

# LifeGroup Study



**Date: September 3, 2023**  
**Text: Matthew 15:21-28**  
**Theme: In Tandem Them  
Too?**

## Belong

Today we're going to consider a concept called "radical inclusivity." In our text for today, Jesus breaks down every barrier that stands between him and helping a Canaanite woman. The call of Jesus is to deconstruct our barriers by recommitting our faith in the One who chooses to include us all.

How quickly we build barriers between us based on geography, nationality, economic status, and appearance. This is what we'll explore as we consider what it means to live "in tandem" with the theme, "Them Too?"

### Discussion

- *What barriers separate us from other people? (race, religion, etc.)*
- *Talk about a time you felt like an "outsider."*

### Prayer...

By your love and grace, let the walls fall down. In your love there is common ground. In your grace, nothing can divide us from each other. Let no wall stand between us. Let no barrier keep us apart. We are your people who worship you in Jesus' name. Amen!

## Believe

**Read Matthew 15:21-28.** Chapter 15 begins with Jesus confronting the Pharisees and scribes about their obsession with external things (particularly obedience to traditions and rituals) and their seeming ignorance of what really matters...the heart. Jesus expounds on this teaching in 15:10-20 as he talks to the crowds about purity. According to Jesus purity is not an external matter (a matter of what goes into a person...e.g. food) but an internal matter (a matter of what comes from the heart and through our lips...e.g. words). Verses 21-28, which are our text for the week, are a stunning story/example of what Jesus has just taught.

Tyre and Sidon were port cities on the Mediterranean Sea north of Israel. Both cities had flourishing trade and were very wealthy. They were proud, historic Canaanite cities. Hatred between the Jews and Canaanites went back to the days of the Israelites moving into the Promised Land. Tyre is said to have rejoiced when

Jerusalem fell in 586 BC.

Most Jews would consider themselves defiled to travel in these cities. Any Jewish male conversing with a Canaanite woman would be doubly defiled. Because disease—and especially demon possession—was generally assumed to be punishment for past sin, Jesus achieves a defilement hat trick in this passage.

### Discussion

- *Jesus is breaking all kinds of barriers in this story. Name some.*
- *How many of these same barriers exist today?*

While we don't know how the Canaanite woman knew anything about Jesus (she may have been a Gentile convert to Judaism) the fact that she referred to him as "...Lord, Son of David..." shows her acceptance of Jesus as the promised Jewish Messiah. Textually this is a "shot" at the Pharisees and Scribes who did not recognize the Messiah.

- *Why do you think the Pharisees and Scribes were so reluctant to recognize Jesus for who he was?*

The woman kneels (the Greek term *proskyneo* is one of Matthew's favorite denotations for a worshipful act of reverence before Jesus) and begs Jesus for help. Jesus responds by again emphasizing the priority of the Jews as the focus of his ministry. Jesus does not use the common derogatory word for "dog" in referring to the Canaanite woman but uses the word "kunarion" which refers to a household pet. Either way this seeming racial slur stings modern ears. The woman, however, is not deterred. She plays right into Jesus' metaphor, being willing to accept the crumbs from the table. In essence she accepts the reality that the Gentiles are a secondary priority in Jesus' ministry, yet still worthy of help.

- *The worshipful posture of this woman is instructive for us. What can we learn from her?*

## Become

- *Who might we be keeping away from God's grace?*
- *What barriers of omission or commission exist in our church and in our individual lives?*

This week let's commit to deconstructing our barriers by recommitting to our faith in the One who chooses to include us all.

### Prayer...

God of radical inclusivity, keep us from drawing lines that exclude. Give us open, thankful hearts that are motivated to work for justice on behalf of all people. Teach us how to be used to break down barriers between people and bring your mercy to all who are in need. Teach us how to be those who practice radical hospitality in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen!

# Daily Walk on the Rock

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## **Day 1: Monday—What Really Matters?**

We've reflected on the feeding of the 5000, pondered Jesus (and Peter) walking on the water, and seen that when we depend on our own strength, resources, and faith, we are limited. But when we fix our eyes on Jesus, we begin to get glimpses of God's power, glory, and heart, and we are invited into the sacred ministry of sharing God's love and God's desire for relationship with us. As Matthew 15 opens, Jesus is confronting the religious leaders about their obsession with the external. Read 15:1-20; consider what Jesus says about true defilement. Do the disciples understand? Read 1 Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 4:23; and 1 Peter 1:22. Talk to Jesus about the nature of your heart.

## **Day 2: Tuesday—The External and the Internal**

As you read the story of the Canaanite woman and Jesus in Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30, recall the 'heart' verses we read yesterday and observe Jesus, the woman, and the disciples. What is the condition of each heart? How does the discussion about defilement (*Matthew 15:1-20*) relate to the reality that the person who approaches Jesus is Canaanite/Gentile, female, and the parent of a demon-possessed child? Social and religious barriers come crashing down as Jesus interacts with her. Consider how the story relates to the account in Acts 10:1-11:4. Pray you will be open to the Spirit's instruction.

## **Day 3: Wednesday—What about Jesus' Response?**

Read Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30. Does the encounter raise any questions? At first Jesus is silent to the desperate woman's cry; then he seems to rebuff her. But notice that Jesus' responses do not deter the woman in her quest to have Jesus heal her child. Might the interchange be moving her to deeper faith and commitment; might it be giving the disciples time to understand its correlation to the teaching about defilement? What indications do you see that the woman believes Jesus is the promised Messiah (*in contrast to the Jewish leaders who did not*)? When Jesus seems silent to your cries, do you turn away or draw nearer? Ponder 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 4:16-18; pray.

## **Day 4: Thursday—Claiming No Worth of Her Own**

Read Genesis 12:1-3 and Luke 2:25-32. Jesus was born a Jew, in fulfillment of Jewish prophecy, and his

ministry was first to his own people, but God loves the world (*John 3:16*), and Gentiles are included in God's plan. Jesus knows all this, and we see it manifest in his interaction with the Canaanite woman (*Matthew 15:21-28*). Notice that she doesn't claim rights, position, or worth; she simply comes to Jesus as Lord, believing he will respond. To her, even crumbs fed to pets, if they are from Jesus, are a feast. She doesn't argue or try to convince him of her merit; in humility, she demonstrates her faith. Ask Jesus what he wants to teach you by her example. Worship him.

**Day 5: Friday—For Whom Do You Pray?** Remember that Jesus' healings point to something greater than the physical; consider the man born blind; he received physical sight and spiritual sight (*John 9*). Now ponder the urgency and passion of the Canaanite woman's pleas for her little girl (*Matthew 15:21-28*). Were her hopes for her daughter rooted only in temporal deliverance? Do we lose ourselves in the urgency of this life but neglect the eternal? Are our prayers only for today's blessings? Read Mark 9:36-37; 10:13-16. Pray with passion that the children in your life will know Jesus.

## **Day 6: Saturday—How Wide Is God's Love?**

Read Genesis 12:1-3. Abraham is the father of the Jewish people. But woven into God's promise of blessing to Abraham is the promise of blessing to the world through Abraham, through the Jewish people, and ultimately through Jesus. God, through the prophet Isaiah, affirms this (*42:6; 49:6; 56:6-8*), and Jesus testifies to this truth (*Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 14:15-24; John 4:21-26; 10:14-18*). Now read Luke 7:36-50; Romans 5:8; and 2 Peter 3:9. Ponder God's limitless love for you. Pray you will speak and live in ways that reflect Jesus' love to others.

## **Day 7: Sunday—In Tandem...Them Too?**

Many of the Jewish religious leaders judged others on external standards, thus, mentally eliminating them from the kingdom (*Luke 5:27-32; 18:9-14*). The disciples, at times more concerned about interruptions than ministry or more focused on a problem than on Jesus, were sometimes eager to send people away (*Mark 6:36; 10:13-16*). But Jesus demonstrates compassion; Jesus embraces people! Jesus doesn't embrace sin, but he does embrace sinners! Do we? Are we more in love with traditions and rules than with people? Do we view ministry opportunities as interruptions? Have we set limits on God's love and grace? Tell Jesus you want to have a heart like his.