Session 6

Includes

Jesus breaks down walls to show compassion to all.

Mark 7:25-37

Memory Verse: Mark 7:37

Read Mark 7:24–8:26, First Thoughts (p. 64), and Understand the Context (pp. 64–65). Notice the miracles of Jesus and the response of the crowds, the religious leaders, and the individuals healed by Jesus.

Study Mark 7:25-37, using Explore the Text on pages 65–69. Identify the setting for the verses, locating Tyre and Decapolis on PACK ITEM 1 (Map: Places in Jesus’ Ministry). Compare the two healings for similarities and differences. Review the In My Context (PSG, p. 63) questions and reflect on how you would answer each question.

Plan the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 70–71) and More Ideas (p. 72), customizing the plan for your group. Consider ways to get everyone in the group involved in the study.

Grow with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

Gather the following items: Personal Study Guides; Markers; and A whiteboard or chart paper. Prepare for display: PACK ITEM 1 (Map: Places in Jesus’ Ministry); and PACK ITEM 5 (Poster: “Don’t Tell Anyone”). Make copies for distribution of: PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verse Bookmark); PACK ITEM 9 (Handout: Gentiles Featured in Mark). If using More Ideas (p. 72): A copy of the children’s book, Don’t Laugh at Me, by Steve Seskin and Allen Shamblin; and copies of PACK ITEM 10 (Handout: Miracles of Jesus in Mark).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

It is hard to be truly inclusive. We tend to prefer hanging out with people that 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.

(In PSG, p. 55) 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?

**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**MARK 7:24–8:26**

Jesus demonstrated what it means to go beyond the typical barriers we human beings so easily erect so that we can remain separate from one another. Our study in Mark’s Gospel so far has included a focus on several of Jesus’ miracles: He healed a paralytic (session 2); He raised a girl to life from the dead (session 4). In this week’s lesson, we’ll look at two of Jesus’ mighty works. Each of them demonstrates how He went out of the way to show compassion to all people, whatever their ethnicity or the presence of social barriers.

The context for this week’s study is part of the section in Mark that focuses on Jesus’ gathering a new community (6:1–8:26). Jesus’ famous feeding of the 5,000 (6:30-44) had occurred around Passover time (spring), about a year before His crucifixion. (See John 6:4.) Thus, He had been ministering throughout Galilee for some months—perhaps more than a year—by the time the events in this week’s lesson occurred. You will recall that He had earlier designated twelve men as apostles and sent them throughout Galilee in pairs (session 5).

What follows is an outline of this week’s core Bible passage.

• **A Gentile Mother’s Faith (7:24-30).** Jesus demonstrated to His disciples that His new community was open to (and would include) Gentiles.

• **Jesus Does Everything Well (7:31-37).** Jesus’ works were so astonishing that no one could keep quiet about Him.

• **Feeding Four Thousand (8:1-10).** Jesus’ disciples were given a second powerful example of how they could minister to multitudes as they submitted their resources to Him for blessing.

• **The Yeast of the Pharisees and Herod (8:11-21).** False teaching and wrong expectations about Jesus are a dangerous threat to the message of Jesus. Like yeast, these can spread quickly.
• Healing a Blind Man (8:22-26). Jesus’ giving sight to the physically blind illustrates how He gives spiritual sight to those blinded by sin.

We have seen Jesus doing what only He could do because He was God’s Son. He alone could forgive sins. We cannot do that. He alone can heal instantly. We cannot do that. He alone could give life to the dead. We cannot do that. In this week’s lesson, we focus on how Jesus is our example. He included in His ministry an outsider because of a handicap. We can do that. He expressed compassion to someone beyond the barriers of gender and ethnicity. We can do that too.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE HUMBLE (MARK 7:25-30)

VERSES 25-26
Mark 7:1-23 reports another instance in which the Pharisees and scribes resisted Jesus’ teachings. Our Lord made the case that they had elevated their traditions above the commands of Scripture. So serious was the hostility between Jesus and His religious opponents that He and His disciples withdrew from any of the regions in which these religious leaders played a dominant role. They went to “the region of Tyre” (7:24). Tyre was a Gentile city on the Mediterranean coast, some thirty-five miles northwest of the Sea of Galilee. It was considered geographically part of Phoenicia, and was ruled at that time by the Romans as part of the province of Syria. Jesus was looking for privacy, but He could not say hidden. The Man with the reputation as a healer had arrived! Perhaps residents who previously had contact with Jesus recognized Him and spread the news. Thus, it was no surprise that immediately after He was discovered to be in that area, He was sought out. Mark introduced the situation by describing the supplicant first as a woman, second as a mother with a little daughter, and third as someone with a serious need: the girl had an unclean spirit.

Mark noted that the mother, in desperation and humility, and reverence for Jesus as well, fell at His feet—just as Jairus, a synagogue ruler, had done (5:22). By noting two such diverse individuals bowing before Jesus, Mark was no doubt indicating that this is how all persons should approach Jesus. If gender was a barrier, then so was ethnicity—then and now. The woman who approached Jesus was a Gentile rather than a Jew, and Jews kept separate from Gentiles and considered them “unclean.” Mark specified that she was a Syrophoenician by birth, that is, she was a native of the region to which Jesus had traveled. Many Bible students have noted the parallel between the account of this woman and that of the Gentile woman of Zarephath—a few miles up the coast from Tyre—who had appealed to the prophet Elijah on behalf of her child (1 Kings 17:8-24).

This woman did not allow the barriers of gender or race stop her. She was asking him to cast the demon out. This episode follows immediately after Jesus pronounce all foods to be clean (7:19). This story shows that Jesus considered that all persons are clean as well.
What individuals or groups do you tend to look at as “unclean”? Why is it important for followers of Jesus to consider all persons as worthy of compassion?

**VERSES 27-28**

At first glance, Jesus’ response to this desperate mother appears noncommittal at best and offensive at worst. Keep in mind several factors. First, Jesus was probably quoting a well-known proverb, the intent of which was to question whether a particular course of action was appropriate. Second, the saying makes three comparisons: (1) **bread** represents the message and ministry of Jesus; (2) **children** represent the Jewish people; (3) **dogs** represent Gentiles. (“Dogs” was not intended as an affectionate term.) The point Jesus was making was that Jews took precedence over Gentiles during His earthly ministry.

Third, Jesus used the word **first**, holding out hope for the woman that there was a way for Gentiles to receive His ministry. Finally, in the light of what happens in verses 29-30, we may conclude that Jesus spoke to the woman as He did as a test of her faith. How else could she have demonstrated her faith in Jesus?

The woman’s reply showed that she humbly accepted her status as an outsider. She acknowledged that the Jewish people had priority. However, she made the case that Gentiles were not necessarily excluded. They might hope to receive the overflow of the abundance provided through Jesus’ ministry. She took the proverb Jesus had used and turned it to good effect. There was more than enough food for the children (Jews). Even though the leftovers were only **crumbs**, they would satisfy the need that she had as a “Gentile dog.”

In Mark’s account, the faith of the woman is only implicit. We are to assume that her response came from a heart of faith. Note that in the parallel account of this event in Matthew, the woman’s faith is explicit (Matt. 15:28). Jesus even complimented her for her great faith. In the Gospel of Mark she is the only person to call Jesus **Lord**—a woman and a Gentile!

**VERSES 29-30**

Jesus commended the woman **because of this reply**. What was it that our Lord recognized? She was humble; she had great faith; she acknowledged Jesus as Lord. In other words, she modeled how all persons are to come to Jesus. He offered her a direct promise: **The demon has left your daughter**. Here, as in other places in the Gospels in which Jesus delivered humans from evil spirits, He issued a word of command and it was done. The power of God working through Him was always more powerful than the power of any evil spirits. As we saw in session 3, Jesus’ exorcisms were like someone entering the house of a strong man (Satan), tying him up, and robbing him (Mark 3:27).

Taking Jesus at His word, the woman went back to her home. The little girl was **lying on the bed, and the demon was gone**. This is the only instance in Mark’s Gospel of either an exorcism or bodily healing from a
distance, although the other Gospels report additional instances. What particularly mattered to Mark was to note for his first readers—almost certainly Gentiles—that the girl returned to health. Because she and her mother were Gentiles, this would have been an incentive for Christians of Mark’s day as they were learning how to reach Gentiles.

**How does Jesus’ example of going beyond gender, racial, or even religious barriers apply to us in the twenty-first century? To what extent should we expect some of those to whom we extend genuine concern to respond with faith, humility, and submission to Jesus as Lord?**

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**THE OUTSIDER (MARK 7:31-35)**

**VERSE 31**

Jesus continued His travels northward along the Mediterranean coast. He left the region of Tyre and went as far as Sidon, about twenty-two miles farther north. Tyre and Sidon—now part of the country of Lebanon—were Phoenician cities known in Old Testament times and condemned by God through the prophet Ezekiel because of their pride and wealth (Ezek. 26–28). Jesus mentioned both cities in Luke 10:14.

After His northward journey, Jesus then looped back southward, skirting the Sea of Galilee. Instead of returning to minister to the people of Galilee, however, He chose to spend time in the region of the Decapolis. Decapolis (Greek for “Ten Cities”) was a group of ten Greco-Roman towns that lay generally northeast, east, and southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had been there before at least briefly, encountering a demon-possessed man who lived among tombs (Mark 5:1-20). At that time, Jesus had become well known in the Decapolis (5:20).

**VERSES 32-35**

Just as the paralyzed man had friends who carried him to Jesus (2:1-12), so it was with this man. Mark described him as a deaf man who had difficulty speaking. It is likely that his speech difficulty was a result of his deafness. When you can’t hear yourself speaking, clear speech will be a problem. Likely, this unfortunate man had been subject to ridicule as long as he’d been deaf. We all know people can be cruel to those with disabilities, whether behind their back or not. Further, since this occurred in the Decapolis, it’s likely he was a Gentile. Mark didn’t specify.

Once the man’s friends got him into Jesus’ presence, they begged Jesus to lay his hand on him for healing. Because of his speech impediment, he could not ask for himself.

Jesus could have healed the man immediately. Instead, He took him away from the crowd to lay his hand on him. He ministered to him by using the senses of touch and sight—which were intact in the man. First, He touched the man by putting his fingers in the man’s ears. This established for the man not only...
Jesus’ concern, but also that there was a direct connection between his need (being deaf) and what Jesus was doing. Second, Jesus took the unusual step—for us, at least—of spitting and then evidently touching the man’s tongue with His own saliva. The idea may very well be that Jesus was, in a sense, transferring His own ability to speak clearly to the man. Again, Jesus was making a connection between the man’s need (clear speech) and what He was doing.

Next, Jesus did something that the man could see and understand: He looked up to heaven. The Lord was showing that He was praying for God’s power to be present to heal. (See Mark 6:41 for another example.) Finally, Jesus sighed deeply (again, something the man would have seen and recognized as an expression of compassion) and said, **Ephphatha!** Mark provided the translation for his Greek-speaking readers of this Hebrew (or Aramaic) command: “Be opened!”

Immediately, the man was fully healed. First, his ears were opened, meaning that he could hear normally. Second, his tongue was loosened. In other words, he began to speak clearly. By God’s power working through Jesus, his hearing and speech became normal. If the man was a Gentile, he may not have realized that Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 35:5-6 that the Messiah would open the ears of the deaf and enable the mute to shout for joy. Surely the disciples recognized this truth, however, and so would any Jews who were present and who remembered the scriptural prophecies.

How does Jesus’ example of including those with physical disabilities apply to us in the twenty-first century? Is there a group of disabled persons to whom you or your Bible study class should consider reaching out?

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**VERSES 36-37**

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.”

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**THE EXUBERANT (MARK 7:36-37)**

**VERSES 36-37**

Jesus then spoke to the man, the friends who had brought him, and all others who had witnessed this remarkable healing. **He ordered them to tell no one.** This was not the first time in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus had asked for silence after He healed someone. Consider the following:

1. After healing a leper, Jesus asked the man to say nothing, but he did anyway (1:44-45).
2. After restoring Jairus’s daughter, He asked the witnesses to keep quiet (5:43).
3. After restoring sight to a blind man, he asked the man to avoid people (8:26).
A counter example is that Jesus asked a man released from many demons to go home and tell his friends what the Lord had done. The man joyfully complied (5:19-20). Bible students have concluded that Jesus’ commands for silence were not based in any desire for persons not to know His mission or His message. Rather, He did not want to have a reputation of being just a worker of miracles. That would have led people to a wrong view of His mission and His message. In His first coming, He was the Suffering Servant of the Lord, whose primary purpose was to give His life as a ransom for many (10:45).

**Jesus is still in the business of transforming people for good. He still does everything well.**

As in other instances in Mark, the more He ordered them, the more they proclaimed it. In this as well as the other cases noted above, the miracle could not be concealed. We can hardly be surprised that people can’t keep quiet about extraordinary experiences.

The people were extremely astonished. They had never witnessed anything like this. They were likely wondering whether Jesus was the Messiah. Their testimony reflects two Old Testament texts. First, *He has done everything well* recalls Genesis 1:31: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” Jesus’ healing of the man restored him to the purpose for which he had been created. Jesus is still in the business of transforming people for good. He still does everything well.

**Jesus showed extraordinary compassion to those who were thought of by most as unworthy of concern.**

Second, *He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak* recalls Isaiah 35:5-6. In the glorious messianic age, beautifully described in poetic language throughout Isaiah 35, all creation would be restored. Now, in the person and ministry of Jesus, the messianic age had dawned. It will not be fully manifested until the return of our Lord; nevertheless, the Messiah Himself had arrived. Mark showed that He came not only for Jews but for Gentiles. In His coming, Jesus showed extraordinary compassion to those who were thought of by most as unworthy of concern.

*How important is it for believers today to tell others when we experience Jesus’ works of compassion? How important is it for us to tell others when we see other believers expressing His compassion to those in need? To what extent are these valid forms of witnessing?*
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
INTRODUCE: Prior to the session, write the words *Comfort Zone* on chart paper or a board. As people arrive, direct attention to the words displayed.

ASK: 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? (PSG, p. 55)

ANALYZE: How do these questions relate to your comfort zone?

HIGHLIGHT: Guide the group to highlight this quote from page 55 of the PSG: *We tend to prefer hanging out with people who share our experiences, backgrounds, and passions.*

TRANSITION: Moving outside our comfort zones to include people different from ourselves is often a challenge. In today’s study, Mark relates two healing stories that reveal Jesus’ love and compassion for people who might have been considered outsiders.

EXPLORE THE TEXT
SUMMARIZE: Briefly share the setting for the study utilizing *Pack Item 1* (*Map: Places in Jesus’ Ministry*) and relate that both healings being examined occurred in Gentile land. Distribute copies of *Pack Item 9* (*Handout: Gentiles Featured in Mark*) and note the definition of *Gentiles*. Emphasize that while Jesus remained focused on His God-given purposes for humanity, He took time to show compassion to all people.

TRANSITION: Mark 7:24 indicates that Jesus departed to Tyre hoping no one would know that He was there, but He was noticed.

READ: Direct a volunteer to read aloud Mark 7:25-30, while the group listens for why the people coming to Jesus might be considered outcasts.

STUDY: Form two teams. Instruct one team to examine Mark 7:25-30 and the other team to focus on Mark 7:31-35. Both teams should be prepared to share why the people would have had multiple reasons to be considered outcasts, any areas of confusion in the verses, and address the question: *What are some of the risks Jesus took in ministering to these individuals?* (PSG, p. 56) Encourage each team to read the information on their respective verses in the PSG (pp. 57–61). Ask each team to be prepared to share a brief report later in the session.

REREAD: Invite a volunteer to reread Mark 7:25-30, as the group considers the barriers the Syrophoenician woman crossed to secure help. Direct the first team to share their responses to the questions they discussed.

ASK: How do ethnic and religious differences serve as barriers for expressing compassion? How can faith in Jesus help a person look beyond these barriers? (PSG, p. 58)

EXPLAIN: Throughout His ministry, Jesus made it clear that Israelites were His principal ministry focus, but Jesus found tremendous faith in her response. This reinforced that faith is not limited to a privileged few.
Highlight: Lead the group to examine the last two sentences in the PSG (p. 59) under Verses 29-30. Read the two sentences as a group.

Read: Direct a volunteer to read aloud Mark 7:31-35, as the group listens to hear similarities and differences between the two healings. Direct the second team to share their report.

Ask: 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? (PSG, p. 61)

Compare: Lead the group to compare and contrast the two healings for similarities and differences. For example: The girl with the demon was not present with Jesus while the deaf man was touched by Jesus. The girl’s healing was sought by a desperate mother while friends brought the deaf man to Jesus. The second healing was done in private.

Read: Instruct someone to read aloud Mark 7:36-37, while the group listens to hear Jesus’ instructions to the deaf man. Reference Pack Item 5 (Poster: “Don’t Tell Anyone”), and highlight that this is one of many times Jesus gave this instruction.

Transition: Mark makes it clear that people couldn’t keep the news of their healing a secret. The crowds recognized that Jesus does all things “well.”

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Query: 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? (PSG, p. 62) After discussion, ask: Did anyone share anything in the group today that impacted how you would respond to those questions now?

Connect: Using the same teams established earlier, connect Old Testament prophecy to New Testament fulfillment by directing the teams to read Isaiah 35:5-6 to see the relationship between today’s study and Isaiah’s prophecy (part of the Bible Skill activity, PSG, p. 60).

Challenge: Guide the group to respond to the following case study: George and Martha are the parents of a special needs teenager. They try to attend your church frequently, but always worry that their son will be disruptive. Ask: How could our church respond to this situation? Remind the group that Jesus took extra steps to communicate with the deaf man. Challenge each person to think about the people with whom they come in contact this week—inside and outside the church—to look for opportunities to reach out to someone outside their comfort zone who might need to hear the gospel.

Summarize: In today’s study, the woman returned home to a healed daughter, and the deaf man couldn’t refrain from sharing what Jesus had done for him. Interaction with either of these individuals might have been outside our comfort zones, but Jesus provides an example of compassion and caring for all people.

Highlight: Mark 7:37 is the memory verse for the session. Encourage the group to focus on the phrase “He has done everything well.” Distribute copies of Pack Item 8 (Handout: Memory Verse Bookmark) to those who need one.

Pray: Thank God for seeing each person as valuable. Pray that each person in the group would have open eyes to share the love of Christ and His message with people who view themselves as outcasts in today’s world.
PRACTICE

• Consider how you respond to people outside your comfort zone, and look for an opportunity to share the gospel this week with someone you might have avoided or overlooked in the past. Be prepared to share your experience during the next group session.

• Contact anyone absent from the last group session. Include a personal invitation to attend Bible study next week.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As another option for focusing attention, check your public library for the children’s book, Don’t Laugh at Me, by Steve Seskin and Allen Shamblin. Begin the session by reading aloud the book, and then utilize the first two questions included in Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 70–71).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• To supplement the study of Mark 7:25-37, examine more closely Jesus’ parable about bread and dogs in verses 27-28 by directing attention to the PSG (p. 58). Guide the group to consider how the woman’s response revealed tremendous faith to Jesus. Discuss how the woman’s response to Jesus contrasted with the religious leaders.

• For further study of Mark 7:31-35, distribute copies of Pack Item 10 (Handout: Miracles of Jesus in Mark). Use the handout to provide a synopsis of Jesus’ miracles throughout the Gospel of Mark. Note that the healing of the deaf man is only found in Mark.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Call for volunteers to answer the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 63): 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?

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Sing or read together the hymn, “He Included Me,” by Johnson Oatman Jr. Remind the group how thankful each of us should be that Jesus included us, and thus we should be sure that our actions and attitudes display this thankfulness toward others.