

# sermon study guide

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## Press On: The Faith Test

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### IN - PURSUE RELATIONSHIP

1. When going for an afternoon drive, do you explore or stick to familiar routes? Why?
2. Tell of a time when you had to persevere to achieve your desired result. What did you learn through persevering?

### UP - PURSUE GOD

Read Matthew 15:21-28

3. How would Jesus' accusers from earlier in the chapter (see 15:1) have viewed his trip to the Gentile area of Tyre and Sidon?
4. How did the Canaanite woman exhibit faith in coming to Jesus? How did Jesus test her faith muscles? What was Jesus teaching the disciples? What can we learn about God from this Scripture?

### OUT - PURSUE MISSION

5. Compared to the tough tenacity of the Canaanite woman, how tenacious are you with God? In what areas of your life are you more tenacious than in others?
6. Jesus took His disciples to what the Jews considered forbidden, unclean territory. What might "forbidden" or "unclean" territory or people look like for you? How might God be calling you to break through with God's love and grace?

### THE WORD (NIV)

#### **Matthew 15:21-28**

21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

27 "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

28 Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

#### **For Personal Reflection/Prayer:**

***How can you follow the example of the Canaanite woman as you pray? Commit to praying daily for a person or situation. Set a reminder in your phone or place a sticky note where you'll see it.***

# sermon study summary

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In this digital age our attention span has been conditioned to that of a 30 second commercial or a twitter post. A lifetime commitment of patient endurance to following Jesus Christ is a serious challenge today, but that is what we are called to do (compare the title of Eugene Peterson's book: *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*). God understands this and places faith tests in our path in order to develop our spiritual muscles to endure the days and years ahead of us. These tests are not to fail us but to strengthen us.

At first blush, Matthew 15:21-28 is a troubling story and so unlike the Jesus we have seen throughout the Gospel so far. After confronting religious leaders where Jesus clarifies that uncleanness is not a matter of externals but of the heart (vs 15:1-20), Jesus withdraws to Tyre and Sidon – pagan Gentile cities, despised by Jews. These 'Canaanites' were long time enemies of the Jewish people. Their conflicts spanned centuries. There Jesus and his disciples were approached by a pagan Canaanite woman with a demon possessed daughter.

Jesus' initial responses (vv. 24, 26) appear to reinforce cultural prejudice though quickly it is turned around. The moniker 'great (or 'mega') faith' is given to only two people in the Gospel – this Canaanite woman and a Roman Centurion (Matthew 8:10) - both Gentiles. None amongst the Pharisees, the Jewish people or the disciples is granted that kind of praise. Christ followers need to be mindful that we too do not begin to despise people different from us, mark a sin as too great, and choose to hold back the Gospel from them. This was the faith lesson for His disciples who looked on in this scene.

What about when God is silent? Sometimes God responds to our cries immediately; sometimes they are unanswered and you must wait while your faith is under fire. Will you persevere and cling to God? Will you turn away in disappointment? Only God knows what is at stake when your faith is tested, and who is watching to see the results. When things go wrong what we truly believe about Jesus comes out.

Six times in Matthew people call Jesus the 'Son of David'; all were in need. Here a pagan woman calls Jesus by His Messianic title! She is desperate, at wits end regarding her demon possessed daughter. And Jesus is silent. He wanted His disciples to see that this woman they branded as unclean had 'mega' faith in His eyes. At first blush Jesus appears to respond rudely to her. Yet nowhere else in the Gospels did Jesus show anything but respect to women. Women were counted as disciples and supported Him in His ministry (Luke 8:1-3). The term 'dog' that Jesus used (v. 26) was not the derogatory slur a Jew might use comparing Gentiles to wild, dirty scavengers. Jesus instead used a term equivalent to a domesticated puppy that a Gentile woman would surely understand. He was explaining that He came first to Israel but that would come to Gentiles also.

The woman was tenacious in spite of the seeming obstacles that Jesus put up by his responses. She knew Jesus alone could help her daughter and she hung on through all the obstacles. Jesus drew out her faith to the surface for all to see and her daughter was restored to her. Mega faith is holding on to Jesus and not letting go even when we cannot see the resolution we want to see happen. Press on and endure in your race to the very end; keep hold of His hand.