

Semicontinuous
**Prov. 22:1–2, 8–9,
22–23**
Ps. 125

Complementary
Isa. 35:4–7a
Ps. 146

**Jas. 2:1–10 (11–13),
14–17**

Mark 7:24–37

Ask Boldly

Goal for the Session

Tweens will compare the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter and the man who was deaf and practice praying boldly on behalf of others.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Mark 7:24–37

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Douglas R. A. Hare

How can Christians appropriate this story? First, it reminds us of our debt to Israel. As Krister Stendahl proposed, in Paul's view we Gentile Christians must consider ourselves “honorary Jews.” The Gentile woman humbly acknowledges the priority of the “children,” even as she presses her request to be fed from the same table. Second, the woman's boldness inspires us to be bold in our prayers of intercession and petition. Even though our basic principle is “Your will be done,” we must not prematurely abandon our prayers for healing, thinking they are futile.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Loye Bradley Ashton

To be the Son of God, the Messiah must suffer, not only at the hands of those of us who do not understand him, but also under the conditions of existence, the challenge of the human condition itself. To be otherwise would not allow Jesus to be fully human. Furthermore, according to the tenets of process and liberation theologies, if he is also “fully God,” Jesus cannot avoid this suffering either. Mark provides an interesting way of seeing how the divine and the human can be completely combined in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, a kind of “Ephphatha Christology.” Jesus is fully God and fully human only if he can faithfully “be opened” to both at the same time.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Amy C. Howe

Perhaps it is too much to ask that a homeless person could interrupt the dinner of the president of the United States to ask a favor, but it is not too much to ask humanity to recognize that there are no walls made of withered hands, deaf ears, or troubled minds separating us from God or us from each other. Status is a product of our own imaginations, invisible to God. Once we acknowledge that there are no walls separating us, love and mercy flow unfettered, and all people are deemed equally valuable.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm

Most of us are reluctant to share our faith with others and we find very good reasons to keep quiet: we may believe that our actions speak more loudly than our words, we may be afraid of the inadequacy of our speech, or we may fear that we will make a mistake and alienate those to whom we are speaking. Yet the healed man is every bit as insistent as the Syrophenician woman. He and his companions give voice to God's presence and power among them. The characters in both stories embolden us to share whatever glimpse of God's mercy, love, and truth we have witnessed. Their stories and words remind us to focus our attention on God and to keep pointing others toward the reign of God proclaimed by Jesus Christ.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 7:24–37

YOU WILL NEED

- green cloth or place mat
- Christ candle, matches
- Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 27
- scissors
- tape, wall adhesive, or push pins
- Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022; CD player
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pencils
- Bibles

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, fine-tipped markers
- option 2: colorful wooden or plastic beads, yarn or parachute cord, scissors, fine-tipped permanent marker
- option 3: newspaper; tape (optional)

A Christ candle is a tall white candle with a cross or other Christian symbol on it. You can make a Christ candle by drawing a cross on a tall white candle. Lighting the candle is a symbolic way of welcoming Jesus in your midst.

Focus on Your Teaching

Expect tweens to approach prayer in different ways. Some may be confident in Jesus' ability to heal in difficult situations, as the Syrophenician woman was. They may approach God in prayer confidently, ready to stand up for the need they see. Others may come to Jesus unable to articulate their need. Like the man who was deaf, they may need encouragement from others to seek Jesus' help. Explore their "growing edges" of faith together and help tweens to find ways to pray boldly on behalf of others and to encourage others on their faith journey.

Lord, open my heart to your healing power. Give me the voice to proclaim my faith in you and the words to encourage others. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, choose a place to create the Word Wall display and place Color Pack 2 in the center of it. Cut piece A from Color Pack 3. Bring a tall white candle to be your Christ candle this fall. If open flames are not allowed, use a battery-powered candle.

As learners arrive, welcome them. Ask volunteers to place the green cloth or place mat in the center of your learning space and put the Christ candle on it. Explain that the color green indicates the church is in the season of Ordinary Time (or season after Pentecost). Review the significance of the Christ candle (see sidebar). Light it, and pray aloud:

O God, we have come together to learn more about you and your loving ways. Help us to grow as we follow Jesus. Amen.

Extinguish the candle, if necessary.

Sit with tweens in a circle. Ask each person to think of an animal sound to represent himself or herself. Begin by saying your name and making your animal sound. The group then repeats your name and sound. Next, have the person on your right say his or her name and make his or her animal sound. The group then repeats the name and animal sound of this person, followed by your name and sound. Continue in this way until the name and animal noise of each group member has been added to the chain.

Comment on the unique ways learners used their voices. Say that today's Bible story is about some people who use their voices to ask for help.

This fall, tweens will encounter some new vocabulary words in the focus Bible stories. Plan for the Word Wall to remain in place for the first six sessions to help learners become comfortable with these terms.

EXPLORING

Distribute Bibles and have learners turn to Mark 7. Point out that Mark is one of the four Gospels, the Bible books that tell about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Explain that today's passage contains two separate stories. Show Color Pack 1 and explain that these events took place when Jesus was traveling near Tyre and Sidon and the Decapolis. Invite learners to find these places on the map. Comment that in these areas, there were many Gentiles—not everyone was Jewish, as Jesus and the disciples were. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the definition on piece A from Color Pack 3 and post it near Color Pack 2 on the Word Wall.

Form two groups. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Group Work) and assign one story to each group. Instruct each group to fill in the chart for its story and then plan how to tell the story to the other group. Allow about seven minutes for groups to work. Ask each group to tell its story. Discuss:

- ✪ What do these two stories have in common? What is different?
- ✪ What might have prevented or discouraged the Gentile woman and the friends of the man who was deaf from approaching Jesus? Why do you think they were bold to ask Jesus for help?

Invite volunteers to tell about times someone else has prayed for them and times they have prayed to Jesus to help someone else. Discuss:

- ✪ What does it mean to pray boldly? How might a person do this?
- ✪ Do you think it takes courage to ask Jesus to help someone else? Why or why not?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Bold in Prayer** Tweens will consider the courage it takes to pray boldly on behalf of someone else. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Prayer Roadblocks) and read aloud each of the "roadblock" statements, asking for a show of hands to indicate how many tweens have ever thought or said that. Form pairs or trios to discuss what might help people overcome these roadblock thoughts, so they can pray more boldly. Have them use fine-tipped markers to write their best ideas in the box. Ask groups to read their ideas to the class. Encourage learners to put these ideas into practice.

EASY
PREP

It's easy to become uncomfortable with times of silent prayer and end too quickly. Encourage learners to speak to God during this time and also to listen silently. It may help them to focus on their breathing as they pray.

- 2. Prayer Cord** Learners will make a prayer cord as a tactile reminder to pray for others. Ask each learner to think of four or five people for whom he or she wants to pray. Invite learners to choose a bead to represent each person, choosing a color that reminds them of the person and using a permanent marker to write his or her initial on the bead. Have each one cut a 12" piece of yarn or parachute cord and string the beads, tying an overhand knot between each bead and a double knot at each end. Trim excess yarn or cord, leaving an inch beyond the knot at each end. Allow a few moments for tweens to pray silently for each person represented on their cords. Encourage tweens to carry the cord in a pocket or backpack this week and to pray for these individuals.
- 3. Upholding Others** As they play a game, tweens will experience what it means to uphold others. Review that one important thing Christians do is support one another in times of need. Place a double-page piece of newspaper on the floor. Tell learners to stand on it so no one's foot is touching the floor. (If your class is large, tape two pieces of newspaper together.) Once the group has succeeded, fold the newspaper in half and ask them to stand on it again. Repeat until the group really struggles to do this. Afterward, discuss: How did you work together to succeed? What might this game teach us about the way Christians can uphold one another in challenging times?

CLOSING

Play "God Is with Me" (Color Pack 27; track 7 on *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022) as you gather with learners around the candle and light it, if necessary. Ask tweens to tell one thing they learned about Jesus today. Explain that you will pause during the prayer so they can offer prayers for other people. Pray aloud:

God of love, help us to approach you boldly in prayer, trusting that you will always listen. Today, hear our prayers for (pause for learners' petitions). We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Have learners practice clapping the hands of the individuals on their right and their left simultaneously, like a group high five. Explain that at the end of the closing, they will do this group clap and say "Amen!" at the same time.

Teacher: Let us go out into the world to love and serve God and our neighbors.

All (group clap): Amen!

Say good-bye to each tween by name.

Allow plenty of time for tweens to speak their prayers. If you move on too quickly, it may cut off the petitions from learners who are shy or introverted.

God Is with Me

Our God is with me
everywhere,
All day and night I'm in
God's care.
It doesn't matter where
I go,
Because God is with me,
this I know.

Repeat two times

Group Work

Directions: Read the Bible verses assigned to your group. Work together to answer the questions in the chart below. Plan how you will tell the story to the other group.

	Mark 7:24–30 (Group 1)	Mark 7:31–37 (Group 2)
Who is in need of help in this story?		
Who asks Jesus for this help?		
How does Jesus help?		
How quickly does Jesus respond to the request for help?		
In what way does Jesus solve the problem for the person who needs help?		
What happens to the person after Jesus helps him or her?		

Prayer Roadblocks

Which of the thoughts on this barricade have been roadblocks to prayer for you?



What can help you move past these roadblocks so you can pray more boldly? Write a few ideas in the space below.



Lined writing area for student responses.