



LEADER'S NOTES

For use with the discussion guides drawing on the Sunday messages.

March 6, 2005
Matthew 15:21-28

OVERVIEW

This week we want to “piggy back” on some of James thoughts and explore a little deeper the idea of who is “in” and who is “out.” James highlighted for us how wrong it is to live out our faith in an atmosphere of personal favoritism. But the letter of James is not the only place we see this idea played out. So, let’s take another look.

DISCUSSION

Almost everyone has experienced the cliques of high school life; whether as one who is part of the “in” crowd or one who is on the outside looking in. Reflecting on that is perhaps an easy way to begin exploring the subject of exclusion and inclusion.

As you begin to turn the discussion to the passage, it will be helpful to remind your people of the “distance” that existed in Jesus’ day between Jews and other people. The Jews, in realizing they were God’s “chosen people,” had something of an elitist mentality. Gentiles (non-Jews) would have been referred to as “dogs.” And Gentiles who were not “God-fearers” (that is, who didn’t recognize the God of Israel) were the lowest of the low. The Syrophenician woman we met was a Gentile (this is indicated by noting she is from the area of Tyre and Sidon), but she was also raised “religiously” as a pagan (this we get from the identification “Canaanite”). She has many of the “markings” of someone who should be considered on the outside.

We are not told specifically why the disciples wanted to send her away. Perhaps they were just troubled by her request. Maybe they were just tired and wanted some peace and quiet. It could be that they took some offense at her status and saw her as an “outsider.” In any case, they apparently didn’t warmly welcome her as “part of the group.”

Jesus’ exchange with her is provocative; there’s more here than you will be able to explore in your small group. But don’t lose sight of the “big idea” here; this woman who would have been seen as an outsider is welcomed by Jesus seeing as she comes in faith. Whatever else you might pick up through their exchange, that is one thing you need to note. For all her “externals,” she is, nevertheless, not an outsider. She belongs, because she comes in faith to Jesus.

That has profound implications for all of us. Most of us have a certain “sense” of who really is on the “inside” (with us and Jesus!) and who is probably an “outsider.” We tend to feel certain kinds of people belong, and certain others don’t. But for Jesus, any and all who come to Him in faith belong; all who believe, no matter their externals, are “insiders!”

BIG IDEA

Whether within our congregation or in the community, no one is an outsider who responds in faith to Jesus.



DISCUSSION GUIDE

A small group resource for the church drawing on the Sunday messages.

March 6, 2005
Matthew 15:21-28

A weekly discussion guide designed to aid you to hear the Word, understand what you hear, and take it to heart.

Do you remember what it was like to be in high school? Do you remember the cliques that formed? Who were the “cool” kids? What made someone part of the “in” group?

In Jesus’ day, some saw some as part of the “in” group and others not as well. We get some hints of this in Matthew 15:21-28.

To refer to this woman as a Canaanite is not only to identify her ethnically as non-Jewish but to also tell us of her religious upbringing—she grew up a “practicing pagan.” Why has she come to Jesus?

How did the disciples respond to her? Although we aren’t given any specific reason, what kinds of things might have contributed to their response to her?

What do you think your response would have been to this woman had you been one of the disciples? Why?

Look closely at her response to Jesus in verse 27. What is she saying about herself and her understanding of her relationship with Jesus and His ministry in these words?

In the end, is she included or excluded from intimacy with Jesus and help from His hand? Why?

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