

— Chapter 4 —
Adding Insult to Injury?
Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman

The Big Picture

A gentile woman pleads with Jesus to cast a demon out of her little daughter. He responds with a metaphor which will teach both her and his listening disciples about the abundant mercy and grace of God. We can learn much from the Syrophoenician woman about how to approach God. Her willingness to throw herself on his mercy and trust in his goodness demonstrated a faith that was commended by Jesus as better than all of Israel's.

Discuss

“Although loud and maybe even inappropriate in her cries, the Syrophoenician woman never came close to arrogance or self-sufficiency. Every word she spoke, every action we see, confirms her humility and total dependence on the mercy of Christ. The Syrophoenician woman beautifully and clearly portrays the first step of faith: admitting helplessness and unworthiness.”

Do you agree with this statement? Why is admitting our helpless and unworthiness necessary to accepting a gift of mercy and grace?

“Our understanding of our helplessness is an integral part of our [ongoing] relationship with him. We must understand that he is the Vine, the Life-giver and Sustainer. Without him, we can accomplish nothing.”

Why is continuing this attitude beyond the moment of our salvation so important to maintaining an honest and healthy relationship with God? How do self-sufficiency and pride get in the way of intimacy with him?

“Jesus commended her faith. He did not commend her persistence. He did not commend her humility. These were only external evidences of her faith. They were not what captured his attention.”

What were the crucial elements of the Syrophoenician woman's faith? Look for clues in how she conducted herself. What does that tell you about what she believed?

Moving Forward

1. Read Matthew 5: 3-4. Who does Jesus say are blessed? In light of the Syrophoenician woman's humble faith, what do you think Jesus meant by “poor in spirit”? (Remember the Laodiceans, who were anything but poor in spirit!) What do you think “those who mourn” were grieving? How do these two verses fit together? How do they give us a template of the necessary ingredients to a saving faith?

2. Abandoning any sense of self-sufficiency continues to be important for those who follow Jesus. What do these verses say to confirm how necessary this is?

John 15:4-5

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

3. In what areas do you struggle to trust God? List some specific ways this is an issue for you. Now think through why you think this way. What does your lack of trust indicate about what you really believe about God, his character, or his intentions toward you?

4. Do the doubts you have about God align with how he reveals himself in Scripture?