

A Woman Of Faith

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In a nutshell:

Given an impromptu test of their faith, even the disciples closest to Jesus failed miserably. But, a desperate yet humble woman passed the test of faith with flying colors.

Icebreaker: It's Mother's Day! Everybody has a favorite TV mom... June Cleaver, Marion Cunningham, Clair Huxtable, Marge Simpson...

Discuss: Who is your favorite? Be honest, how does your own mom compare to your favorite TV mom?

Passing a Test of Faith:

Setup: Read Matthew 15:21-28. Use multiple translations if you have them available. Read the study notes for this passage if you have a study Bible.

Discuss: Make a list of the things you know about the woman in the story. What does the passage itself say? What else can you infer from the context? What do you know about the culture that comes to bear on this story?

Fail: Jesus told his disciples to love God and love others. Enter: a woman (wrong gender) from Canaan (wrong neighborhood) who appeared unstable (wrong mental state) and desperate (wrong attitude). Their response: "This woman is bothering us." They failed.

Discuss: What characteristics give you "permission" to marginalize someone or ignore his or her need? Race? Clothing? Attitude? Lack of time for "needy" people? Compassion fatigue? Be honest: which are legitimate and which are excuses?

Silence: Initially Jesus responded to the woman with silence. Our faith is often most severely tested when God is silent and seems to be ignoring our desperate need.

Discuss: Describe a time in your life when you felt like God was ignoring your need. In retrospect, do you feel God ultimately did the right thing? What did you learn?

Pass: The woman persevered through silence and reacted humbly to a cultural insult ("dogs") because she had faith that Jesus could grant her request. She passed this test of faith with flying colors. Jesus said she had "*great*" faith ("mega" faith - a phrase used only twice in scripture). Mega-faith can never flow through pride, but only through humility.

Discuss: Do you see a connection between faith and humility? Can you describe a time when admitting your desperate need to God was an act of faith?

As a Group: Sometimes we avoid a troubling scripture passage because it seems to violate other passages or our own sensibilities. However, when we consider the context, target audience, and cultural background, we may learn that it didn't mean that at all what we originally thought or were taught about the passage.

Discuss: What steps can we take as a group take to insure that we are interpreting scripture correctly?