

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

Love for Everyone

Goal for the Session

Children will hear of the Syrophenician woman's persistence and practice ways to demonstrate God's love is for all.

■ 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

Focus on Your Teaching

Young children are familiar with persistent asking and experienced in asking in a variety of ways until they are satisfied their requests are understood. They know they may not receive the answer they want, but they will give the asking their best effort. To children, Jesus' response in today's story may seem exactly that of a tired parent, yet his final response is just the answer for which the woman has been hoping. Invite children to take their requests to God in the same trusting and persistent way, knowing that God's love expands to include all their questions.

Loving God, your enveloping love hears my questions and requests. Help me to express this inclusive love as I teach. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ green cloth
- ☐ small table or large box
- ☐ battery-powered candle
- ☐ Bible
- ☐ 4 index cards
- ☐ marker
- ☐ Color Pack 1, 2, 27
- ☐ scissors
- ☐ 13" x 9" baking pan
- ☐ water
- ☐ bath towel
- ☐ copier paper (optional)
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022; CD player
- ☐ Resource Sheet 1

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2; scissors; glue sticks; crayons; Color Pack 27; *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022; CD player
- ☐ option 2: 12" x 18" construction paper, scissors, pencils, crayons, marker
- ☐ option 3: see sidebar by activity

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, use a marker to print the letters L, O, V, E on separate index cards. Cut out the figure on Color Pack 1 and fold it as shown in the diagram. Fill a 13" x 9" baking pan with water and set it on a bath towel. If you are using option 2 in Responding, cut a 6" x 18" piece of construction paper for each child. Fold each piece in fourths accordion-style, so the resulting piece is about 4½" x 6". If you are using option 3, cut several sizes of hearts from cardboard for children to use as tracing patterns. Make a copy of "Poem for Option 3" on Resource Sheet 1 (Session Resources) for each child. Cut drinking straws in half; each child needs six pieces.

Greet each child by name. Invite the learners to help you place a green cloth on a small table or large box to make a worship center and put the candle and the Bible on it. Light the candle and pray aloud, asking the children to repeat each phrase:

Dear God, / thank you for always loving us. / Be with us today / as we learn about Jesus. / Amen.

Invite the children to tell about times when they asked their parents or teachers for something that was really important to them. Encourage discussion by asking:

- ✂ Did you have to ask more than once? If so, why did you keep asking?
- ✂ How do you feel when you ask for something and the answer is yes? How do you feel when the answer is no?

Say that today's Bible story is about a woman who asked Jesus for something.

Children's persistent asking can frustrate parents and teachers. Some children may have been told "no means no," and so have difficulty understanding Jesus' tolerance for the woman's requests. Affirm that God hears our prayers, no matter how often we repeat them.

Option: From copier paper, make a smaller version of the figure on Color Pack 1 for each child and fold it. Have learners place their folded pieces in the pan of water and observe what happens.

EXPLORING

Open the Bible to the Gospel of Mark and point to the word *Mark*. Explain that this book of the Bible has many stories about Jesus. The Bible story for today comes from Mark.

Use "Story Script" on Resource Sheet 1 (Session Resources) to tell the Bible story. After telling the story, ask:

- ✂ What did the woman want Jesus to do?
- ✂ Why do you think Jesus said no the first time she asked?
- ✂ Why do you think the woman kept asking Jesus to help her daughter?
- ✂ How do you think the woman knew that God has enough love for everyone?
- ✂ How did Jesus show God's love for the woman and her daughter?

Gather around the baking pan of water. Show the folded figure from Color Pack 1. Invite the children to guess what might happen when you place the piece of folded paper in the water. Place the folded heart in the water with the folded panels facing up and watch what happens. Talk about how God's love unfolds until there is enough for everyone. God's love grows and grows to include everyone. Wonder together about how this is good news for them and for others too.

Show Color Pack 2 and invite them to imagine the many kinds of people whose arms are in this picture. Invite volunteers to spell and read the word *love*. Ask:

- ✂ How might we use our hands and arms to tell other people the good news that God's love is for everyone?

Place the index cards with letters (L, O, V, E) in the middle of the circle. Invite the children to take turns holding up one of the letters and naming a way to tell about God's love or to show it.

Wrap up Exploring by affirming that God's love is for everyone, regardless of where people live or how they look. God has enough love for everyone. Discuss:

- ✂ How can you show the people in your family and your friends that God's love is for them?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Song Poster** Children will sing a song about God's love for all. Ask the children to listen as you play the first stanza of "You Are My Beloved Child" (Color Pack 27; track 21 on *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022). Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Song Poster) and scissors. Demonstrate how to cut off the strip and then cut apart the rectangles. Have learners glue the rectangles to the page in the same order as the words in the first line of the song. Invite learners to color their posters. Have children run their fingers under the words as they sing this stanza again. Encourage them to teach their families the song as a reminder of God's love.

**EASY
PREP**

Materials needed: copies of Resource Sheet 1, cardboard, construction paper, stickers, scissors, pencils, crayons, tape, drinking straws, play dough, paper cups

2. **Expandable Hands** Children will demonstrate how God's love stretches to include everyone. Distribute accordion-folded construction paper strips and pencils. Have children place one hand on the top fold, having the pinkie finger and the thumb resting on opposite folds, and then trace around this hand with a pencil. Demonstrate how to cut out the handprint, leaving a bit of the fold at the pinkie and the thumb. Help as needed. Use a marker to print "God's love is for everyone" on the top hand of each child's cutout. Invite them to carefully stretch out their strip of handprints and use crayons to decorate. Suggest that they refold their strips and use them to tell their families about God's love for everyone.
3. **Bouquets of Love** Children will make a bouquet of hearts as a gift to proclaim God's love for a friend or family member. Lead learners in the following steps: Trace around the cardboard heart shapes and cut out six construction paper hearts in a variety of sizes. Use crayons and stickers to decorate the hearts. Tape one end of every heart to the tip of a half-straw. Place a small piece of play dough in the bottom of a paper cup. Tape a copy of "Poem for Option 3" from Resource Sheet 1 (Session Resources) to the side of the cup. Stick each straw into the play dough to anchor it in the cup. Discuss to whom they might give their bouquets.

You Are My Beloved Child

You are my beloved child,
hallelujah,
You are my beloved child,
hallelujah.

And my face has smiled on
you, hallelujah,
And my face has smiled on
you, hallelujah.

Then says God to everyone,
hallelujah,
Then says God to everyone,
hallelujah.

You're God's daughter,
you're God's son,
hallelujah!
You're God's daughter,
you're God's son,
hallelujah!

CLOSING

Gather with the children around the worship center. Invite children to stretch their arms out as far as possible as you pray aloud:

Thank you, God, for loving us this much! Thank you for asking us to share your love with everyone we meet. Amen.

Sing "You Are My Beloved Child" (Color Pack 27; track 21 on *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022).

Touch each child lightly on the shoulder as you offer this blessing: "(Name), God has enough love for you and for everyone."

Session Resources

Story Script (Based on Mark 7:24–37)

Directions: Teach the words of the **Refrain** (below). Encourage the children to listen for “The woman said . . .” as their cue to say the refrain.

Jesus wanted to rest. He had been very busy helping people and teaching them how to live in God’s way. Everywhere Jesus went, people followed him and asked for his help. Now he was tired and wanted to rest.

Jesus and his disciples went to the town of Tyre and stopped at a friend’s house to rest. Jesus did not want anyone to know he was there. But a woman came and knelt at Jesus’ feet.

The woman said . . . **Refrain**

Refrain

Jesus, please listen to me!
My daughter is sick and needs to be free!

Jesus said, “I can’t help you. I’m sorry. Please go away.”

But she would not go away. The woman said . . .

Refrain

“I was sent to help some other people,” said Jesus. “I must help them first.”

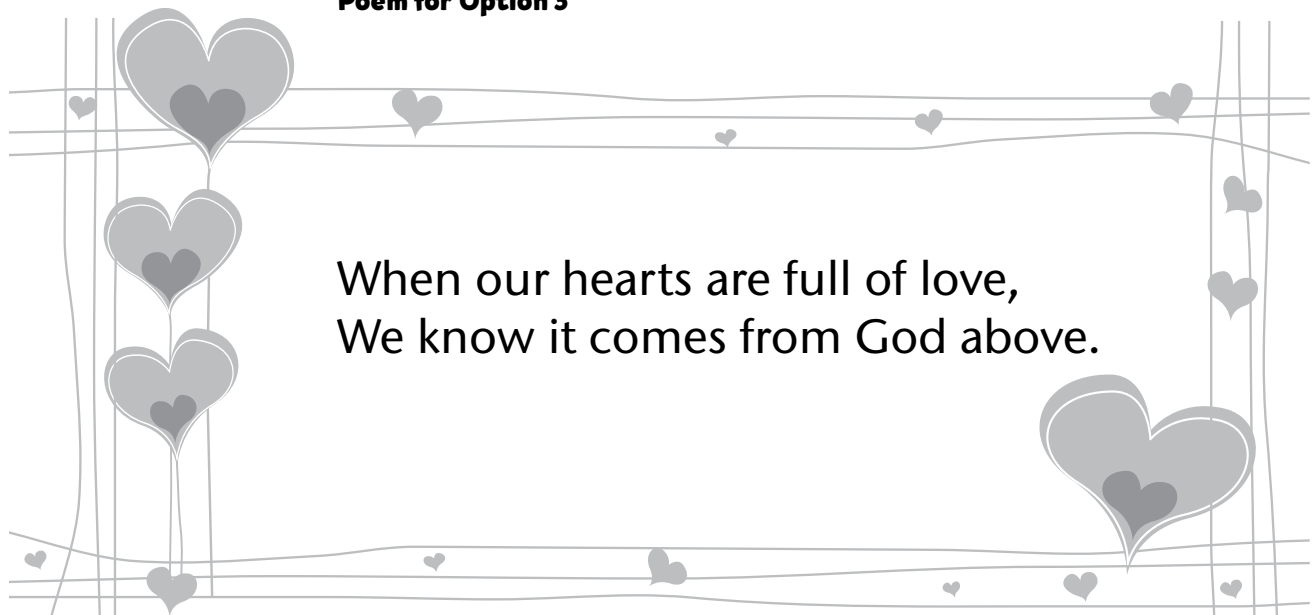
The woman did not give up. “Don’t you have enough love for everyone? Can’t you offer help to people like me who are different from you?” And the woman said . . . **Refrain**

Jesus heard what the woman said. He knew that God’s love was big enough for everyone.

“You are right,” said Jesus. “You are very brave. Go home now. Your daughter will get well.”

The woman went home and found that her daughter was healed!

Poem for Option 3



September 5, 2021
Love for Everyone

Grades (K) 1–2
Resource Sheet 2

Song Poster

You Are My Beloved Child

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hallelujah!	my	are	You	child,	beloved
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Semicontinuous
**Prov. 22:1–2, 8–9,
 22–23**
Ps. 125

Complementary
Isa. 35:4–7a
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**Jas. 2:1–10 (11–13),
 14–17**

Mark 7:24–37

Pray Boldly

Goal for the Session

Drawing from the strong cries of the Syrophenician woman, children will pray boldly for themselves and 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?

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FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 7:24–37

Focus on Your Teaching

Children know what it means to be persistent, although they may not know the word. Their parents or other adults in charge may view this persistence in less flattering terms, such as badgering or pestering. Children may even identify with the woman as Jesus tries to turn her aside, as they recall their requests being minimized too. But their persistence can be turned to a positive turn in their prayer life, whether praying for themselves or others. The woman could speak directly to Jesus and the children can speak to him when they pray.

God, guide me as I seek how to pray persistently and boldly to you, knowing that you always listen. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ green cloth
- ☐ Bible
- ☐ white Christ candle
- ☐ matches or battery-operated candle
- ☐ offering basket
- ☐ Color Pack 1, 2, 27, 28
- ☐ Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022; CD player

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, scissors, construction paper, stapler, markers
- ☐ option 2: Color Pack 2, list of prayer concerns, newsprint, marker
- ☐ option 3: construction paper, pencils, ruler, scissors, markers
- ☐ option 4: newsprint, marker

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, place a bookmark at the Gospel of Mark in the worship table Bible. For option 2 in Responding, get a list of prayer concerns for your congregation and look at your denominational Web site for prayer concerns there.

When the first children arrive, invite them to arrange the worship table with the green cloth, Bible, offering basket, and Christ candle.

When it is time to begin, gather at the worship table. Lead the children in these opening words:

Leader: *Come, Holy Spirit, and give us your power.*

Group: *Come, Holy Spirit, come.*

Explain that the church calendar calls the Sundays between Pentecost and Christ the King Sunday (the Sunday before Advent begins) Ordinary or Common Time. During these months, the church studies how to follow Jesus.

Receive the offering.

Sing “Jesus Loves Me!” (Color Pack 27; track 14 on *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022).

Extinguish the candle.

To introduce the theme of persistence, ask:

- ✠ When have you asked your parents or a teacher over and over to give you something or let you do something?
- ✠ How did they answer?
- ✠ Did you get what you wanted or to do what you wanted?

If children studied with Feasting on the Word summer curriculum, they will recognize the Gospel of Mark, which supplied the focus scriptures for many of those weeks.

Jesus Loves Me!

Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong;
In his love we shall be strong.

Refrain

Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.

Jesus loves me! This I know,
As he loved so long ago,
Taking children on His knee,
Saying, "Let them come to me."

Refrain

Jesus loves me, still today,
Walking with me on my way,
Wanting as a friend to give
Light and love to all who live.

Refrain

EASY
PREP

Explain that asking for something over and over is a form of persistence, when you try again and again to learn something or get something. Today's story is about a woman who kept at Jesus until she got what she wanted.

EXPLORING

Invite a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship table, open it to the bookmark, and read the name of the book. Recall with the group that Mark is one of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) that tell about Jesus' life and work. Then have the child turn to chapter 7.

Tell the story based on Mark 7:24–37 on Resource Sheet 1 (A Bold Woman). Ask:

- ✂ Why did the Syrophenician woman come to Jesus?
- ✂ Why didn't Jesus help her right away?
- ✂ Why do you think Jesus changed his mind and healed her daughter? (*Include the word persistent in the discussion.*)
- ✂ What do you think other people in the house learned about God when this happened?

Show Color Pack 1. Ask:

- ✂ What is different about the people in this picture?

After the children have named a variety of differences, such as age, and size, ask:

- ✂ How are these people alike?

You may get many kinds of answers, from they all have a mouth or they are all looking at the camera. Eventually someone will realize that everyone in the picture, just as each one of them, is loved by God.

Acknowledge that today they can't talk directly to Jesus. Ask:

- ✂ How can we speak or listen to Jesus and God?

After the children answer, show Color Pack 2. Talk together about what they see in the picture. Ask:

- ✂ When do you pray? With your family? Elsewhere?

RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children who can work on their own.

1. **Prayer Litany** To encourage their persistent prayers, children will make prayer journals to use during the week. Provide a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Prayer Journal), scissors, and a sheet of construction paper. They can stack the journal pages in any order and cut front and back covers from construction paper. Help any who need it to stack the covers and pages neatly so the left edges are aligned. Staple the journal. Provide markers to write "Prayer Journal" and the child's name on the cover. Demonstrate how they might use their prayer journal and invite their ideas for using them at home.

If possible, e-mail the prayer litany to the children's families, inviting them to pray it together.

If the group is mostly younger children, fold the construction paper in advance.

You Are My Beloved Child

You are my beloved child,
hallelujah,
You are my beloved child,
hallelujah.

And my face has smiled on
you, hallelujah,
And my face has smiled on
you, hallelujah.

Then says God to everyone,
hallelujah,
Then says God to everyone,
hallelujah.

You're God's daughter,
you're God's son,
hallelujah!

You're God's daughter,
you're God's son,
hallelujah!

2. Prayer Litany The children will practice praying boldly for themselves and others by creating a prayer litany. Look at Color Pack 2 and ask the children when they pray with their families. Show the children the list of prayer concerns from your congregation and denomination. In the case of the congregation, you may wish to talk about groups of people (people who are sick, mourning, traveling, taking care of others) instead of individuals. Have the children select six to eight groups or programs to be part of this litany. Provide at least two options for the response (such as God, hear our prayer; Heal us, God; God, answer our prayer) and have the group select one. Print the selected groups for whom to pray and the response on newsprint. After a moment of silence, pray the prayer litany aloud together.

3. Accordion Cards A visual sign of their prayer is cards the children send to people for whom they are praying. Give each child a 6" x 18" strip of construction paper with one fold about an inch wide. Demonstrate how to fold the paper accordion-style. Give each child a piece of construction paper and a pencil to trace around each hand. They can help each other by tracing around the dominant hands. Cut out the hands and glue one to each end of the accordion strip. Print "God's love is for everyone" on one hand. This will be the front of the card. On the back card, they can write a message for the person who will receive the card. Talk about who would enjoy hearing about God's love and could be given a card.

4. Bidding Prayer The children will practice praying for others in a bidding prayer. Explain that sometimes in worship the worship leader prays a bidding prayer, which means that the leader suggests a prayer concern and then it is quiet for everyone to pray about this concern. For example, a bidding prayer may suggest that we pray for people who are far from home, people who are in the hospital, people who have helped others, or people who are sad. Invite the children to name groups or individuals for whom they want to pray. List their suggestions on newsprint. Then lead the group in a bidding prayer:

God, we bring our worries to you because we know you listen to them.

We pray for people who are sick (pause for the children to pray).

Conclude the prayer with "Amen" and invite the children to repeat "Amen." Talk about how they can continue to pray for these people at home during the week.

CLOSING

Gather at the worship center. Light the Christ candle. Talk about how the children will pray for others and themselves at home during the week.

Sing "You Are My Beloved Child" (Color Pack 28; track 21 on *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022). If this song is new, play it for the children and have them pat their knees in rhythm to the music.

To each child, say, "Thank you for coming. Pray to God boldly this week."

A Bold Woman based on Mark 7:24-30

Jesus had traveled back and forth from one side of the lake to the other. People crowded around him to be healed. When this story begins, Jesus was in the region of Galilee called Tyre. He was looking for a place to rest and be by himself. So he went into a house, but he couldn't hide from people who wanted to be healed. The word spread quickly from one person to the next that the special teacher Jesus was in their village.

One woman who heard that news was an immigrant to the area. She was Greek, and had been born in Syrophenicia. This means she also wasn't Jewish as Jesus and his disciples were. The Jews tried to have nothing to do with anyone who wasn't Jewish, like this woman.

But this Syrophenician woman knew into which house Jesus had gone and she went there. You see, her daughter had a disease that people in those days thought was caused by a demon, an evil spirit. This Syrophenician woman knew that Jesus could heal her daughter if he would come to her house and touch her daughter. Jesus had healed other people of demons, why not her daughter?

So the Syrophenician woman walked boldly into the house where Jesus was. She knelt at Jesus' feet and said, "Please, please, please heal my daughter. She is suffering from a terrible demon. Nothing has helped her. Please, please heal my daughter."

Jesus looked at the woman and knew that she was Greek, not Jewish. "I have to care for and feed my people first, the children of Israel. It isn't right to take what belongs to them and give it to someone else or toss it to the dogs."



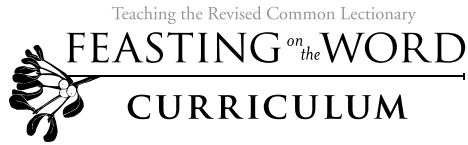
Jesus sounded harsh and uncaring, but that didn't stop the woman at all. She kept looking at Jesus and said, "But even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

Now what was Jesus going to do with the woman's persistence and challenge to him? Everyone in the room had gotten quiet and was waiting to see what Jesus would do.

"What a good answer," said Jesus. "You are right. Go home now because your daughter has been healed."

Immediately, the Syrophenician woman left the house and practically ran to her home. When she got there, she hurried to her daughter's bed. The girl was lying on the bed calmly and quietly. She had been healed.

September 5, 2021
Pray Boldly



Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 2

Prayer Journal



God, I am thankful for . . .

God, I am so sorry that I . . .

**God, please help these
people . . .**

God, I love you because . . .

**God, thank you for sending
Jesus to teach me to pray.
I know that you hear me
when I pray.**

God, I ask you to . . .

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**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?

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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.

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

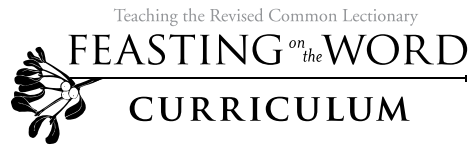
Have learners practice clapping the hands of the individuals on their right and their left simultaneously, like a group high five. Explain that at the end of the closing, they will do this group clap and say "Amen!" at the same time.

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.

September 5, 2021
Ask Boldly



Tweens
Resource Sheet 1

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?		

September 5, 2021
Ask Boldly

Tweens
Resource Sheet 2

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.



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

Breaking Barriers

Goal for the Session

Seeing mercy overcome human boundaries in Mark 7, adults will plan ways to challenge barriers and show mercy.

■ 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

Focus on Your Teaching

In an ever-shrinking world, we have more opportunities to encounter others different from ourselves. Yet, trouble around the globe and in our cities raises fear and suspicion of those who are not like “us.” In response to fear, barriers are erected to keep out the “other” and to protect ourselves. Gated communities, low-income housing sites and high property costs segregate our cities and towns. Private schools, charter schools and public schools serve to separate our children. Many religious communities are segregated. Such realities keep people apart. Today’s session offers adults a chance to recognize human tendencies to erect barriers and respond to Jesus’ model of challenging barriers and showing mercy.

Help me, O God, to open my arms and welcome those who gather to feast on your Word. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ board or newsprint
- ☐ marker
- ☐ map of Palestine in the time of Jesus
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 2
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 1 for September 12, 2021

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: newsprint or board, marker, copies of Resource Sheet 1, pens
- ☐ option 2: newsprint, marker
- ☐ option 3: pens, paper, envelopes, stamps

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if using option 1 in Responding, write the statements for display on a board or newsprint. If using option 3 in Responding, preview the recommended Web sites for Bread for the World and Amnesty International.

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce newcomers. Invite people to name various barriers, either physical or relational, that they regularly encounter, such as climbing stairs to enter a building or joining a particular club or group. Challenge them to list barriers that exist in your congregation or church building. After a number of barriers have been named, discuss ways people break down or avoid barriers. Tell participants they will encounter two stories from Mark 7 in which barriers are overcome.

Say this prayer or one of your choosing:

Holy God, we gather today seeking your good news. Open to us the mysteries of your mercy. Amen.

EXPLORING

Distribute Resource Sheet 2 (Outline of Mark’s Gospel) and have participants read the first two paragraphs. Point out the italicized headings on the outline and where today’s focus scripture is found on it. Encourage participants to keep the sheet to use as a reference.

Direct participants to a map of Palestine in the time of Jesus, either in a study Bible or posted on the wall.

Read aloud Mark 7:24 and 7:31. Have participants locate on the map the cities named in the verses. Identify the predominantly Jewish regions of Galilee and Judea, and the

Obvious barriers existed between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman. She was a Gentile woman from a Phoenician city in Syria—the wrong side of the tracks. According to Jewish purity laws, she should not have access to Jesus.

Most people living during the first century CE viewed illness, physical impairment, and demon possession as consequences of sin. People showing illness or infirmity were often shunned or barred from society.

predominantly Gentile regions of Phoenicia and Decapolis. Explain that Jews and Gentiles were allowed to cross boundaries between these areas. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus traveled throughout these regions teaching and healing.

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Mark 7:24–37. Have the group identify the barriers encountered by the Syrophoenician woman and the deaf man in the two stories. Discuss whether these were physical, social, or religious barriers.

Focus specifically on the story of the Syrophoenician woman in verses 24–30. Invite participants to imagine the woman's feelings as she encountered Jesus. Discuss the clues found in the text that indicate how the women might have felt during the encounter. Ask:

- ✧ What surprises you about Jesus' response?
- ✧ How did the woman challenge the barriers?
- ✧ How was mercy shown?

Call attention to the story of the man who was deaf in verses 31–37. Have a volunteer read the Scripture aloud and invite participants to imagine the man's feelings as he encountered Jesus. Discuss the clues found in the text that indicate how the man felt in his encounter. Ask:

- ✧ How did Jesus' response to the man differ from his response to the Syrophoenician woman?
- ✧ How was mercy shown?
- ✧ When healing the deaf man, Jesus said, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” (v. 34) Who or what is opened in this encounter in addition to the man's hearing?
- ✧ Who or what is opened in the encounter between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman?

To transition to Responding, distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Mark 7:24–37) and have a volunteer read the “So What?” excerpt. Ask:

- ✧ With these words in mind, how does the church, specifically our congregation, break down barriers and show mercy today?

**EASY
PREP**

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

- 1. Challenge Barriers and Show Mercy** This activity helps adults identify their feelings about boundaries between people and encourages them to name ways to challenge barriers and show mercy to others.

Display newsprint with the following prepared statements:

- ✧ How does the excerpt challenge barriers today?
- ✧ How can Christians appropriate these stories into daily living?
- ✧ Name one way you will challenge a barrier and show mercy in the next week.

Distribute pens. Have individuals read the “What?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Encourage them to circle statements with which they agree and to underline statements that seem uncomfortable. Form pairs to discuss their highlighted statements, acknowledging different feelings that arise from the excerpt.

Remaining in pairs, discuss the posted statements. Have individuals write on their resource sheets what they will do to challenge barriers and show mercy in the next week. Suggest that they take the sheet home and display it as a reminder of their commitment.

- 2. Barriers in Our Community** This activity helps adults name barriers in their local community and identify ways their congregation can show mercy. Challenge the group to list barriers to living well that they see within their community; include physical obstructions as well as social barriers between people. Some barriers might include children sleeping in homes without beds, jobless people gathering on street corners, lack of handicapped parking spaces, or steep inclines and stairs challenging building access. Have a volunteer record these on newsprint.

Review the list and identify ones that your congregation already acts on to reduce or change. Encourage people to get involved in these efforts. Then identify ones your congregation does not challenge or address. As a group, select one barrier that participants can challenge or break down. Brainstorm steps to challenge it, create a timeline for putting the steps into place, and agree on who will make sure the steps are taken. Follow up your progress in the next session.

Two groups that provide letter-writing or email campaign information are Bread for the World, www.Bread.org and Amnesty International, www.amnestyusa.org.

- 3. Letter Writing** This activity encourages adults to challenge barriers in their community or to raise their voices concerning national or international barriers using a letter-writing campaign. National and international agencies offer resources for letter-writing campaigns from concerned Christians and others wishing to address barriers across the globe. You may wish to share information about letter-writing campaigns from one of the two agencies listed in the sidebar.

Distribute pens, paper, envelopes, and stamps. As an option, provide e-mail addresses and mail contacts for people to write to express their concerns. Work as a group to develop a basic message that calls attention to the barrier(s) participants have identified in their community or in the world. Have participants prepare letters and envelopes for mailing, or encourage them to send e-mail letters at home.

CLOSING

Have individuals name one action they will take to challenge a barrier or to show God's mercy in their community.

Say the Lord's Prayer in unison.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for September 12, 2021, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

Focus on Mark 7:24–37

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Outline of Mark's Gospel

There are various ways to outline this Gospel. The following is an adapted, abbreviated version highlighting upcoming lectionary texts from Mark in the *Interpretation Bible Commentary* by Lamar Williamson Jr. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983), vii–ix. Upcoming lessons covered are in italics with the dates that they will be discussed in parenthesis. Please keep this sheet and bring it to class while studying these texts.

Mark is concerned with the kind of Messiah Jesus is and with discipleship appropriate to following him. Mark repeatedly insists (1) that Jesus is the Son of Man who must suffer humiliation and death by human hands, (2) that his followers either would not or could not accept Jesus' divinely appointed mission or its implications for their own, and (3) that Jesus challenged his disciples' confusion with clear instruction, stressing self-sacrificial service in Jesus' name and for the gospel's sake.

Prologue Mark 1:1–13

From the Call of the First Disciples to the Plot of Jesus' Opponents

Mark 1:16–3:6

From the Naming of the Twelve to Rejection by His Own People

Mark 3:7–6:6

From the Sending of the Twelve to Misunderstanding by His Disciples

Mark 6:7–8:21

6:7–13	The Sending of the Twelve
6:14–29	The Death of John the Baptist
6:30–44	The Feeding of the Five Thousand
6:45–56	Walking on Water and Healings at Gennesaret
7:1–23	Controversy About Tradition
7:24–37	<i>The Syrophenician Woman and the Deaf-mute of the Decapolis (September 5)</i>
8:1–21	The Feeding of the Four Thousand: "Do You Not Yet Understand?"

Discipleship: The Way of Jesus Mark 8:22–10:52

8:22–26	The Blind Man of Bethsaida
8:27–38	<i>Caesarea Philippi: First Passion Prediction (September 12)</i>
9:2–13	The Transfiguration
9:14–29	The Boy the Disciples Could Not Heal
9:30–37	<i>Capernaum: Second Passion Prediction (September 19)</i>
10:2–16	<i>Teachings About Marriage and About Children (October 3)</i>
10:17–31	<i>Teaching About Riches (October 10)</i>
10:32–45	<i>On the Road: Third Passion Prediction (October 17)</i>
10:46–52	<i>The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus (October 24)</i>

Jesus in Jerusalem Mark 11:1–13:37

11:1–12:37	Entry into Jerusalem and Addressing Questions
12:38–44	<i>Religious Hypocrisy and the Poor Woman's Offering (November 7)</i>
13:1–8	<i>The Temple and the End-time (November 14)</i>
13:9–37	Foretelling Persecution and the Destruction of the Temple

The Passion of Jesus

Mark 14:1–15:47

The Resurrection

Mark 16:1–8

The Longer Ending of Mark Mark 16:9–20