that same hour.

I want to spend the remainder of our time looking this one phrase that jumps out at me every time I read it: **"Because you believed, it has happened."** The question is, did Jesus heal this man's servant because he had enough faith, because he believed? That is what it sounds like. Does that mean that our prayers will be answered, or not, depending on the intensity or quality of our faith? So, if you or your loved one didn't get healed, was it the fault of your faith?

It's interesting to note that the faith of the servant who was healed by Jesus didn't come into play here at all. He may have asked his boss to go to Jesus, but the text doesn't tell us that.

It is the vicarious faith of his employer that is in question. That puts a different spin on this. There are many such instances in the Gospels and Acts where people got healed without having faith. How about Jesus' friend, Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead? It's pretty tough to have faith when you are dead.

Or, how about Eutychus, the guy who fell out of the window during one of Paul's long winded sermons in Acts 20. He was apparently dead as well, and was brought back to life. No faith needed in that case either.

Or Tabitha, in Acts 9 who died and was raised to life by Peter. Dead people don't need faith. Or let's take a look at this case in Mark 3.

[8]

Mark 3:1–5 (NLT)

¹ Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand. ² Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath. ³ Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone."

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⁴ Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer him. ⁵ He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored!

This man did not come to Jesus. Jesus moved towards him. We don't know if the man had faith at all, and yet Jesus healed him.

Jesus' brother James, in his letter, says this:

[10]

James 5:13–15 (NLT)

13 Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. 14 Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.

So, whose faith is in question here? It's not the faith of the sick person. It's the prayer of faith offered by the elders, that moves the Lord in this case.

And yet, there *are* several instances in the Gospels where Jesus says things like, "*Your faith has made you well*", like the woman in Mark 5 who had been haemorrhaging for years and was unable to get any help. According to Jewish law she would have been continually unclean, and unable to participate in worship and social gatherings. She was on the outside and continually feeling like an outcast. She touched Jesus' robe when he was passing by in a crowd so she could be healed. Jesus turned to her and said:

[11]

Mark 5:34 (NLT)

34 ... "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over."

Or how about blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10. Jesus and his disciple went into Jericho with a large crowd of adoring fans following him. Bart heard that Jesus was nearby and so he hollered out, "***Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.***" The people told him to shut up and leave Jesus alone, but he shouted all the louder, "***Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.***"

Jesus stopped and invited him to come near and asked him what he wanted. "***Rabbi, he said, I want to see.***"

[12]

Mark 10:52 (NLT)

52 And Jesus said to him, "Go, for your faith has healed you." Instantly the man could see, and he followed Jesus down the road.

Over and over again, people who were pushed aside by others were welcomed by Jesus and healed. If you are someone who has ever felt on the outside, you would know what it would be like to have Jesus move towards you and pay special attention to you. He was, and is, the kind of person who makes you feel like you are the only person around, even though you are in the middle of a large crowd of people.

Here's another interesting encounter Jesus had with ten lepers.

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Luke 17:11–19 (NLT)

11 As Jesus continued on toward Jerusalem, he reached the border between Galilee and Samaria. 12 As he entered a village there, ten men with leprosy stood at a distance, 13 crying out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 He looked at them and said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed of their leprosy.

[14]

15 One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, "Praise God!" 16 He fell to the ground at Jesus' feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan. 17 Jesus asked, "Didn't I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? 18 Has no one returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" 19 And Jesus said to the man, "Stand up and go. Your faith has healed you."

“Your faith has healed you.” So, where does that leave us? I could share many more Scriptures on both sides and we would be left with more questions.

[15]

How come some people get healed by God and others do not? Why is it that we hear of some people who have been miraculously healed by God while others seem to spend their whole lives crying out to God and he seems silent?

[16]

I DON'T KNOW! Sorry, but there is a mystery and a tension to this question that will never be resolved this side of heaven. There is no formula, or silver bullet, or magic words. God didn't give us a one size fits all solution. It is a mystery. God is bigger than us. His ways are higher. We will never figure it out because I don't think God wants us to.

[17]

What he wants is our hearts. He doesn't just want us to seek him for answers. He wants us to seek him for relationship in the middle of all the stuff we are going through.

There were times that even the Apostle Paul didn't get his prayers answered. In 2 Corinthians 12 he described an experience he had with the Lord. He had had some visions that the Holy Spirit gave him that were pretty profound. And then he said:

[18]

2 Corinthians 12:7–9 (NLT)

7 ...So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.

We have no idea what the thorn in flesh was. Some Bible scholars believe it was a physical ailment, such as an eye disease left over from when he was blinded by the Lord on the Road to Damascus. That could be true since in his letter to the Galatians he described being sick while he was with them and he said they would **“taken our [their] own eyes and given them to [him] if it had been possible”** (Galatians 4:15).

I've heard some say he had osteoporosis. Others have said malaria or epilepsy. Some have said his thorn in the flesh was persecution from inside the church and from outside the church. The truth is we don't know what his thorn in the flesh was. Whatever it was, it was something that made his life uncomfortable and he wanted it gone.

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8 Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. 9 Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.

Paul begged the Lord, over and over again, to take away whatever it was that was causing him pain. His conclusion was that the Lord Jesus thought he would be better off with it than without whatever it was. **“My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.**

This passage has been a life verse of mine for about three decades. When we pray, what is the object of our faith? If we are praying for healing, is our faith in the hope that we will be healed? Is our faith in a certain outcome of our prayers? If our faith is in God, that he always does the right thing, that he will never let us down, that all things work for the good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose, then the outcome is secondary. The main thing is that we are growing through the crucible of life with Jesus, and in our relationship of trust with him.

We've talked about this before. A crucible is a container that can withstand very high temperatures in which metals such as silver can be melted in order to burn out the impurities. Our life with Jesus is like a crucible. The heat gets turned up, Jesus gives us more grace to withstand, and we get refined to be more like him if we respond to his grace. The outcome is more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, and more intimate trust in Jesus.

So, although God may not answer us in the way we would like, the outcome is better than we had first envisaged. A perfect example of the kind of faith we are talking about is the attitude of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, threw them into the fiery furnace for not worshipping his idol. When he threatened to throw them into the furnace, here is how they responded:

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Daniel 3:16–18 (NLT)

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. 18 But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

They had faith that God could deliver them. They knew, without a doubt, that the power of God was greater by far than the power of Nebuchadnezzar, and he could save them from the heat of the furnace if he desired. However, they said even if he doesn't save them, it would not shake their faith in God. Their faith was not in a certain outcome. Their faith was in God — period. That is the attitude God wants us to have when we seek him.

When Jesus went to his home town of Nazareth, the Bible says, he couldn't do many miracles there because of their lack of faith. Their lack of faith was in who he was. They heard his teaching and said he was amazing. They had heard about the miracles he had been doing, but to them he was just the carpenter's son. They did not believe he had authority. That is the crux of the matter.

When Jesus told the Roman officer that because he believed, his servant would be healed, what did the officer believe? He believed that Jesus had authority over all creation, including sickness and disease.

[21]

Do you believe Jesus has authority over sin, sickness, death and all creation?

That is where we need to start. We don't need to drum up a certain amount of intense faith in order to have our prayers answered. We just need to know that Jesus does have authority over everything and then ask him, leaving the outcome to him. Do the next right thing and trust him. Trust him and then do the next right thing and repeat.

I know that many of you have gone through, or are currently going through some tough stuff. The Degrace family has been praying a long time for Rhonda's battle with cancer. At one point the doctors were not very hopeful. Just a couple weeks ago, they changed their tune and said that she is a walking miracle. We need to praise God for that. We have praying with them for a long time, and God answered.

Ryan Schlesinger:

Taylor was a normal healthy baby and a bright little girl right up until just before her 2nd birthday.

August 22, 2010 - After taking Taylor to the walk-in 4 times over the course of a week and being told she's 'just sick', Morgan was feeling very uneasy about how Taylor was doing after church. I wasn't excited about seeing another doctor but we decided to head to the emergency room.

A friend from our bible study was the doctor on call in emerg. He knew a bit about the week we'd had and ordered blood tests and x-rays. Things started to move pretty fast at that point and I heard these words:

"We think your daughter has cancer."

We were flown to Vancouver. That first night and the following day were a blur. We were introduced to doctors and nurses. We had to make sense of all of the new medical language.

Taylor was admitted as a "high risk" patient because her cancer was so advanced by the time we found it. Once we had found it, the problem became slowly reducing her white blood cell count so we didn't shock her kidneys with all of the suddenly dead cells. We prayed and asked for prayer. She started chemo and her counts came down so perfectly that the nurses started calling her our "miracle kid". We could feel the hand of God in the midst of our mess.

Our time in and out of the hospital and in and out of Vancouver was a roller coaster. We'd experience God's provision but we also felt loss and loneliness being away from home and our friends. There were nights where we yelled at God and asked why He let this happen to us and why He didn't heal our daughter all at once.

Taylor had her first absence (blank out) seizures while she was still doing chemo. They were pretty intense and made her really tired afterwards. We got in touch with neurology and she was put on her first seizure medication which controlled her seizures right away.

We finished chemo and graduated to the long term followup program after 2.5 years.

Once we were "done with cancer" we came home and tried to rebuild our lives. It quickly became clear that Taylor was struggling with some developmental delay especially at school. As time went on, she struggled to make progress in kindergarten. It was hard not to feel like since we'd already beaten cancer we were owed an easy time from God and we struggled with resenting Him.

After some time had passed, she started to "space out" in the bathroom at times which we thought was weird but we didn't think too much about it as it was very slight. Over time she started to have a repetitive chin drop to her chest but it took some time for us to realize we were seeing a new kind of seizure.

It was at this point that her neurologist realized that her epilepsy was worsening and we started the revolving door of different medications. Every new medication (that worked) would make her a lot better for 2-4 weeks before she would slide back into what were slowly worsening seizures. It was an extreme rollercoaster for us. We'd get our hopes up with each new improvement only to have them dashed again. We cried out to God over and over for Him to heal our daughter. Why had He saved her from cancer just to struggle like this?

In the midst of this, God blessed us with an incredible Growth Group and a support system at Penfield school. We've lost track of the number of times we've burst into tears at one or the other because of the love and support shown to Morgan, Taylor, and myself.

Up to this point Taylor had been having the same kind of seizures where she would seem to "go away" for a brief time and then come back over and over again. Sometimes she would lose her balance and fall. Then something new happened in first grade; her body would go rigid and she would scream repeatedly every time she went to the bathroom.

We were in survival mode. On every outing we had to be mindful of where we could take Taylor to the bathroom. She had to be carried out afterwards. We were worried that with her screaming people would think we were hurting her. Why was God letting this happen?

In second grade we started Taylor on a non-traditional medication: CBD oil. Initially we saw some incredible improvements but it was just like everything else and she slid backwards again. From April until October 2017 (now third grade) we slowly increased her dose and found a fair improvement but her seizures and fogginess remained.

Morgan and I really struggled during this period as we exhausted all of the 'fixes' that neurology had for us and it looked like Taylor would have seizures and special needs for her entire life. At every step along the way previous to this, there had been hope that she would one day lead a 'normal' life. We wrestled with God and with our view of our daughter. It was too easy to see her as a problem to be solved or managed. We finally came to terms with the fact that we had a special needs daughter and God was still good and worthy of our trust.

Since medications had failed us, we had one last shot at improvement: a surgical implant to help 'pace' her brain (like a heart pacemaker). In preparation for the surgery, we made one final increase to her CBD.

Taylor had her last seizure on October 14, 2017.

In November, even though we were still terrified that the seizures would come back, we were so thankful to God for the blessing of Taylor's freedom from epilepsy that we decided to throw a party to celebrate.

Today we're still unpacking everything that's happened over the past 7 months of freedom from seizures. Taylor can read some short books and she can write her name! She's stopped being angry all the time and is more likely to laugh at a joke. She's engaging with the people around her. God's blessing is evident.



***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
Faith in What?
Matthew 8:5-13
Week of May 20, 2018***

Objective of this study: To understand the purpose of prayer and grow in intimate trust of Jesus.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us.]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 34:1-8** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

Welcome (5 minutes)

Describe a time when you didn't give somebody something they asked for.

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (30-45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Matthew 8:5-13.
 1. Describe all the characters in this passage. What were they like? What was their situation?
 2. Why did the officer go to Jesus? What did he believe about him that cause him to seek him out?
3. Break up into pairs or smaller groups and divide up the following passages. Read them together and report back to the group what you discovered about prayer, faith, heart attitudes, and seeking Jesus. Mark 3:1-5; Mark 5:24-34; Mark 6:1-6; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 17:11-19; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10; Daniel 3:1-18.

Work (30-45 minutes)

1. Describe something you have prayed long and hard for. Has it been answered? Whether or not it has been answered in the way you wanted, what have you learned about God, yourself, and others?
2. What do you think Jesus wants you to learn, or how does he want you to grow through your prayer relationship with him? What do you think should be the object of your faith when you pray?

Sermon Quote: “What he wants is our hearts. He doesn't just want us to seek him for answers. He wants us to seek him for relationship in the middle of all the stuff we are going through.”

Sermon Quote: “When we pray, what is the object of our faith? If we are praying for healing, is our faith in the hope that we will be healed? Is our faith in a certain outcome of our prayers? If our faith is in God, that he always does the right thing, that he will never let us down, that all things work for the good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose, then the outcome is secondary. The main thing is that we are growing through the crucible of life with Jesus, and in our relationship of trust with him.”

Prayer

1. Spend the rest of the time praying for each other. **Praise God together for how he works, and how he allows us to partner with him to accomplish things in his kingdom.**
2. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:
 - A. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.
 - B. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus
 - C. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.
 - D. **Our missionary of the month:** Ken and Debbie Dewar
 - E. **Our missionary of the week:** Diego & Claudia Cardona
 - F. **Local CR church:** Ocean Crest Salvation Army Church - Captain Keith & Violet Hopkins