

Includes

SESSION 5

Mark 7:24-37

Memory Verse: Mark 7:37

Jesus extends mercy to all people.

By the first century, the Jews had come to believe that they alone had the privilege of experiencing God's mercy. They saw themselves as God's favored people, and they assumed that Gentiles (non-Jews) would never experience God's mercy. But Jesus never limited His mercy to Jews. As He ministered to Gentiles, He proved that God's mercy extends to them too. His death provided the perfect sacrifice for every person, and His resurrection revealed His power over death for all.

As you study Mark 7:24-37, reflect on the excellent example Jesus provided of how the good news is for anyone, anywhere. Who are the "Gentiles" in your world? How can you help them experience the grace and salvation offered by the Messiah?



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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Most people have at least once experienced being excluded. Feeling like an outsider is an emotionally painful experience. Whatever the reason for being excluded, the incident typically stays in our minds for a lifetime. Yet the opposite—being included in a group or event—can be life-giving. In the same way, the memory of belonging can remain with us throughout life. (PSG, p. 46)

When have you most felt like an outsider?

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When have you most felt like an outsider?

46

Understand the Context (Mark 7:1–8:21)

Jesus’s disciples accepted a call—and a challenge—to share what they knew with others. They went out in pairs to minister in the surrounding areas and returned with incredible stories of all that God had done through them (6:7-13). And, after making their report, Jesus took them away to a remote place to rest and reflect on all that had happened (6:30-32). But it didn’t last.

A crowd of more than 5,000 people followed Jesus and interrupted the solace. Instead of turning them away, Jesus taught them. He also fed the multitude with a few loaves of bread and a couple of small fish. And when it was all said and done, everyone was satisfied (6:33-44). This was just another example of Jesus showing compassion to others when it might have been easier to turn them away.

In his Gospel, Mark emphasized that Jesus never turned away people who truly sought Him. He always taught and healed them, even when it seemed inconvenient (6:53-56). 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 (7:1-23).

To emphasize Jesus’s compassion for even the castaways of society, Mark highlighted two healing stories. First, Jesus met the needs of a mother from the Gentile region of Tyre. While He initially refused her request, the woman’s faith impressed Jesus greatly, so He healed her daughter (7:25-30). From there, Jesus encountered another outcast in a Gentile

region known as the Decapolis. This deaf man had trouble communicating, but he was able to ask Jesus for a healing, which the Lord provided (7:31-35).

Neither of these people would have gotten help from most Jews in their day, but Jesus was not any Jew. He was (and is) the Savior of the entire world, and He had come to share the message of God’s kingdom with all who would listen.

Jesus often told people not to share how they had been healed. However, their joy and appreciation usually ran too deep. They just had to tell others about Jesus and what He had done in their lives. As a result, anyone who had witnessed Jesus’s works walked away with the same impression: He did 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 related to hypocrisy (8:11-21). Mark closed that section with another example of Jesus’s compassion in the healing of a blind man (8:22-26).

Review Mark 7:24-37 and note the occurrences of the word “heart,” in either singular or plural form. Why is the human heart of importance when it comes the subject of including others, rather than excluding them?



INTRODUCE: Direct adults to imagine being a first-time guest to the group. Allow a few volunteers to share some emotions that go along with being a “first-timer” in any new group. *(Possible answers: excitement, nervousness, fear, doubts, anxiety, and so forth)* **Note:** If you have some first-time visitors, do not put them on the spot. Allow them to share only if they are comfortable and volunteer. Enlist an adult to read the paragraph in First Thoughts (PSG, p. 46).

ASK: **When have you most felt like an outsider? (PSG, p. 46)**
What did that experience feel like?

TRANSITION: Use **Pack Item 10** (*Chart: Miracles of Jesus’s Authority*) to explain how Jesus’s miracles revealed his care and concern for people. *In today’s session, we’re going to look at how Jesus includes everyone and extends mercy to all people.*

MIRACLE	REFERENCE	SIGNIFICANCE
1. Healing the man with the withered hand	Mark 6:7-13	Jesus' authority over nature
2. Healing the man with the withered hand	Mark 6:7-13	Jesus' authority over nature
3. Healing the man with the withered hand	Mark 6:7-13	Jesus' authority over nature
4. Healing the man with the withered hand	Mark 6:7-13	Jesus' authority over nature
5. Healing the man with the withered hand	Mark 6:7-13	Jesus' authority over nature
6. Healing the man with the withered hand	Mark 6:7-13	Jesus' authority over nature
7. Healing the man with the withered hand	Mark 6:7-13	Jesus' authority over nature
8. Healing the man with the withered hand	Mark 6:7-13	Jesus' authority over nature
9. Healing the man with the withered hand	Mark 6:7-13	Jesus' authority over nature
10. Healing the man with the withered hand	Mark 6:7-13	Jesus' authority over nature

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Music

Pre-enlist three or four volunteers to act out the lyrics of “If We Are the Body” by Casting Crowns. Direct one of the volunteers to sit alone while the other volunteers walk by ignoring or laughing at him or her. As the song ends, lead the group to consider ways they can be intentional about being the body of Christ to newcomers in the group. At the close of the study, play the song again and encourage adults to determine ways they can be Jesus’s hands and feet to an “outsider” this week.

The Dejected (Mark 7:24-30)

24 He got up and departed from there to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it, but he could not escape notice. **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 be fed first, because it isn’t right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” **28** But she replied to him, “Lord, even the dogs under the table 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.

(v. 24) Region of Tyre: •Tyre is a city located on the Mediterranean coast northwest of Galilee. Jesus didn’t go into the city of Tyre itself, but He did travel in the area around it. The term **region** refers to the administrative district which would have surrounded the actual city of Tyre. In contemporary terms, it would be similar to our city and county boundaries. Tyre was a Gentile city known for its wealth and its commerce. Many people were coming to see and hear Jesus from all of the surrounding areas.

(v. 24) Could not escape notice: It would appear that Jesus was not going in this region to do ministry. He was trying to enter into a house without anyone identifying Him. It was becoming more difficult for Jesus to go anywhere without being noticed because crowds were following Him wherever He went. His popularity had grown beyond Galilee and spread into this predominantly Gentile area.

The fact that Jesus didn’t want anyone to see Him suggests that He was probably trying to rest after several days of intense ministry. He also may have been preparing Himself spiritually for the events to come. Pious Jews would be offended that Jesus was entering a house in a Gentile area.

(v. 25) Fell at his feet: When the woman approached Jesus to ask Him about healing her daughter, she **fell at His feet**. The wording suggests that she was desperate and repeatedly asked for His help. She also referred to Jesus as “Lord” in verse 28. This is the only time in Mark’s Gospel that someone used this title for Jesus.

(v. 26) Syrophenician: A woman whose daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit had obviously heard about Jesus’s healing powers and sought His help. Mark noted that she was a Gentile, a •**Syrophenician**. Phoenicia belonged administratively to Syria. She was a Canaanite living according to the Greek culture.

(v. 27) Children be fed first: Jesus’s response appears harsh. However, He was using a parable for comparison and contrast. Jesus emphasized that the **children be fed first**. In context, He was referring to Israel in accordance with God’s perfect plan.

Key Context

Jews and Gentiles

It is important to note that Jews did not associate with Gentiles because of issues related to ceremonial purity. But Jesus continued with His mission and spoke to this woman, even though it technically violated Jewish laws. On the other side, the woman’s boldness in approaching Jesus is commendable. As a Gentile, she would have been considered unclean and was not supposed to approach any Jew, let alone a Jewish rabbi. The fact that she was a woman also could have raised cultural concerns.

(v. 27) Throw it to the dogs: Jews often referred to Gentiles as **dogs** in a derogatory way; but Jesus was using the term that described household pets, not mongrels. His point put emphasis on the priority of feeding the children over the puppies under the table. The woman apparently understood this distinction. And even though she was an outsider, Jesus still ministered to her and set the example for us to follow.

(v. 29) This reply: The woman countered Jesus’s explanation with the observation that even puppies get fed under the table. Her statement demonstrated her faith, as well as her humility. She recognized that even the smallest act by Jesus could meet her need. Jesus acknowledged her great faith and healed her daughter. Faith, rather than status or position, has always been the standard for God’s actions.

EXPLORE Mark 7:24-30

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APPLICATION POINT: Believers should offer the hope of Jesus to social outcasts.

CONTEXTUALIZE: Use **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry in Mark's Gospel*) to remind the group about the various places in which Jesus ministered around the Sea of Galilee.

SUMMARIZE: Use Understand the Context (PSG, p. 47) to provide an overview of Jesus's ministry in Mark 7–8. Remind adults that, unlike the religious leaders of the day, Jesus always paid more attention to what was going on inside people.

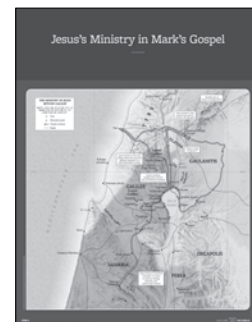
READ: Invite a volunteer to read Mark 7:24-30.

MINI-LECTURE: Use the commentary for verses 24-30 in the PSG (pp. 48-50) to explain the context of this passage. Note that it may seem that Jesus was insulting the woman. However, he was actually explaining His mission.

ASK: **What did the woman's response say about her as a person?**

DISCUSS: Emphasize that this Gentile woman would have been seen as an outsider by most Jews because of gender, race, and religion. Ask: **What groups might be outsiders today? What obstacles keep believers from sharing the gospel with them?**

TRANSITION: *Jesus could have ignored the woman, which would have been culturally acceptable. Instead, He spoke with her and, ultimately, granted her request.*



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 50). Find the locations of Tyre and the Decapolis in a Bible atlas. Then use a Bible dictionary to learn more about these locations. Discuss the question: ***What significant facts lead to a deeper understanding of Mark 7:24-37?***

The Deaf (Mark 7:31-35)

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 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.

(v. 31) Sidon: Another Gentile city in the region, closely associated with Tyre. •**Sidon** was located on the Mediterranean Coast about 25 miles north of Tyre. It was an ancient city and appeared often in the Old Testament (Josh. 13:1-4; Judg. 10:6; 18:7; Joel 3:4). The wicked queen Jezebel was from the region of Sidon before marrying the Jewish king, Ahab (1 Kings 16:31).

(v. 31) Decapolis: The region of •**Decapolis** was located on the eastern side of the **Sea of Galilee**. The territory's name was derived from ten Greek cities that were largely inhabited by Gentiles, though some Jews also lived in the area. The route that Jesus took from the region around Tyre would have taken him through Sidon and the territory of Herod Philip. This journey would have been close to 120 miles, affirming Mark's theme that Jesus would go to great lengths to demonstrate concern for all people, whether Jews or Gentiles.

(v. 32) Difficulty speaking: Mark is the only Gospel to include this story of Jesus healing a deaf man who also had trouble speaking. Including this story, along with the narrative of the Syrophenician woman, lends credibility to the fact that Jesus healed Gentiles in their own territory. We don't know who brought the man to Jesus, but the fact that he had suffered from some kind of speech impediment would indicate that he was not born deaf. It's possible that he experienced a debilitating ailment earlier in life that left him unable to hear and hindered his ability to speak.

(v. 33) Took him away: Crowds loved to see Jesus perform miracles in front of them, so they begged Jesus to heal the man. However, He took the man away from the crowd so He could communicate with him in private. Jesus would have used signs and symbols to help the man understand what He was saying.

(v. 33) Spitting: Jesus probably applied the spit from His mouth to the man's tongue as part of the healing. Many commentators suggest that this was a way of symbolizing the cleansing of the man.

(v. 34) Sighed deeply: The Greek word used here (*stenazo*) suggests an emotional groan that often reflected mourning. In doing this, Jesus displayed the depth of His empathy for the man and the plight that he had endured because of His difficulties. At other times in Jesus's ministry, He prayed by lifting up His eyes to heaven (John 11:41-42; 17:1).

(v. 34) Ephphatha: As Jesus looked to heaven, he spoke this Aramaic word that literally means "be opened." It was a command voiced in the form of a prayer, directing heaven to open the man's ears and unbind his tongue. The man was completely healed in both his hearing and his speech (v. 35).

With this miracle, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 35:5-6, which stated that the Messiah would unstop deaf ears and cause the mute to sing for joy. Like Jesus, we must also show concern for people with physical challenges.

Key Doctrine

Man

The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love. (See Genesis 1:27-27; Revelation 7:9-10.)

(v. 35) Loosened: The Greek wording denotes being released or set free. With His miracle, Jesus set the man's tongue free from whatever had held it captive.

EXPLORE Mark 7:31-35



APPLICATION POINT: Believers must show individual care to people with physical challenges.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Mark 7:31-35

EXPLAIN: Use the commentary for verse 31 to explain why the details concerning Jesus's travel were significant. Point out that Jesus went out of His way to travel through non-Jewish areas and to minister to Gentiles.

ASK: **In what ways can we follow in Jesus's footsteps and minister to all people? What can believers do to effectively minister to individuals with physical challenges?** (PSG, p. 52)

TRANSITION: *Jesus again demonstrated compassion toward all people by healing the man. However, He also gave the man an unusual command: Don't tell anyone who healed him. This is sometimes known as the "messianic secret," and we'll see what it means in the next set of verses.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Pray

Pass out index cards. Direct the group to write the name of one person they can see or place they can go to show the mercy and compassion of Jesus this week. Invite the group to write a prayer on the backside of the card asking Christ to give them opportunities to show mercy in His name.

The Dumbfounded (Mark 7:36-37)

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.”

(v. 36) Tell no one: Once again Jesus ordered the man (and, presumably, the crowd) to remain silent about the healing. However, as in other situations where Jesus had instructed people this way, the crowd proclaimed the miracle throughout Decapolis.

While His demand might seem odd, Jesus had a purpose in keeping His role in the healing a secret. First and foremost, He wanted people to focus on His message about the kingdom. However, if people only saw Him as a miracle healer, it would hinder His ability to fulfill His mission from the Father.

Key Concept

The Messianic Secret

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus gave the same stern order to individuals whom He had healed or people who wanted to tell others about the miracles they had witnessed (Mark 1:44-45; 3:12; 5:43). The previous miracles took place among Jewish people and provided them with opportunities to affirm Him as Messiah. But He wanted them to refrain from telling anyone about the miracles for an important reason. In this case, broadcasting the news about the miracle that had just taken place would only serve to foster a misunderstanding of His messianic mission.

His messianic purpose was to provide the gift of eternal salvation. Such a purpose called on Him to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. He validated His mission by healing the sick and driving out demons; but, when people focused their attention exclusively on His miracles and ignored His message, they would lose sight of His messianic purpose. So, it was better for them to keep their peace in the moment—though they never did.

(v. 37) Extremely astonished: This is the only time that this word is found in prominent Greek literature. The term suggests being amazed beyond anything imaginable and sometimes included the sense of shock, fear, or panic. While Jesus’s other miracles were well received and highly praised by the people who were left in awe by what they had seen, this situ-

ation went off the charts. The sense of astonishment surpassed anything they had ever experienced. In a sense, it was so overwhelming that Mark had to make up a new word to describe it.

(v. 37) Everything well: This phrase echoes the wording of Genesis 1:31 in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Like the Father in creation, Jesus had gone beyond all expectations in His work. Once again, He had done what only God could do by healing a man who was both deaf and mute. Without realizing it, the Gentiles in the Decapolis were affirming Jesus’s deity, which also validated His claim as the Messiah.

As Jesus performed miracles, the people who observed His work tended to focus on the miracles themselves, only viewing Him as a miracle worker. However, Jesus intended the miracles to be understood as affirming that He is God’s Messiah.

As we follow the example of Jesus, we are to point people to Jesus the Messiah and to the gift of salvation that He alone offers. Like Jesus, we must strive to remain focused on the fact that redemption and salvation is made available to all through Him.

Key Questions

- **What type of Messiah were the Jewish people expecting in the first century? How does that help you to understand Jesus’s need to downplay the miracles He performed?**
 - **How can we balance an appreciation for Jesus’s incredible works while maintaining a focus on His mission as Savior? (PSG, p. 53)**
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EXPLORE Mark 7:36-37



APPLICATION POINT: Believers must remain focused on the redemption provided to all through Jesus alone.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Mark 7:36-37.

COMPLETE: Write the following sentence on the board: *The more Jesus _____, the more the crowd _____.*
Encourage adults to suggest words or phrases that could fit in each of the blanks.

ASK: **Why would Jesus want people to keep quiet about His miracles?** Use information from pages 52-53 in the PSG to explain Jesus's command. Remind adults that, in some ways, the expectations of miracles and healing could distract people from Jesus's primary message. *So, His command was designed to keep their focus on the main thing.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read James 4:6.

REFLECT: **What attitude is God drawn toward? In what way does spiritual pride keep us from seeing Jesus?**

SUMMARIZE: Remind the group of this session's summary statement: *Jesus extends mercy to all people.* Emphasize that "all" includes them when they are struggling and need His help, but it also includes others around us. *Jesus set the example, and we are called to be His hands and feet as we point people toward Him.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Sign Language

Enlist an interpreter for the deaf to visit the session and to share Mark 7:36-37 using sign language. Allow the interpreter to talk about the people's response to Jesus healing the man who was deaf and mute. Encourage adults to think about things that Jesus has done well in their lives and to thank Him for those things.

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 54 of the Personal Study Guide:
- *Believers should offer the hope of Jesus to social outcasts.*
 - *Believers must show individual care to people with physical challenges.*
 - *Believers must remain focused on the redemption provided to all through Jesus alone.*
- BRAINSTORM:** On the board, list ideas for reaching out to those who would be considered social outcasts or “untouchable,” including those with disabilities. Discuss several specific ways the group can be intentional about demonstrating the mercy of Jesus to all people.
- PRAY:** Invite the group to pray for God’s wisdom and direction as they seek opportunities to minister to everyone in every situation.

After the Session

Reinforce the session by emphasizing Jesus’s desire for every person to have a relationship with Him. Reach out to the group this week, making yourself available to anyone who might want to talk about starting a relationship with Jesus and urging them to look for opportunities to share Jesus with others this week.

ADULT COMMENTARY



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