

# Pastoral Encouragement

“Lord I believe; help my unbelief.

Mark 9:24

This is exactly how I felt last week when the Lions lined up on fourth down instead of punting. If you recall, the game was tied with just over a minute to go. We could punt and hope our defense could keep the Chargers from scoring in regulation and try to win in overtime or go for a first down. If we fail, the Chargers get the ball near midfield with plenty of time to move the ball into field goal territory and win the game. If we succeed, we get four more downs to do the same.

As a Lions fan, all you can remember is all those debacles when they snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. However, this year is different. I found myself sitting up straighter with a hopeful expression on my face. That’s when the pastor in me broke to the surface and I found myself quoting scripture, because God is, after all, on our side. “Lord I believe; help my unbelief.” I held my breath as I watched the play unfold. When the dust settled, we had made the first down and the Lions ended up winning the game on a field goal. Yes! 7 and 2 going into the Turkey Bowl. God answered my prayer, or did he? We’ll circle back to that another day.

“Ok Pastor, enough football. What’s the point? Wait! How did they make a goal in a field? Is this like field Hockey?”

Let’s go back to the passage above. In context, Jesus is unhappy with the father’s lack of faith. This is also true of his disciples.

Jesus sees a crowd arguing with each other. Jesus asked what was going on. A man explained that the disciples had been trying to cast

a demon out of his son but couldn't do it. Jesus said, "You unbelieving generation, . . . how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

Then the father asks Jesus, "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us" Jesus responds, "Everything is possible for one who believes", "Immediately the boy's father cried out, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'" Jesus then spoke to the unclean spirit and permanently cast it out of the boy. After that, Jesus' disciples asked why they were unable to cast the demon out. Jesus told them, "This kind can come out only by prayer".

Most Christians can identify with this man. We know God is at work in our lives. He comes to inadequate sinners who realize that sometimes we are faced with something that seems to overpower our faith. We don't seem to have enough faith to follow him in that moment, so we ask for more faith. We acknowledge that even our faith comes from God. It is His work in our lives that enables us to believe and obey.

So, as we examine our lives, we have to ask ourselves why do we sometimes believe and have faith in times of crisis and the next minute find ourselves feeling hopeless.

Let's go back to our Lions example. Over the past 50 years, we have come to expect and accept that our team is destined to make the wrong decisions. We have become conditioned to anticipating inconsistent performance and outcomes that disappoint us and leave us feeling like all is lost. Many of us feel this way about our lives.

But then there comes a year like 2023. Something's different. Leadership. We talked about this in an earlier Encouragement. Leadership reflects attitude and a winning attitude is contagious.

Brothers and Sisters, who is your coach? Is it some personality who's all the rage this year? If so, you're walking on shaking ground and will soon be disappointed.

But, if your Coach is Jesus, if he is your Lord and Savior, then dear one, he knows the plans he has for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Bereans, when you find yourself on the field of life where it's fourth down and you need a play to win the game, don't call Coach Campbell for a play. Turn to Jesus in prayer and he will answer you and give you an eternal hope. Now that's the ultimate Win-Win.

Yours in Christ  
Pastor Terry B