

You will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff.
You will winnow them, the wind will pick them up, and a gale will blow them away.
But you will rejoice in the LORD and glory in the Holy One of Israel.ö

No matter how big the ömountainö each of us faces today, Godö's word to us remains the same: öDo not be afraid! I myself will help you!ö As we cast our burden on the Lord, he may remove that burden in one miraculous act. Or he may help us turn the mountain into dust and blow it away, one particle at a time. But he will help!

Taking It Home

Let the Mustard Seed pocket piece/keychain remind you to focus on Jesus, not on the mountain! Trust his promises, not your own faithfulness! He will never fail you or forsake youö we have his word on that!

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The Mustard Seed

Introduction

Rising up out of the northwest Iowa prairie, the Ocheyedun [oh-CHEE-dun] Mound stands at 1,613 feet. The name means öplace where they weepö because the Native American tribes that roamed through the area mourned their dead from this high point on the east-central edge of the Great Plains. Contrast this height with

- Pikeö's Peak in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado that tops 14,109 feetö almost 10 times as tall;
- Mount Everest in Nepal that towers more than twice as tall as Pikeö's Peakö at 29,028 feet; and

- Mauna Kea, in Hawaii, about 31,000 feet high; most people have never heard of this mountain because two-thirds of it lies beneath the Pacific Ocean. Therefore, climbing to the top isn't considered such a feat as climbing Everest.

Getting to the Heart

The problems human beings face in life come in varying sizes, too, but any of them can create a place in life where God's people weep:

- This week's math test looms large for the fifth graders who will take it, especially those who struggle with compound fractions.
- Next Tuesday's test for lupus or cancer towers tall for the patient who will submit to it. And for the patient's spouse or parent or grandparent.
- This afternoon's test of wills between two nuclear powers weighs heavily on the hearts of all world leaders who know that one false move could make large portions of our planet unlivable for several hundred generations.

Perhaps you've cautioned yourself or a friend, "Don't make a mountain out of a molehill." Still, when any problem is *our* problem, we can find it difficult to keep that problem in proper perspective. This is especially true when we think we must deal with it alone, that our God doesn't know, doesn't care, or cannot help.

A "god" who wants to help, but cannot do so, hardly deserves our worship! Scripture ridicules "gods" like this—and those who worship them. (See Psalm 115:468; 135:15618; Isaiah 44:20.) A "god" who can help his children, but refuses to do so, hardly deserves our worship either! Over and over, Scripture contradicts this kind of blasphemous thinking. (See Isaiah 41:13614; Romans 8:31639.)

Matthew 17 tells of a time when nine of Jesus' disciples attempted to help a family burdened by a mountain-size problem. Listen! (*Read Matthew 17:14–20; then re-read v. 20 for emphasis.*)

Interestingly, our Lord Jesus never tried to prove the truth of his promise by rearranging the landscape of Palestine. Neither he nor his disciples ever moved Mount Tabor across the Jordan River into the region of the

Decapolis. They never transferred Mount Hermon to the Nile delta in Egypt. Rather, the Lord's promise seems to be a figure of speech, one sometimes called *hyperbole*. We use hyperbole when we say, "I'm so tired I could sleep for a month!"

Does recognizing this promise as a figure of speech gut the promise of its power? Not at all. Quite the opposite, in fact! Listen to the way Eugene Peterson translates Jesus' answer to his disciples' question, "Why couldn't we help?" Jesus answers:

Because you're not yet taking *God* seriously. . . . The simple truth is that if you had a mere kernel of faith, a poppy seed, say, you would tell this mountain, "Move!" and it would move. There is nothing you wouldn't be able to tackle (*The Message*, emphasis in the original).

Jesus' words here do not accent a disciple's faith or lack of faith, but rather *God's* great love and power! When the problems in our life start to look like huge mountains, when our eyes fill with tears of fear and grief, God wants us to focus on him, to depend on him. Hebrews 12:2 invites us, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."

After all, our Savior-God is the one who has solved our biggest problem, the problem of our sin and guilt. He is the one who has bridged the chasm of sin that otherwise separates us from him and his love. In Jesus' cross, our heavenly Father has brought us back to himself. The apostle Paul writes, "[God] who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

Paul's logic runs along these lines: Since God did not withhold his very best gift—his own Son—we can trust him to meet our other needs fully and richly, too! He gave his best; he won't withhold the rest!

Does that mean that all our problems will evaporate instantaneously? No. But there are many ways to move a mountain! Isaiah 41:14616 says:

"Do not be afraid, . . . O little Israel,
for I myself will help you," declares the LORD, your
Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.
"See, I will make you into a threshing sledge, new and
sharp, with many teeth.

Taking It Home

God has made wonderful promises to us! We can trust those promises! Even when our faith is as tiny as this mustard seed, God's promises to us are true in Jesus. He will make our faith grow stronger as we keep studying his Word. No matter how big our problems are, he will help us. We can trust him to do what he says.

You can take this bookmark and pocket piece/keychain home to help you remember God's love for you and the power of the promises he has made to you!



The Mustard Seed

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Introduction

(Show the children a small pebble.) If I plant this in the ground, what will happen? You're right. It will lie there in the soil forever, unless some person or animal or earthquake moves it.

(Now show the children the mustard seed pocket piece. Ask one of the children to read the words on it.) If I plant this seed in the ground, what will happen? You're right. It will sprout and grow to become quite a large bush, possibly as tall as 10 feet.

What makes the difference? Why will the seed grow into a plant, but not the pebble? *(Lead the children to see that our Creator-God has put life into the seed. That power, the power of life, comes only from God.)*

Getting to the Heart

One day, Jesus' disciples tried to help a daddy whose little boy was very sick. The disciples tried and tried, but nothing happened. Soon, Jesus himself came. He healed the sick boy right away; the boy and his daddy went home, safe and happy. (See Matthew 17:14–20.)

Later, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Why couldn't we help this family?"

Jesus replied, "You don't have enough faith." Then he added this promise: "If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible" (Matthew 17:20).

Sometimes we have huge problems, problems that look as big as mountains! That's the kind of problem the daddy and his little boy had. Like the disciples, we try and try on our own to solve our problems or the problems of other people whom we want to help. Sometimes we even try and try to *believe* the problems away, as if we can make our own faith grow big

enough to fix the problem. That's a little like planting a pebble in the garden and wishing and hoping and trying to make it grow. Our wishing and hoping and believing won't make a pebble grow—no matter how much we wish and hope and try! Our trying won't make our faith grow either.

But when we bring our problems to Jesus and remember his promises to us, even mountain-size problems aren't too big. God's promises have power, just like this tiny mustard seed has power—God's power. Even a tiny faith in God's promises works, because God's Word, God's promises, are always true.

Who can think of some promises God has made to us, promises that can help us, no matter how huge our problems seem? *(Let the children name some promises like those below. Let them also tell one another about a time when these promises would help with problems, big or little.)*

- Matthew 28:20—[Jesus said,] "I am with you always."
- Psalm 46:1—God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.
- James 1:5—If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you.
- Isaiah 41:10—[God says,] "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand."
- Isaiah 65:24—[God says,] "I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!"
- John 11:25–26 (NIV)—[Jesus said,] "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."
- 1 John 1:9—If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.