



## ***LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES: Part 2***

### **THE CANAANITE WOMAN: LESSON 10**

It's time to jump into the New Testament and meet a woman who had an amazing encounter with Jesus. I love the Old Testament, but sometimes I just need a look at Jesus and how He ministered to people. Especially women. His love and care for people rocks my soul and reminds me, again, how I should treat people, respond to people, and simply love people. This woman's story is an example of the mercy, grace, and love of our Lord. We don't know much about her personally, yet we can learn incredible things from her about faith. She is often called "the woman who begged like a dog," but after I learned her story, the title seems like a compliment!

As you read her story in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus' response to her might bother you at first. It did me until I looked under the surface and began to dig a bit deeper. I love how Max Lucado describes this whole scenario. In fact, I'll ask forgiveness from you now because I plan to quote him often. I sure wish I could write and describe things like he does! But I know you'll enjoy his take on a few of the verses. I pray that as you study this week's "lady" you'll be stretched, and your own faith will be strengthened. Have fun!

#### **First Day**

1. Read Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30. Using facts from both Gospels, summarize the story in your own words. List the facts you find, answering the questions Who? What? Where? When? How?

2. What does Matthew call her? What does Mark refer to her as?

3. Are there any apparent contradictions in the two stories?

4. What DO we know about her? What facts DON'T we know?

Matthew calls her a woman from Canaan and Mark calls her a “Greek” or a “Syro-Phoenician” woman. There is no contradiction in this because the term Greek was used often to simply differentiate between Jews and Gentiles. Anyone other than a Jew was a Gentile or a Greek, as called by some. In his letters, Paul divided the human race into Jew and Gentile, for writing purposes. Her nationality was Syro-Phoenician, which tells us her religion was pagan and was outside the privileges of having a covenant relationship with God. The Syro-Phoenicians originally were worshippers of Asherah or Astarte, who was the moon goddess. Jesus had gone outside of Israel and stepped into Northern Galilee, which was Gentile territory. As He stepped onto the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, we see a classic example of Jesus going to the “outsiders” rather than a case of the outsiders coming to Him.

5. Do either of the Gospels give us a hint as to why He traveled there at that time?

6. Culturally speaking, how many strikes would be against her?

It's important to know a bit about what had happened previously, such as who Jesus had been with, what He thought about them, and the context in which the story takes place.

7. Read Matthew 14:34-36, 15:1-20, and 23:13-15. What did Jesus say about the condition of the religious leaders' hearts?

8. Read Deuteronomy 7:3-4 and Leviticus 19:33-34. How did God want His people to treat the Gentile nations? Were the religious leaders doing that? Why did Jesus call them hypocrites?
  
9. What was most surprising to you about this story? What was most significant or challenging?

Before we go any further, I want to share something Max Lucado wrote to help frame the rest of our week. He was once given a sketch of Jesus laughing from an Episcopal priest who told him he frequently gave the sketch to those who were inclined to take God too seriously. Max said, "He pegged me well. I'm not one who easily envisions a smiling God. A weeping God, yes. An angry God, okay. A mighty God, you bet. But a chuckling God? It seems too unlike what God should do ... and be. Which just shows how much I know – or don't know – about God. What do I think He was doing when He stretched out the neck of the giraffe? What do I think He had in mind when He told the ostrich where to put his head? What do I think He was doing when He designed the mating call of an ape? And what do I envision on His face when He saw Adam's first glance at Eve? A yawn? Hardly. As my vision improves and I'm able to read without my stained glasses, I'm seeing that a sense of humor is perhaps the only way God has put up with us for so long. Is that Him with a smile as Moses does a double take at the burning bush that speaks? Is He smiling again as Jonah lands on the beach, dripping gastric juices and smelling like whale breath? Is that a twinkle in His eye as He watches the disciples feed thousands with one boy's lunch? Can you honestly imagine Jesus bouncing children on his knee with a somber face? No, I think Jesus smiled. I think Jesus smiled a bit **AT** people and a lot **WITH** people."

10. Are you inclined to take God "too seriously"? What do you think Max, and I, mean by that? Can you give examples?

Enough for today. As you read the story again tomorrow, imagine that Jesus is smiling inside. It may help as you try to make some sense of His reaction to our lady.

**Memory Verse of the Week:** “Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire ...” Matthew 15:28

### **Second Day**

**Work on your verse.**

1. Read Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30 again. Describe the woman’s attitude towards Jesus. What did she call Him?
  
2. How would calling Him the “Son of David” bring Him honor? What does that mean?
  
3. Contrast the unbelief of the Jews with the faith of this woman.
  
4. Describe the woman’s agony and how she must have been feeling. Do you think you would have felt any different? Have you ever seen your child or someone you love in a desperate state?

In Mark 7:26, the tense of the Greek word translated as “kept asking Him” implies repeatedly, or again and again.

5. How did she know Jesus? Had she met Him before?
  
6. Describe Jesus’ first response. (Not what you think about it!)

7. How did the disciples respond? Why do you think they reacted that way?
  
8. Some think the disciples saw the woman as a nuisance. Notice who Jesus keeps talking to. (Hint ... it wasn't the disciples!) Does He seem to think she's a nuisance? How does that encourage you? Do you ever feel like you're "bugging Him"?
  
9. People always point out the indifference Jesus appears to show our woman. But Jesus ignored His disciples too. What are your thoughts on that? Why is it significant?
  
10. Did the woman come with any agenda? Did she offer money? A reward? Did she try to manipulate Jesus or make any promises?
  
11. Why do you think Jesus seems to ignore her at first? Discuss your thoughts.
  
12. Have you ever felt that God was ignoring your plea for help? Have your prayers ever seemed to go unanswered? Knowing that God will always try to develop your faith rather than destroy it, how do you view His apparent silence? Perhaps a better question is, how **SHOULD** we view it?

13. If you have children, have you ever been “desperate” in your prayers for them? She came to Him as “a sinner needing help,” as Weirsbe wrote. Do you worry more, talk to your friends more, or pray more when you need answers and help? Do you seek Him in the way this woman pleads with Jesus?

Tomorrow we’ll discuss Jesus’ response to her and what He most likely was doing. For now, I’m asking God to work more patience in my life as I wait for His answers to my pleas for help. Will you do the same?

### **Third Day**

**Spend time on your memory verse.**

Herbert Lockyer wrote, “Artists never depict Christ with His back turned,” yet in our story, we meet this anguished woman to whom Jesus seems to do just that. Hmmm ...

1. Read our woman’s story again. Why do you think He doesn’t respond initially?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How did she react to what appeared to be rejection at first?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Ok, can you explain Jesus’ answer? What are your thoughts?

Jesus appears to turn a deaf ear towards her request at first. Why? Because we know the character of Jesus and His unlimited love and compassion, we know He wouldn’t simply be ignoring her. Many scholars believe that Jesus is testing her, waiting to see how serious she was about her faith. His method was maybe to “draw out” her faith, to refine and develop it.

William Hendriksen said, “He wanted to give her faith an opportunity for more glorious expression. He aimed to strengthen it by means of the very answer He had given her in verses 24 and 26; for she would now begin to realize, far better than if he had immediately healed her daughter, what an extraordinary blessing she was receiving.” Warren Wiersbe wrote, “When she approached Him as ‘Son of David,’ she was definitely putting herself on Jewish ground; and this she could not do, because she was a Gentile. Of course, this title did reveal her faith in Him as the Messiah of God (Matthew 22:42). Since she came to Him on Jewish terms, He was silent. Of course, He knew her heart, and even His silence encouraged her to keep asking.” Max had yet another opinion. “I think He was admiring her. I think that it did His heart good to see some spunky faith for a change. I think that it refreshed Him to see someone asking Him to do the very thing He came to do – give great gifts to unworthy children.” My opinion, I agree with them all!

In the Bible, waiting for prayers to be answered or fulfilled is not unique or unusual. Abraham, David, Moses, and many others in the Old Testament were required to wait. There are many examples in the New Testament where Jesus appeared to delay, as in the healing of Jairus’ child (Mark 5:35), Lazarus remaining in the grave for two days until Jesus raised him from the dead (John 11:6), and many more.

Now let’s look at the meaning of His response. Jesus seems to want to make it clear to her, the disciples, and everyone else who was around, that the full opening of the door to the Gentiles into the Kingdom of God would take place in the future. For now, His mission was to those He tenderly called the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Some believe Jesus was trapped because of that. So not true! He had already helped a Samaritan woman, a centurion, and other Gentiles while being focused on His mission. He knows He can heal her daughter, and He knows He was going to. Could He have been engaging her a bit with some humor or even satire? Could it have been something like this? (According to Max!) ‘Now, you know that God only cares about the Jews,’ Jesus says, smiling. When she catches on, she volleys back, ‘But Your bread is so precious, I’ll be happy to eat the crumbs.’” He seems to be delighted in her sincere faith.

He wasn’t being mean by comparing her to a dog. In fact, the word Jesus used for dog referred to “a little pet dog” rather than the filthy ones that ran around town and ate garbage. (Those were the dogs that the Pharisees compared the Gentiles to!)

4. How did Jesus respond, according to verse 28?

5. Describe her faith. Jesus didn’t often “commend” someone’s faith. What made it so spectacular? Why was He so impressed by her faith?

6. The woman seemed to know only two things; she was weak, and Jesus was strong. Why are these two points so crucial for us today?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. We often try to bargain with God, advise Him of the way He should answer or deal with the situation, or put Him in a box in regard to the possible ways He could work. What's your tendency?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Her faith was certainly persistent. Are you persistent in your prayer life? Persistent in your faith? What does a "persistent" faith look like?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. What hinders you from being "persistent"? What are some of the roadblocks we can face?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. God showed this woman mercy and grace. All God asks is that we believe and have faith in Him. Max wrote, "This woman knew she had nothing to offer. She didn't rely on her heritage, her race, her clout, her Torah skills ... only on Christ." Do you ever expect God to act or show grace to you because you deserve it for some reason, or because He "owes" you for all the good things you've done? What does Ephesians 2:8-10 say about this? How can that theology wreck someone's faith?



11. This woman's faith delighted Jesus! He had just spent time with the legalistic religious leaders who were always questioning Him and doubting His authority, so this woman must have been a breath of fresh air. Does your faith delight Him? Do you have trouble believing that could be possible? Why is it so hard for us to believe that? What do these verses say about that?

A. Psalm 147:11

B. Psalm 149:4

C. Zephaniah 3:17

12. Now, in your own words, how does our simple faith "delight" Him? What exactly does that mean?

See you tomorrow, ladies!

#### **Fourth Day**

#### **Memory Verse?**

As we discuss our Canaanite woman, don't forget the anguish that she was experiencing as she helplessly watched her daughter suffer. Remember that in her religion she was taught to worship idols and false gods. But she had heard of Jesus, His kindness, His love, His compassion, and His miracles. When she heard He was there, He became her hope!

1. Let's talk about faith for a bit. What is the definition of faith? Read these verses for help: Hebrews 11:1, Galatians 5:22-23, John 6:29, Eph. 2:8, Romans 10:9-10.

2. What is the role of faith in a believer's life, according to these verses?

a. Romans 1:17

- b. Romans 4:12
- c. Matthew 21:22
- d. Ephesians 6:16
- e. 1 John 2:13-17
- f. 1 Corinthians 16:13
- g. Acts 14:22
- h. Romans 4:20-24
- i. 2 Cor. 8:7
- j. 1 Tim. 1:12

3. What did Jesus say about faith in Matthew 17:20? What does this verse say about the power of God? What does it say about our focus? How does this verse often get taken out of context?

Max wrote, "How freeing it is to know that God acts based on the abundance of His power and not on the abundance of our faith! He only asks for a mustard seed-size faith. How do we get this seed-sized faith? From God Himself! The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the 'author and perfecter of our faith.' (Hebrews 12:2) He does all the work! When we make God's response about our faith, our righteousness, our level of spiritual maturity, we lose sight of the Gospel. We shift our eyes off Jesus and onto ourselves. We make healing about our good works. But the truth is that it is all about God's abundant grace. Our only job is to trust He is good and trust He is right."

4. What was the woman of Canaan's role in her daughter's healing? How does this testify to the paragraph above?

5. I also recently read that "faith isn't the belief that God will do what we want Him to, but that He will do what's right." What do you think about this quote?

6. How easily do you “waver” in your faith when God doesn’t act like you think He should?
  
7. Can you recall a time when God didn’t “act” or respond to a situation like you wanted Him to, and later you understood why?
  
8. How did this woman show humility as she sought Jesus? What part does humility play in faith? How does pride conflict with or affect our faith?
  
9. I’ve asked if you believe you have a “persistent” faith, now let me ask you another hard question. Is your life characterized by humility? Do you have a humble faith? Ponder that for a bit ...

### **Fifth Day**

**Write out your verse from memory.**

1. Read Mark 7:24-30 again. Did Jesus heal her daughter? How did He do it?
  
2. As she walked home, what thoughts may have been going through her mind?

3. This may be a silly question, but how do you think she must have felt when she walked through that door?

Elizabeth George wrote, “When she arrived home, the demon had left her daughter, just as Jesus said. There was no physical touch. No laying on of hands. No spittle mixed with dirt. No drama. No calling down of fire. No casting out of any demon. No face-to-face showdown. Only a few words spoken from a distance, but they were spoken by the very breath of God. At the same time that Jesus’ words offered peace, comfort, and assurance to the mother, they wrenched the young girl free from the demon’s control.”

4. Jesus didn’t always heal people the same way. Each touch was different according to the situation, the person, and the purpose of the healing. Why do you think Jesus chose to heal this girl specifically the way He did?
5. God is still doing miracles in the lives of His people. He still heals, frees, restores, and transforms. But do you think it’s possible to miss God’s work when we always look for miracles rather than finding Him in the ordinary?
6. Although this woman barely knew anything about Jesus, she had faith to boldly trust in the power of His Word. How about you? Do you boldly trust in the power and efficiency of the Word of God, even before you see the results?
7. What lessons have you learned from our dear Syro-Phoenician friend?
8. How is God developing your faith right now? Are you cooperating?