

# Difficult Cases

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and prayer in confronting difficult spiritual challenges and the reality of spiritual warfare.*

**Duration:** 37:35

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 10:17-20, Acts 16:16-18

**Topics:** "Difficulty"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker recounts a story from the Bible where Jesus encounters a man whose son is possessed by a spirit. The disciples had tried to cast out the spirit but were unsuccessful. Jesus expresses frustration with the lack of faith in the people and commands the spirit to leave the boy. The speaker also shares a personal experience of encountering a possessed woman and the power of faith in overcoming evil spirits. The main takeaway from the sermon is the importance of having faith in Jesus and the power it holds in overcoming difficult situations.

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## Transcript

I want to speak to you from God's word about difficult cases. You know, one of the things that we don't talk about much or admit is this, that in life, not every difficulty is the same. And going further than that, every spiritual problem and spiritual attack is not the same.

Every difficulty is not the same, and not every mountain is of the same height. Some mountains we've been over before, and we've seen what God can do. So we take it like, yeah, God's going to do this.

And then others are just like, wow, what am I going to do? Some attacks of Satan we've had before in spiritual warfare. Others, it's like, wow, what is this about? Am I right here? Do I get an amen? We don't talk about that much. We just make it generic.

I need God, he's, I have this problem, but there is a very subtle but real difference. Many times not so subtle, to be quite honest with you. And I want to talk now about difficult cases and about faith in God and the power that there is in faith in Jesus.

To get us where we need to go, I'm going to be reading a passage, and the last verse of it is different depending on what translation you have. The older translations, like the King James or the New King James, some of the others, have a word in there that is omitted by the more modern translations. And the

reason for that is because the manuscripts, as you go back, some manuscripts have this extra word, but a lot of the older manuscripts in the Greek don't have this word.

So the newer translations are based on older manuscripts, meaning closer to the original writings, which is usually thought to be obviously more accurate. There's a difference, you'll notice it right away if those of you that read your Bible a lot, and we'll explain how it really doesn't matter that much. But let's look at the story about difficult cases.

When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. What are you arguing with them about, he asked.

A man in the crowd answered, teacher or rabbi, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground, he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the demon or the spirit, but they could not.

They tried, but they could not. You unbelieving generation, Jesus replied. How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.

So they brought him. And when the demon or the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus asked the boy's father, how long has he been like this? From childhood, he answered. It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.

If you can, said Jesus, everything is possible for one who believes. Immediately, the boy's father exclaimed, I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief.

Boy, isn't that true to life? I, Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief because there's something else inside of me. When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit or unclean spirit. You deaf and mute spirit, he said, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.

The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently, and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, he's dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, praise God, and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

After Jesus had come indoors, his disciples asked him privately, why couldn't we drive him out? He replied, this kind can come out only by prayer. And now the New King James Version, for example, so he said to them, this kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting. And that's the debatable word in some of the older manuscripts.

The word fasting is not there, so it wasn't an addition by a copyist, or did someone miss it back then? But fasting linked with prayer in several places doesn't make it a big controversial issue for us. Let's take it as prayer and fasting today. This story happens right after Jesus goes up on a mountain with the disciples, Peter, James, and John, alone, and it's called the Mount of Transfiguration.

Earlier in this chapter, he takes them up there, and suddenly, his garments become whiter than anybody could ever bleach them, and he becomes some glistening, semi-glorified person that makes them just in

awe. And then out of nowhere, Elijah and Moses, who died thousands, hundreds, and thousands of years before, appear with him, and they talk about the fact that he's soon gonna give his life, which the disciples don't get, but it's so awe-inspiring that they all fall down, don't know what to say. Peter, who usually put his foot in his mouth, did it again and said, Lord, we should build three tabernacles, one for you, one for Elijah, one for Moses, which isn't the right thing to do because Jesus is not Moses or Elijah.

He is the Son of the living God. He's the Savior. Suddenly, a voice was heard from heaven as a cloud came over them.

No, this is my beloved Son. Keep on listening to him, is what the text really reads there. Hear ye him, or keep on listening to him.

It's in a continuous present tense. So they come down from this high moment, Peter, James, and John, and they see a bunch of squabbling going on amid the crowd. And let's just repeat the story here for a second because I wanna explain a couple terms.

And Jesus says, what are you arguing about? And a man speaks up and says, listen, I brought my son. He's mute. He's possessed by a spirit.

He not only can't speak, but this spirit periodically comes and convulses him and attacks him, and he's thrown to the ground. It has not only robbed him of his speech, but it tries to kill him, throws him in the water, throws him in the fire. He's out of control.

He's got a compelling, a drivenness to his life that comes from this spirit. Let's just stop here for a second. There are many people today who when they read the Bible, just dismiss this as folklore.

But Jesus spoke about evil spirits. Jesus spoke about demons. Demons are mentioned almost every other page in the Gospels.

Their origin is debatable, but they want to inhabit human beings, and they are operating under the power and authority of Satan himself. And if you're so smart and bright that you're past all of that, then you're brighter than Jesus, and smarter than Jesus, who recognized their existence, along with Satan, of course, and dealt with them, and told his disciples that they should deal with demonic, demonization of people and demonic forces. And the Bible tells us as Christians, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against what? Principalities and power.

There's demonic forces that we deal with, and we probably don't delve into that enough and talk about how do they work. It's not clear from Scripture exactly how they work, what thoughts they could possibly suggest. They don't know everything, because we obviously saw there that when they saw Jesus, they threw the boy to the ground.

So they don't have all knowledge. They're not everywhere at once, but they're forces to be dealt with. Who knows how much of the craziness that's going on in our society today of someone who's been, what, normal? What, he got a gun and killed how many people? He never acted like that.

Who knows? Who can really speak to that with authority about what that connection might be to these demonic spirits that Jesus talked about? I know Jesus was not deceiving us. He dealt with these powers and forces, and there's enough in Scripture to make us to sit up and take notice. So he asked the man, how long has he been like this? And the man told him, since a child and the spirit.

Notice the boy didn't seem to have loss of personality at all times or compulsion at all times, but he couldn't speak all the time. Remember, the devil comes to steal, kill, and what? And these demonic forces, what did they do? They stole his ability to speak in this case, not saying that all people who can't speak have been demonized. That relationship can't be made.

But periodically, it would come upon him to try to kill him. Steal, kill, and destroy. I want you to notice also here as we pass through this that Jesus never prayed about this evil spirit.

He spoke to it. You will not find in the Bible, in the New Testament as far as I know, where people confronted demonic forces and prayed over them or prayed about them. The way it was dealt with by Christ and by Paul in the book of Acts is they spoke to these spirits and with authority drove them out.

And what's interesting is the disciples had been given authority over evil spirits earlier and had success. They had come back to Jesus and gave a report. Even the evil spirits are subject to us.

This authority and power that you've given us is amazing. And that's when the Lord said, don't rejoice that the evil spirits obey you. Rejoice that your name is written in the Lamb's book of life in heaven.

But I want you to notice there that there was just a simple sentence, no long prayer. He just spoke to them. You find the same thing with Paul.

Apostle Paul, who's a leading Christian figure for those of you not aware of it. In the book of Acts, he was an apostle, an early leader in the church. He had a case where a woman, a young lady was following him.

And we don't know about that one because for days she was crying out and saying things, but she was a damsel of divination. She was involved in fortune telling, which is against scripture. Should never be around anyone who supposedly contacts the dead or tells your future.

That is opening yourself up to bad things. How many say amen? If you want to know your future, you can see me at the end of the service. I won't charge you a thing and I'll tell you what your future is surely.

Goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. You see? And you have to pay anything. What are we learning here so far before we get to the main point? We're learning that Jesus recognized, believed in, saw the reality and dealt with demonic forces.

That they are part of the powers of darkness, of evil, ranged under Satan, Lucifer himself. And we notice that periodically they would do certain things to the young boy. Not all the time.

He couldn't speak all the time. But it seems like it came upon him at certain times, just like the spirit of God can come upon somebody to do good things for Christ. We also cannot escape the fact that no prayer was given, but there must have been something going prior to that so that these forces were just spoken to.

Diana Berrios works in housekeeping. She's a classic example of a spirit coming upon her and taking possession of her personality. For those of you who have not heard the story, she's gonna be giving her testimony again in the next few months.

She was brought here in her late teens. And all I was told is that she was involved in gangs and maybe some drugs, but just a violent young Hispanic girl from El Barrio up in Upper East Side of Manhattan. And a brother and a sister, siblings in the choir, brought her because they had been witnessing and praying for

her, wanted her to hear about Christ.

But what they didn't tell me is that she was working, her mother, and I think her aunt or some woman that was brought into the situation, had been bathing her in these herbs and lighting candles and saying incantations over her, incantations, and that she had been totally surrounded by demonic forces, voodoo, santeria, call it what you will. So I just was handed a note, the girl that they're praying for is finally here on a Tuesday night, would you pray for her? We've done that before, done it since. Called her, Pastor Hammond, I think was there that meeting.

Weren't you Pastor Hammond? I called her, the brother and sister on either side of her, she's not even five foot tall, and brought her forward. And a woman evangelist who happened to be here who came to help me pray. For those of you who'd like, come on, Pastor Simba, be real.

And those of you watching on the webcast, like be real now, I'll be real real, okay? I'll tell you what really happened. So they brought her forward, and in that building we had the platform that came up about this high, about this high, and I was leaning against it, didn't go on the platform, and she's coming forward, and this female evangelist just for some reason just said, Jesus, just Jesus. She was about eight feet from me, little thing.

And suddenly a primal scream came out of her, and she jumped on me, got her hands on my throat, my shirt, drove me back against the thing, the thing that's a little thing, a little thing, not even five foot tall. And suddenly, ask Pastor Hammond, I'm not making this stuff up. Suddenly her voice was taken control of.

The Spirit seized her that she had been working with, or it was more than one. And as she's choking me, she's screaming, let her alone, get away from her, get out of here. She's ours, you'll never have her, get out of here.

That's the people who were here that night, if we were just fooling around here, right? I finally got the strength, how could she have that strength? I finally got her and threw her down on the ground, and I mean I threw her down on the ground. I lost my sanctification for about 30 seconds, I went boom, what are you choking me for? I had a shirt on just like this shirt, as God is my holy witness. She ripped that shirt, this collar, see this collar? She ripped it off like it was tissue.

Do you hear me? Tissue. She just yanked it off, and my collar went flying. And she's not even five foot tall.

Threw her down on the ground, I leaned over her, and obviously chaos broke out in the service. Imagine first time visitor coming that time like, oh, that was a great service, yeah, that was beautiful. Pastor got choked to death, lost his shirt.

And as I was speaking to these spirits and telling them to shut up, and everyone was there, a couple things happened that I'll never forget. Number one, she spit at me twice in the face. Her eyes were rolling like something in another, like a movie or something.

I don't know what all was going on there. And then a deacon then that we had who lives in Puerto Rico now tapped me on the shoulder just like this, I was right here. She's down there, all chaos, people calling on God.

We're yelling, telling these spirits, no, you're gonna come out. You're gonna come out of her. He tapped, she's spitting at me, she's yelling.

You could hear her, it was her voice, but not her voice. He taps me, and I go, what? And he goes, I believe she's demon possessed. And I went, oh, wow.

I said, wow, you're a prophet. What in the world is that about? That's the truth. And I left, within five minutes, within five minutes, she was on her feet.

She was free. I stood behind her to the left. I held her tiny arms up, and she sang her first Christian song.

Oh, the blood of Jesus. There was this example of evil spirits seizing her. Oh, pastor, you're just making that up.

Am I making it up? Brother. Listen, I lost a shirt out of that meeting, I want you to know. And this, I hope they find her, because she's so cheap.

She'd never given me a shirt all these years. The people here that work here, they're witnesses. I remind her every time I see her.

1634, would you please go to Macy's 50% off and get me a shirt, please? She told me, this is what she tells me, pastor, I'm gonna get it for you in heaven when we're in heaven. I said, I don't need a shirt in heaven. We wear robes there, right? Amen.

Let's thank God for delivering Diana. Now, what do we learn that we really take home with us? The incredible power of faith in Jesus. Notice, notice the power that's operative here.

Jesus wasn't working in his divinity. He was working as a man and teaching the disciples something and we learned last week about the primacy of faith or was it in the Tuesday night prayer meeting? Yes, where even in his own hometown, he couldn't do many miracles because of their unbelief, like there is in some of you. You don't believe, you're judging what I'm saying.

You're judging what I'm saying about even, you're judging the word of God. You're trying to fit it into your mentality, what you think rather than coming like a child and saying, Lord, I believe, Lord, I believe. What do we learn about faith? We learned about that the whole thing operates on faith.

How do we know that? Isn't it interesting that the disciples had been successful in the past with demoniacs, but not this one. This was a more difficult case. Goes to show that in the realm of spiritual warfare, in the realm of dealing with problems, let's broaden it, mountains that you face as a pastor, as a young man in college, not everything is the same.

So we learn here also that Jesus spoke to the evil spirit with such authority and faith that they had to obey. I wonder when the Bible says, just wanna throw this out, where the Bible says, resist the devil and he will what? I wonder if we would not be doing better if we spoke out loud more to the devil. How do you resist the devil? How do you resist the devil? Maybe what God wants us to do is when we feel oppressed, attacked.

Satan, I know you can't see him, but you can feel him. Satan or whoever, I resist you, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus Christ. You get out of here, you get out of my mind, you get out of this thing, you don't belong here, get out.

Now will he come back? Yeah, but every time he comes back, we're supposed to resist the devil. How do you resist him? You submit to God and you resist the devil. And resisting might mean, how much better

would we be all off if we did what Jesus did, who spoke to the spirit and said, get out of here.

And they had to obey. The father says to Jesus, this is how it's been since he was a kid. Now if you would only have pity on us, boy, what a plaintive cry this is.

Can you hear him say it? Imagine if it was your boy. How would you feel if it was your boy who couldn't talk and then periodically was thrown into the fire and thrown into the water? How would you feel? How would you like that if that was your own boy? How would I feel if that was my Levi, my grandson or Luke or Claire? So he said, if you just have pity on us, could you please help us? If you can do anything, help us. Notice what Jesus said, and here's another controversial word here in the Greek.

Some of the older translations, but it's not backed up by the best manuscripts have, if you can believe all things are possible for those who believe. But others, more modern translations are saying, no, that first believe is not in there. It's Jesus saying, if you can, is that what you said to me? If you can, have pity and help me? If you can, you said that to me? If I can, if you can, he's repeating what he said.

Some translations or commentators say he's really bouncing it back to the man and saying, no, if you can. Don't say, if I can. If you can, what? Everything is possible for the one who believes.

Everything is possible for the one who believes. Faith, real faith, links you up with God in such a way that now all things become possible. There's nothing that God can't do when he sees someone who has faith.

That's the main lesson here. Notice two things here as we close. Varying degrees of problem, varying degrees of faith.

Not all problems, not all demons, not all situations are the same. Not all faith levels are the same. The disciples had faith to do previous deliverances, but now in this one, they're tied up.

They can't do it. They admitted it. They ask him later why they couldn't.

Notice what the father says. Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.

Well, wait a minute. Do you believe or you do not believe? Ah, how many know that it's possible to believe in a sense and yet doubt? How many know that? Lift your hand, okay? Have we not faced situations like that? We're not faithless. We believe, but yet, ooh, the thing looks so big.

I don't know. So what held the disciples back was a lack of faith. Notice this.

It wasn't because they weren't Jesus. They had done deliverances before. There was a lack of faith in them for this one, and this one demanded more faith.

This is all about a matter of faith. The father says, Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief. Jesus said, don't say to me, if I can, I'm gonna put it back on you.

If you can, everything is possible if you could only believe. And then Jesus sees the crowd ready to come. He grabs the boy.

He speaks with authority and faith to those spirits, and the boy is delivered. He looks like he's dead, but Jesus lifts him up. I love that little verse.

He looked like he was a corpse and it was all over, but then Jesus lifted him up. How many times in your life, spiritually speaking, you looked like it was all over and dead and gone, and Jesus lifted you up? Anybody here like me where he just lifts you up? So they go back to a house and the disciples go, whoa, talk to us. We saw what you did, and we know what we used to do in other cases.

Why couldn't we drive that one out? And Jesus said, now this kind, notice there are kinds of problems, kinds of evil spirits, kinds of mountains. Everything in life is not the same. This kind only comes out by prayer and fasting.

Let's just focus on the prayer. He's not saying that prayer does it, faith does it, but prayer builds up faith. Your faith was insufficient.

This kind, you need prayer. Now, what kind of prayer? I wanna ask that. Look at me as I close, everyone.

What kind of prayer when Jesus didn't pray himself? He just spoke. What's he saying here? He's not saying this only comes out by prayer. You didn't pray yourself, Jesus.

You just spoke. What he's saying is that the faith needed for certain things can only be cultivated and grown in an atmosphere of a real giving yourself to communion with God. And I'm not talking about praying like this, and Father, help me with this, and help my grandson, and help my granddaughter, and then help me get a job, and help us pay the bills.

I'm not talking about just about that. That's not, I don't think, the prayer he's talking about. The Bible says early in the morning before they got up, Jesus went up into a lonely place to be alone to pray.

You think he was giving a laundry list of requests to the Father? I don't think so. What he was doing is what the apostles did and we need to do is when we spend time with God, look at me, everyone, when you spend time with God, your spirit begins to commune with God as you pray and you listen. As Caleb waits and prays and plays his keyboard alone somewhere, he begins to communion with God, and as you commune with God in prayer and wait in his presence, now your ear starts to get open, your spiritual ear, and your spiritual eyes in communion with God begin to see how awesome God is.

Oh, how awesome God is. As you spend time with him, he makes these things real by the Holy Spirit, and now the problem that looks so big, it looks now like this because you realize God is so awesome, come on. Let's put our hands together and say amen.

Remember this, and this is the shallow part of formulaic prayer. People who preach just grab a promise and stand on the promise. Promises are important and we do stand on the promises and we're told to pray, God do as you said.

But faith is born when you know who's speaking the word, not just what the word says. For example, if somebody here, while we're greeting each other, or when the service ends, if somebody comes up to me and says, total stranger, I'm visiting today from wherever, Pastor Simba, I want to help you with that amount of money that you need for the prison. I'm going to send you 10,000, the whole 15,000 tomorrow.

I'm going to send you the money. I'll go back to my office and I'll tell the pastor, some stranger just said they're going to do it. Well, you think he will? I don't know who he is, I'm not sure.

But I thank God that someone came up. Why don't I have faith? I don't know the guy. All due respect, I don't know the dude.

I don't know. Faith is not based on what he said. Faith is based on if he know, I know him.

And what if Deacon Stephen comes up to me with his wife and says, God spoke to me in the meeting. I'm going to have a check tomorrow. I'm going to bring it to the church, \$15,000.

God's blessed us and I want to take care of that debt. Oh, I'm going to go rejoice him. Why? I know him.

He's not going to say that unless he's going to do it. No, no, I know him. We've spent a lot of time together.

I prayed with him on some Tuesdays at 12 noon. I know that when this deacon tells me he's going to do something, he's going to do it. When we spend more time with God, our faith begins to grow because we're reminded as our eyes are open and our ears are open, how awesome is our God.

The scriptures and the promises come alive to us. Then we can reach out in faith. Why? Because I know in whom I have believed.

Not I know what he promised. I know him. I know him.

And that's what prayer does. Brothers and sisters, when we spend more time with God and I made a consecration of my life yesterday alone here up in my office early. God, I want to be now more with you.

Not for my own sake, God, but for the people. I want to be able to have a deeper faith. My prayer won't do it, but my faith God could use to help someone whose faith is weak.

How many get it? Say amen. But God, I know what that means. Listen, extra time with you in your presence, waiting, listening, reading, studying, calling on you, but just lingering in your presence.

Oh God, open my eyes, open my ears that I might be reminded how awesome you are because then when the request comes, we can just say, evil spirit, get out of here. You can't stand before the Jesus I just been with. I know who he is.

Get out of here, you're God. But if we barely spend time with him, am I wrong or right, brothers and sisters? Tell me if it's true to your life. We barely have time for him.

It's Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief. So we're going to worship on Tuesday like from 7 to 7.45, and then we're going to start to pray. We're just going to spend time with Jesus, okay? So that God can build up our faith.

How many get the point of this story? Lift your hand, okay? Jesus said, this kind, no, it's faith, it's all faith. It's not extra praying and fasting. God doesn't do things for you because you pray a lot or because you fast and do without food, and God says, wow, they fasted for three days.

I'm going to do something for them now. No, prayer and fasting builds faith, and without faith, it's impossible to please God. Did I not tell you, Jesus said, to one of the Mary and Martha, one of the sisters, that if you would only believe, you would see the glory of God.

For everything is possible for the one who believes. How many of you here, like with me, you want God to cultivate a stronger faith in you so that you can be a blessing to more people? Come on, lift your hand.

Notice who Jesus said this to.

He didn't say this to an apostle. He said this to the father of a boy. If you can believe, all things are possible.

Let's close our eyes. It seemed like this morning while I was praying that there would be a parent here who has a child that's so severely learning disabled that you're so worried about them learning in school, they're struggling. This message was for all of us, especially for the speaker.

Because I don't want to be some two-bit preacher just preaching sermons. I want God to make me a man of faith. But certain kinds of mountains, certain kinds of satanic attacks, certain kinds of demons, they don't come out except by a faith that's been nurtured by time with God, fasting, time with God in prayer, and even sometimes turning over your plate so you can spend extra time with God so that the invisible things of God become more real as you deny the physical world of even food, which is nothing wrong about food.

But if you're here today and you have a child who's, you're concerned about them, you've been struggling and worrying, even laying awake at night because you're just worried, is he gonna learn, is she gonna learn? It's gonna be a problem. And you have faith that Jesus can touch the mind and the way the connections are made. He's gonna help that child.

You can just stand where you are in the balcony or downstairs should you be here today. Maybe God just wanna lay that on my heart to encourage you to believe. For those that are standing, reach out your hand and touch the child that's being stood for.

God, honor their faith. And I gotta believe that I would say that strange thing only because you wanna do something so that your name would be glorified. So we're expecting now, God, for there to be improvements starting tomorrow in school.

Starting tomorrow in school or whatever they do, we are believing you, Lord, to bring about sudden and incredible improvement so that they can learn. And the only reason we're asking it, not because we earn it, we deserve it, but because you are awesome. Jesus, we know you're here.

Thank you for coming to our service through the presence of your spirit. Thank you for creating faith in our hearts. Thank you for reminding us that you're the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Get us out of the two by four little ditch that many of us could live in, Lord, of faith mixed with unbelief. Help us to come away like you brought the disciples away, to just be with you, to listen, to look, to wait, to worship. Cause our faith to grow so that we can be a blessing to people.

And we can see a reminder that you're not dead, you're alive. Thank you for Diana. Thank you for delivering her through the power that's in the name of Jesus.

Thank you that she's not dead, but she's alive. Jesus, thank you, thank you, thank you. Let's just open our mouths and thank them out loud.

We thank you, we thank you. We thank you for every answered prayer. We thank you for our jobs.

We thank you for our children. We thank you, Lord. We bless your name.

Now let your blessing be upon your people. Keep us safe and close to you all day long. For we pray it in Jesus' name.

And everyone said. Amen. God bless you.

Hug a bunch of people near you. Everyone give someone a hug.

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