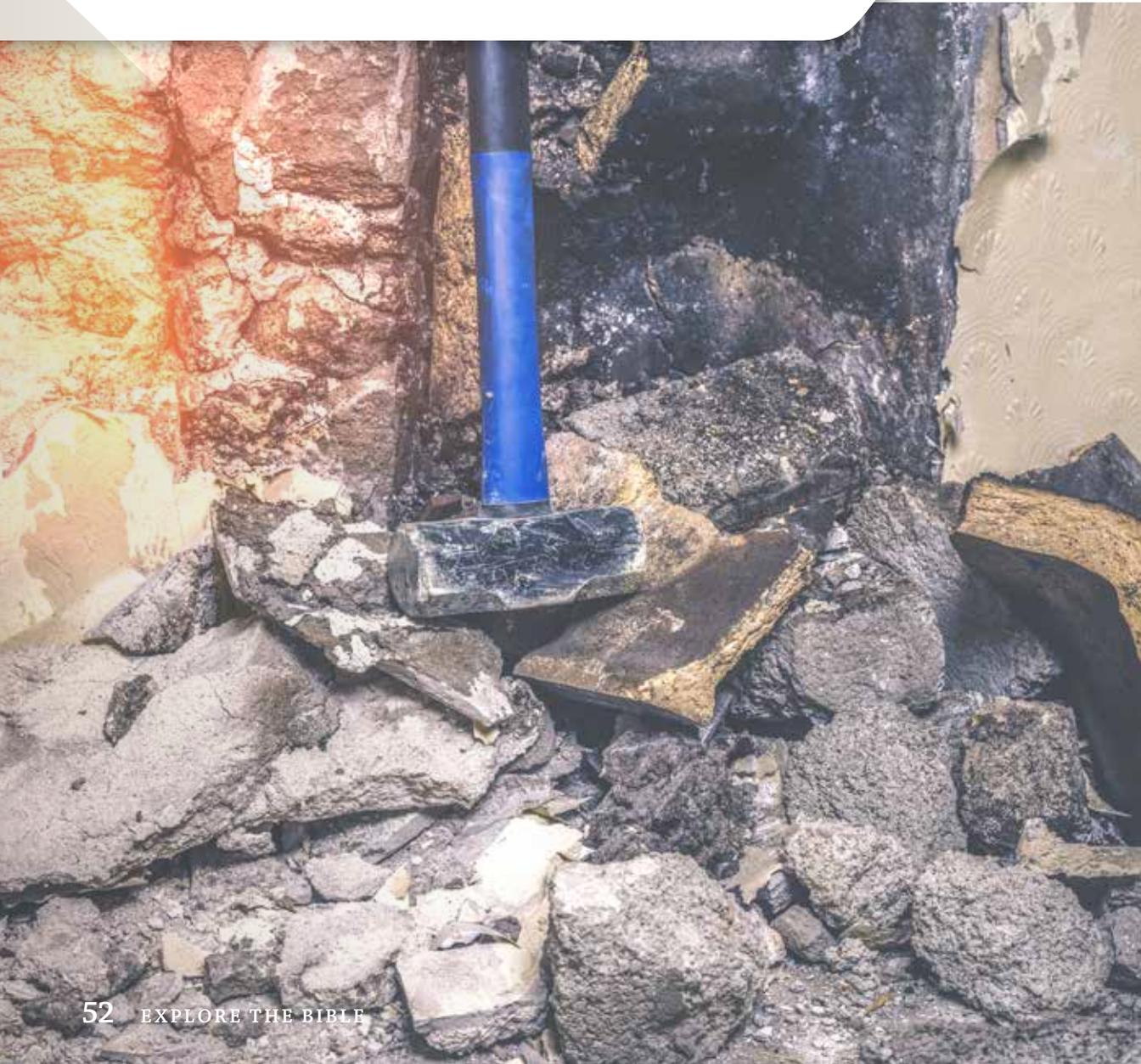


Includes

Jesus breaks down walls to show compassion to all.

Mark 7:25-37



What comes to your mind when you think about including persons very different from you in your life? How important is it for you to go beyond barriers to show compassion?

It is hard to be truly inclusive. We tend to prefer hanging out with people who share our experiences, backgrounds, and passions. Showing true concern to those of another ethnicity or religion is demanding. Right treatment of immigrants stirs strong emotions. Those with mental or physical disabilities are easy to ignore.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In his Gospel, Mark emphasized that Jesus never turned anyone away. He was always willing to teach and to heal, even when it might not have seemed convenient at the time. His attitude and actions stood in stark contrast to the religious leaders of the day, who were usually more concerned with the traditions of the law than the troubles of the people.

To emphasize Jesus' love and compassion for even the castaways of society, Mark highlighted two healing stories. First, Jesus met the needs of a mother from the Gentile land of Tyre. While He initially refused her request, the woman's humility and faith impressed Jesus, so He granted her request (Mark 7:25-30). Jesus encountered another outcast in a region known as the Decapolis. This deaf man had trouble communicating, but he was able to ask Jesus for a healing, which the Lord performed (7:31-35).

Jesus often told people not to share how they had been healed. However, their joy and appreciation ran too deep. They had to tell others about Jesus. As a result, anyone who had witnessed Jesus' works walked away with the same impression: "He has done everything well" (7:36-37).

Back home, Jesus continued His routine of meeting needs and battling with the religious elite. He fed another multitude—this time with seven loaves of bread that produced seven baskets of leftovers (8:1-10). This miracle led to a deeper discussion with His disciples about the dangers of following the hypocrisy of the religious leaders (8:11-21). Mark closed that section with another example of Jesus' compassion in the healing of a blind man (8:22-26).

MARK 7:25-37

25 Instead, immediately after hearing about him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit came and fell at his feet. **26** The woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth, and she was asking him to cast the demon out of her daughter. **27** He said to her, “Let the **children A** be fed **first B**, because it isn’t right to take the **children’s bread C** and throw it to the **dogs D**.” **28** But she replied to him, “Lord, even the **dogs under the table E** eat the children’s crumbs.” **29** Then he told her, “Because of this reply, you may go. The demon has left your daughter.” **30** When she went back to her home, she found her child lying on the bed, and the demon was gone. **31** Again, leaving the region of Tyre, he went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis. **32** They brought to him a deaf man who had difficulty speaking and begged Jesus to lay his hand on him. **33** So he took him away from the crowd in private. After putting his fingers in the man’s ears and spitting, he touched his tongue. **34** Looking up to heaven, he **sighed deeply F** and said to him, “Ephphatha!” (that is, “Be opened!”). **35** Immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak clearly. **36** He ordered them to tell no one, but the more he ordered them, the more they proclaimed it. **37** They were extremely astonished and said, “He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Passage Outline

The Humble
(Mark 7:25-30)

The Outsider
(Mark 7:31-35)

The Exuberant
(Mark 7:36-37)

Keywords

- a. A reference to the Jewish people, the Israelites—those whom God had chosen (Deut. 7:6)
- b. Jesus was indicating that His first priority was to preach to the Israelites (see Matt. 15:24). Jesus’ primary focus was not on a public ministry with the Gentiles. He had a responsibility toward the Jewish people first.
- c. Refers to the blessings God offered to the Jews through Christ
- d. Meaning the Gentiles; the word Jesus used meant little dogs who were kept as pets, not abandoned or vicious dogs.
- e. The woman’s reply revealed her faith and that she wasn’t trying to circumvent others’ needs.
- f. A groan as we await “the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23)

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Jesus likely went to Gentile territory to escape the crowds, but even there, His reputation preceded Him. A woman from the area had a need only Jesus could meet. Demons were oppressing her daughter, so she humbly begged Jesus for help. She was a prime example of an outcast in Jesus' day—the kind of person most Jews called “sinner” and avoided at all cost. But her humility provides a great example of how we should come to Jesus—regardless of our ethnic background.

How do ethnic and religious differences serve as barriers for expressing compassion? How can faith in Jesus help a person look beyond these barriers?

Jesus found tremendous faith in her response. Therefore, He granted her request. Back home, the woman discovered her daughter was freed from the demon. The situation reminds readers again of Jesus' great power over the supernatural, but it adds a new dimension: distance. Previously, He had spoken directly to the unclean spirits. Here, His word was all it took to drive out the demon even though He was not in the same location as the spirit.

BIBLE SKILL: Connect Old Testament prophecy to New Testament fulfillment.

– Read Isaiah 35 and take note of the main features that the prophet foresaw about the coming joy of the redeemed. Pay attention particularly to verses 5-6 considering this week's lesson. How clearly do you think Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of verses 5-6? How clearly did He fulfill the prophecies of the rest of the chapter? What predictions still await fulfillment when He returns?

Jesus and His disciples headed back toward Israel but were in no hurry to leave Gentile territory. A group of Gentiles brought to Him a man who was deaf and suffered with a speech impediment. Mark noted that the people begged Jesus for a healing. This indicates an earnest desire fueled by faith. Even if the deaf man wasn't convinced or didn't understand the reason for coming to Jesus, his friends had enough faith to take action on his behalf. Jesus honored the request of the deaf man's friends. When Jesus spoke, healing occurred immediately.

How are individuals with physical disabilities treated like “second-class” citizens today? What can the church do to serve as an advocate and break down barriers for them?

Jesus often encouraged people to keep quiet about what He had done. Jesus knew that in Gentile areas His miracles might be seen as magic tricks and take away from His true message. But these people had seen God do something incredible. As a result, they couldn't help but share the news with others.

What single word best summarizes the exuberance found in seeing Jesus changing a life? What does a person's response communicate about what and who they value?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Following Jesus' example, our compassion should go beyond ethnic and religious barriers.
- Following Jesus' example, our compassion should extend beyond social barriers and include those with physical disabilities.
- Jesus' acts of compassion are so astonishing that we cannot keep them to ourselves.

As a group, identify groups who may feel like outcasts in your community. What are some ways your Bible study group can minister to them?

Jesus took some extra steps to communicate with the deaf man. Think about the people with whom you come in contact this week. Ask God to help you alter your approach to make sure the gospel is clearly understood by the people around you.

Record opportunities you have this week to express compassion to an "outcast." What did God teach you through these encounters?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: The message of the gospel is for everyone.

Read Mark 7:25-28, considering the explanation Jesus gave the woman.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus made it clear that Israelites were His first ministry focus. Jesus' parable about bread and dogs is a reflection of priority, not prejudice. While the Jews did use dogs as an insult toward Gentiles, that doesn't fit the context here. The point Jesus was making was that Jews took precedence over Gentiles during His earthly ministry. Bread represents the message and ministry of Jesus. Children represent the Jews. The point is clear. No loving parent would take food from the mouths of their children to feed the dogs. The children would be the priority. Jesus did not see Gentiles as worthless or beyond God's love. Instead, He emphasized that the gospel would come to the children of Israel first. The Gentiles would be "fed" when the time was right.

She agreed that the children should be fed first but added that the dogs were not completely ignored. Instead, the dogs put themselves in a position to receive what crumbs they could. Simply put, the woman was not asking Jesus to completely overhaul His mission. She just wanted a small piece of His provision in the moment. The whole meal wasn't necessary. Just one crumb—her daughter's healing—would satisfy her hunger.

How do ethnic and religious differences get in the way of you expressing compassion? How can faith in Jesus help you look beyond these barriers?

Day 2: Show compassion to all.

Read Mark 7:29-30, noting Jesus' response.

The woman's humility, honesty, and courage reflected the kind of faith Jesus had not seen much in Israel. His compassion reminds us that faith is not limited to a privileged few. So often, believers huddle in sanctuaries instead of showing compassion to those outside their circles. Jesus broke down barriers and ministered to those who humbly called on Him. He calls His people to do the same.

What could you learn from this woman about how to respond to challenges?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Christian and the Social Order – Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love (John 15:12).

Day 3: Befriend and minister to people of all abilities.

Read Mark 7:31-32, identifying what the deaf man's friends desired.

Jesus and His disciples headed back toward Israel but were in no hurry to leave Gentile territory. Again, Jesus' presence created a stir, even in Gentile areas. In this case, a group of people brought to Him a man who was deaf and suffered with a speech impediment. While Mark didn't provide the details of who brought the man, the situation reminds readers of the four men who lowered their paralyzed friend through the roof earlier in the Gospel (Mark 2:1-5).

The Greek wording for "difficulty speaking" is found only here in the New Testament, but it appears in the Greek Old Testament (called the Septuagint) in Isaiah 35:6. There, Isaiah prophesied about the day when "the tongue of the mute will sing for joy." The connection supports Mark's emphasis on Jesus as the Messiah—not only because He could heal diseases, but also because He fulfilled Messianic prophecies.

Mark noted that the people begged Jesus for a healing. This indicates an earnest desire fueled by faith. Even if the deaf man wasn't convinced or didn't understand the reason for coming to Jesus, his friends had enough faith to take action on his behalf.

Too often we see persons with physical challenges as outsiders to minister to rather than contributors to ministry. How is this ultimately cruel?

Day 4: Advocate for those with disabilities.

Read Mark 7:33-35, highlighting the word "immediately."

After communicating with the man, Jesus communicated with His Father. First, Jesus looked up to heaven, indicating the source of His power. Then, he sighed deeply. The implication is that Jesus hurt with the man and sympathized with his suffering.

When Jesus spoke, healing occurred immediately. Jesus spoke directly to the man's ears and tongue rather than to the man. He commanded them to be opened, and they were. As evidence of the healing, the man began to speak clearly. This wording is in stark contrast to the difficulty he had experienced before coming to Jesus.

This healing is only found in Mark's Gospel, and it would have been significant to his readers. In addition to affirming Jesus as Messiah, it also emphasized that Jesus is not the hope of the Jews only. The Gentiles also have a place in the kingdom. This would have been incredibly encouraging to Mark's non-Jewish audience.

How are individuals with physical disabilities treated like "second-class" citizens today? What can you do to serve as an advocate and break down barriers for them?

Day 5: Share the life change you see.

Read Mark 7:36-37, noting the people's exuberance.

Among the Gospel writers, Mark most emphasized this “messianic secret.” Jesus knew that in Gentile areas His miracles might be seen as magic tricks and take away from His true message. Thus, it was better to encourage silence until His true identity was revealed in the resurrection.

Mark also made it clear that people couldn't keep it to themselves. Mark described those who had seen Jesus heal the deaf man as extremely astonished. The idea is that they had never seen anything—or anyone—like this before. The crowds stated that Jesus did everything well. Some commentators have identified a connection between Jesus' acts and God's assessment of creation as “very good” in Genesis 1:31. If so, the statement reflects Jesus' ability to remove chaos from creation and restore its original purpose. When Jesus acted, nothing was left undone or incomplete.

What does your response to seeing Jesus change a life communicate about what and who you value?



TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Mark 7, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

Why is rudeness or cruelty never appropriate? How is this different from what Jesus did in verse 27?

Name specific ways you can communicate with someone who has hearing loss to show friendship. How might that person show friendship to you?

Why do your caring actions speak love so much more powerfully than your caring words? What risks do we take when we choose to act on someone's behalf?



For additional context, read “QuickBites: Dogs” in the Spring 2019 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.