

INTRODUCTION

We live in a strange world. Someone sent me a list "surprising facts." I must admit I was surprised to learn that:

1. Texas is the only state that is allowed to fly its state flag at the same height as the U.S. flag.
2. One quarter of all the bones in your body are in your feet.
3. The word "kemo sabe" (how Tonto addressed the Lone Ranger) literally means "soggy shrub" in Navajo.
4. Sherlock Holmes never said, "Elementary, my dear Watson."
5. The electric chair was invented by a dentist.
6. A duck's quack is the only sound that doesn't echo.
7. The microwave oven was invented after a researcher walked by a radar tube and a chocolate bar melted in his pocket.

But probably the MOST surprising fact is that Jesus called a desperate woman a dog! In our text today a woman from the area of Canaan comes to Him asking for help and He basically calls her a dog, He calls the Canaanite a canine. In Jesus' time, it was common for Jews to call Gentiles dogs, but it was highly offensive label. It would be like me using the n-word in relation to an African-American. It was insulting. So when Jesus used the d-word we're surprised: We're shocked. We can't believe these words came from the lips of the Savior. But even after being called a dog this woman doesn't give up. That's why I've entitled this message "Dogging Jesus for a miracle."

Matthew 15:21-28. "Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.' 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.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.' The woman came and knelt before him. 'Lord, help me!' she said. He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.' 'Yes, Lord' she said, 'but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour."

This woman was witty. She was skilled skillful in the art of repartee. The word repartee comes from the sport of fencing and it describes a quick answering thrust. In conversation, repartee is when you answer someone with a quick witty response. They say something to you and it's like, "touché" you respond in a clever way. Winston Churchill was a master of repartee. He carried an ongoing friendly feud with Lady Nancy Astor. One night Lady Astor was so exasperated she said, "Mr. Churchill, if you were my husband I'd put poison in your tea." And Churchill immediately said, "And if I were your husband I would gladly drink it." On another occasion Lady Astor said, "Mr. Churchill, you are despicably drunk." He said, "I agree. And you, my lady, are despicably ugly. But in the morning, I will be sober!"

This woman's quick response made a lot of sense to Jesus, but He didn't commend her for her wit, He commended her for her faith.

One of the largest Christian movements in America today is called "Women of Faith." Some featured speakers are Sheila Walsh, Mandisa, and Nicole Johnson, whom I had the privilege of leading to Christ when she was a teenager in Alabama. I think this is a great movement, and I love the label, "Women of Faith." I wonder if the organizers realize the ONLY time Jesus used the words "woman" and "faith" in the same sentence was when He spoke to this Canaanite woman? So as we study this miracle, let's remember \ this unnamed Gentile mother could be called the matron saint of ALL women of faith.

If you want to express the great faith of this mother there are five steps she took in her crisis. We can follow her steps if we want to have a great faith.

1. TURN TO JESUS WHEN YOU'RE DESPERATE

The first thing we see is a desperate mother who seeks out Jesus. The Bible says, "A Canaanite woman from the vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.'" Put yourself in her sandals for a moment. She has a daughter who is suffering. She hears that a Jewish rabbi who can perform miracles is in her town. There are barriers to her, but she takes a risk and goes where she doesn't belong. She was a Gentile and the Jews had no dealings with them. She was a woman and they were men; it was socially unacceptable for a woman to talk to strangers. She crashed the party. One pastor said it would be like us crashing a party and going up to the guest of honor and asking him if he has jumper cables to help us start your car. It was inconvenient and inappropriate, but she was desperate.

Is there anything you need so desperately you won't let anything stand in your way? Who or what do you turn to in your desperation?

I've often said God always meets you at the P.O.T.D. That stands for the Point Of Total Desperation. You've heard of potted plants, well you've got to be a potd person before you seek help. I've used that acrostic so many times people write me and say that they were "potd." God brings us to these points of desperation because He knows some of us are so hardheaded that we will only seek Him in times of desperation. Vance Havner used to say the problem with unanswered prayer is that "the situation is desperate but the saints are not." Are you desperate enough to cry out to Jesus?

2. DON'T STOP PRAYING WHEN GOD IS SILENT

The woman's prayer was simple. She said, "Please have mercy on me and help my daughter who is suffering." The Bible says, "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.'" Even though Jesus was silent and the disciples complained that she was bothering them, she refused to give up. She demonstrated an important aspect of great faith: Persistence. She refused to quit when she didn't receive an immediate answer.

Are you a persistent person or do you give up quickly? Jesus taught us, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7) But those verbs denote continuous action. He literally said, "Ask and keep on asking ... seek and keep on seeking ... knock and keep on knocking." You wouldn't walk up to a closed door and knock once would you? Have you been praying for something for days or weeks and you haven't received an answer yet? Don't quit praying. God rewards persistent praying. Don't give up. Keep praying.

I read a fable once about two frogs who found themselves in a dairy barn. They both accidentally jumped into a can of cream. The first frog swam for a while, but when he realized the inside of the can was too slick to climb out, he finally quit trying and sunk to the bottom of the can. But the other little frog didn't give up. He kept kicking until finally he had churned that cream into a chunk of butter. Then he stood on the butter and jumped out. Which frog are you like?

Jacob wrestled with an angel one night and near morning the angel said, "Let me go." But Jacob said, "I won't let go until you bless me." That's a great lesson about prayer. Sometimes we just need to hold onto God tenaciously until we receive an answer. Don't let go.

Sometimes when I'm tempted to quit, I remember a poem I learned in college. "I want to let go; but I won't let go. There are battles to fight; By day and by night; For God and right—and I'll NEVER let go. I want to let go; but I won't let go. I'm sick, it is true; Worried and blue; and worn through and through; but I won't let go. I want to let go; but I won't let go. I will never yield! What? Lie on the field; and surrender my shield? No, I'll never let go! I want to let go; but I want let go. May this be my song; 'mid legions of wrong; Oh, God keep me strong; that I'll never let go!"

3. WORSHIP GOD EVEN WHEN YOU HAVEN'T RECEIVED THE ANSWER YOU WANT

Finally Jesus answers the woman. But it wasn't the answer she was looking for. He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" Now, lesser people would have heard the words of Jesus and thought, "Okay, so He came for the Israelites and I'm a Canaanite, so I'm not eligible for what this man has. I'm heading home." But she didn't let that stop her. She knelt before Jesus and begged Him for mercy. When you don't receive the answer you're hoping for, do you still kneel before the Lord and worship Him?

I love her prayer. In the last lesson I spoke about the power of a simple, sincere prayer. When Peter was sinking he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Compare that to this woman's prayer. She knelt and simply prayed, "Lord, help me!" Simple prayers are sometimes the best prayers.

It's easy to worship when all your prayers are answered, but praise becomes a sacrifice when you are still waiting on an answer to your prayer. One of my favorite groups is Casting Crowns and they sing a song entitled, "Praise You in this Storm." It describes how you can keep worshipping even when your prayers haven't been answered. The first verse says: I was sure by now, God,

that you would have reached down and wiped our tears away, stepped in and saved the day. But once again, I say, "amen" and it's still raining. As the thunder rolls, I barely hear you whisper through the rain, "I'm with you." And as your mercy falls I raise my hands and praise the God who gives and takes away. The chorus says: And I'll praise you in this storm, and I will lift my hands; For you are who you are no matter where I am; and every tear I've cried you hold in your hand. You never left my side; and though my heart is torn, I will praise you in this storm.

Is there something you really need from God and you haven't gotten the answer you've been looking for? Will you still worship Him? That's a key to great faith.

4. PRACTICE HUMILITY WHEN YOU THINK YOU DESERVE BETTER TREATMENT

So this desperate mother knelt and begged Jesus for mercy and He said, to her, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." This desperate mother was dog-tired of taking care of her suffering daughter and then Jesus had the audacity to compare her to a dog. At that point, most of us would have been insulted and said, "How dare you call me a dog!" I'm out of here and I'm going to sue you for defamation of character! But the Bible records her amazing response. "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." She didn't take offense at His dog reference. She even agreed with it! She said "Yes, Lord." Actually she said, "I'll see your puppy and raise you a yard dog." In other words, there was a word play involved in the original language that we don't see in the English translation. When Jesus said, "We don't give the children's food to the dogs," He used a word for "a puppy." We'd call it a housedog. But when the woman answered Jesus she said, "But even the dogs get the crumbs that fall from the table." She used a different word for dog. Her word meant "a mangy stray." We'd call it a junkyard dog. She was so humble she abased herself even more before the Lord.

Are you a humble person? If you answer, "yes" then you aren't. It's like the guy who was given a button for being the most humble guy in his church. When he wore it they took it away! Instead of asking if you're a humble person let me ask it a different way. Are you easily offended? Do your feelings get hurt quickly? Are you always thinking you deserve better treatment?

How do you react if someone calls you a dog? If you don't growl and the fur on your back doesn't stand up, chances are you're a fairly humble person. We can learn something about humility from dogs. How many of you own a dog? How many of you own a cat? Wrong. You don't own a cat, a cat owns you. Dogs have owners but cats have servants.

We have a dog named Betsy and a cat named Myrtle Mae. Myrtle Mae is a male, but when he was a kitten the vet didn't look closely and said he was a she, that's how he got the name Myrtle Mae. Myrtle Mae never begs to be fed. In fact he'll look at his bowl of cat food and walk away as if to say, "Do you expect me to eat that?"

Meanwhile Betsy isn't too proud to beg. When I'm eating something she will sometimes stand up on her back legs and lay her head sideways on my leg and look at me and blink those big

brown eyes. She has a particular whine that says, "I want some of that." If dogs could talk, do you know what they'd say? "Give me something to eat! Give me something to eat!"

Humility is valuable because it's rare today. It's a lot easier for us to make demands before God than to beg Him for mercy like a dog begging for a crumb.

Isaac Watts wrote a great hymn, "Alas and Did My Savior Bleed." The first line says, "Alas and did my Savior bleed and did my Sovereign die; Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?" Later the word "worm" was considered to be too insulting so it was changed to say, "Would He devote that sacred head for sinners such as I?" And in some hymnals, even "sinner" was considered too offensive and it has been sanitized to "Would He devote that sacred head for someone such as I?" I can imagine the next edition will say, "I don't need that sacred head because I'm a good person." Admit it, without God's grace we are like a lowly worm and you can't get much lower than a worm.

So in addition to being desperate and persistent she was humble. Here's an equation for you who like formulas: DESPERATION + PERSISTENCE + HUMILITY = GREAT FAITH and great faith always leads to great blessings.

5. REALIZE THAT EVEN A CRUMB OF GOD'S GRACE IS ENOUGH

Her reply was, "Yes, Lord" she said "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." Instead of engaging Jesus in a debate about the parameters of His Messiahship she said, "I just want a little crumb because I believe what you have is so powerful that just a little bit will do." That's faith. She realized something we should all learn: Just a tiny amount of God's provision is always more than enough. With God a little is always enough. Another woman believed if she could just touch the hem of His garment she'd be healed. That's a crumb. Jesus said faith the size of a mustard seed can move a mountain—that's smaller than a crumb. Without faith it is impossible to please God. You can do a lot of things in this life without faith. You can get an education, get married, have children, make money and retire and travel. You can do all that without faith. But there is one thing you cannot do without faith and that is to please God.

Moments before Jesus compared her to a dog and now He calls her "woman." That's not a generic term like we use today. It's not like saying, "Woman, go fix my dinner!" Guys if you try that I'll do your funeral. No, when Jesus used, "woman," it was a term of respect. Jesus used it when He addressed His mother from the cross. The best translation would be "Ma'am." Jesus smiled and said, "Ma'am you have great faith." And she had enough faith to believe that her daughter was well at His word. She didn't say, "Well, okay, come on and touch my daughter." She went to Jesus with the faith believing that He could help her daughter, and she left knowing he already had.

Did she convince Jesus or did He already know she would answer that way? I happen to believe He knew what she would say. But this raises a question that maybe you've never thought about, much less answered: Can God be reasoned with? In my Bible, Abraham reasoned with God to find some righteous people in Sodom. Jacob reasoned with God when He wrestled with the

angel. Moses reasoned with God not to kill the rebellious Israelites. And Mary even reasoned with Jesus at the Wedding Feast at Cana. The truth is that God *invites* us to reason with Him. In Isaiah 1:18 we read: "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

But you may still be wondering *why* did Jesus call her a dog? On the surface it sounds as if He is being cruel to this desperate woman. What kind of personality did Jesus have? There is only one place in the New Testament where Jesus says, "Here are two words that describe me." In Matthew 11:29 He said, "I am GENTLE and HUMBLE in heart." So because He is gentle and humble, then He wasn't being rude. There are a couple of reasons why Jesus used the dog reference. First, He was testing this woman. Because Jesus knows our thoughts, He knew she would pass the test. And she passed it with flying colors.

But the main reason Jesus used the d-word was to teach His disciples. Remember, they were there watching and listening to this exchange. The Bible says they were unlearned and ignorant fisherman. They were from Galilee, which was redneck central. We know Peter was a bigot, because even after he was saved he had trouble eating in the home of a Gentile Christian. They came to Jesus and said, "We need to get rid of this whiney woman, she's driving us crazy." And then Jesus used the d-word. Can't you see them in the background giggling and fist bumping? They were saying, "Did you hear the Master? He called her a dog. He really put her in her place! Who let the dog out?"

But then as she demonstrated humility and grace, suddenly Jesus exalts her to a place of honor. Can't you see their jaws drop as Jesus says, "You go girl! Good answer! You have great faith and your request is granted." What we don't read what happened after the woman left. But I suspect Jesus looked at the disciples and said, "When are you guys going to figure out that I am the Savior of the *whole* world?"

CONCLUSION

There are plenty of stories today of people who have a great faith. Shane Hammond lives in Melbourne, Australia. A few years ago his pregnant wife collapsed on their bedroom floor in the middle of the night. He called for an ambulance but it was obvious she was going to give birth before the paramedics arrived. The baby was breech so Shane couldn't deliver it. And he didn't know that the umbilical cord had wrapped around the babies neck and was cutting off the oxygen. When the paramedics arrived they delivered the baby, but the heartbeat was only 40 beats per minute when it should have been 140. As the paramedic pumped oxygen into the baby's mouth, he looked at Shane and shook his head.

Shane had been reading his Bible earlier that day and had read where Jesus said that the faith of a mustard seed could move a mountain. He walked outside and begged God for just a tiny seed of faith to carry him through. He said he felt strength flow through him as he prayed that prayer. He went back inside and the paramedic took him aside and said, "I don't think the little bloke's going to make it." Shane said that was a turning point. He refused to give up. He said to the paramedic, "No, I believe he's going to be fine."

When they arrived at the hospital the doctor said, "When they called in I thought they'd be bringing in a dead baby, but it's a miracle that he's alive." Later that night the doctor told them that it was likely that the baby had suffered brain or organ damage from the lack of oxygen. But once again Shane refused to give up. He said, "We are praying and believing that he will be okay." That night they met with a psychologist who tried to prepare them to handle a child who was mentally handicapped. After their meeting Shane's wife saw that the psychologist had written, Shane's wife saw that the psychologist had written, "This couple is not prepared for failure." Shane smiled when he heard those words and said, "She's right about that."

They continued to pray around the clock. Their son started out in the most critical section of NICU, and they told them it might be weeks before he would leave the hospital. But within five days they took him home and today he's a healthy little boy. Shane writes, "Since that time I have pushed myself to learn as much as possible about the incredible power of faith that saved my son's life. What I have learned about faith has transformed my near bankrupt business into a thriving company. I have seen faith transform children with learning disabilities and sleeping problems into peaceful intelligent happy kids. I truly believe an unwavering faith in God it is the answer to every obstacle we face." (www.shanehammond.com)

If you need a miracle today don't be ashamed to dog Jesus for it. Every crisis has a turning point. In this encounter, it's not what Jesus said that constituted a turning point, it was her persistence that made the difference. Are you at the point of total desperation? Are you willing to start praying and keep on praying and not quit praying until you have an answer? If you'll humble yourself before the Lord you may be a person that Jesus says, "You have great faith."

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes