

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Ministry: A Study of Matthew 14–20

STUDY FIVE

Feeding Scraps to a “Dog”

Matthew 15:21–28

Great faith is not an illusion. It is not presumption. It is not wishful thinking. It is an absolute trust in the Lord God to do what we cannot possibly do ourselves. Faith is trusting God to do for me—for His glory and in His time—what I cannot do for myself.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SOME acts look like great faith, but they aren't faith at all. Skipping preparation for a job interview *isn't* great faith. Refusing the best available treatment for an ailment *isn't* great faith. Neglecting to listen to what God has already revealed in His Word *isn't* great faith, and naming and claiming all your desires *CERTAINLY isn't* great faith.

So what is great faith exactly?

Faith begins with knowing the one true God through Jesus Christ. That relationship's foundation is a deep trust in who He is and how He works. That trust then expresses itself as complete dependence and active obedience. Yes, true faith is active. Not passive.

Now, what does great faith look like?

To answer that question, we have a perfect picture in the most unlikely of persons. We don't even know her name. But Matthew preserved her story for us. Jesus Himself marveled at her. Let's take a close look with Pastor Chuck Swindoll at this account to see what great faith looks like and how we today can live with the same faith she did.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Engaging God through His Word requires faith . . . faith that He inspired it, gave it for your good, and still speaks through it today. Faith that its promises are yours to receive. Warnings, yours to heed. Commands, yours to obey. Truths, yours to believe. With those convictions, ask the Holy Spirit to increase your understanding and faith through this remarkable passage.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The Gentile woman in *Matthew 15:21–28* stands in contrast with the Pharisees who had just rejected Jesus and His messianic message. In the eyes of the Jews, a woman from a Gentile region would have been the last person to understand the importance of the Messiah. But . . . unlike the Pharisees . . . *she got it!*

So let's see what she did to gain Jesus' applause and a place in the gospel story.



Observation: Food for Children and Dogs

In Pastor Chuck's book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, he explains the first step in his approach to studying the Bible: “Through observation, we discover what the Bible says. This part of the process is absolutely foundational.”¹ Let's set the foundation with our observations now!

Read *Matthew 15:21–28* a few times. As you do, note the speakers in the passage and the flow of their tone.



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What titles did the Gentile woman use when she addressed Jesus?

Verse 22: _____

Verse 22: _____

Verse 25: _____

Verse 27: _____

Why did Jesus turn away the woman at first (*Matthew 15:24*)?

In *verses 26* and *27*, what four concrete images did Jesus and the woman use in their exchange?

Image one: _____

Image two: _____

Image three: _____

Image four: _____



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What reason did Jesus give for finally granting the woman's request (*Matthew 15:28*)?

This strange conversation had miraculous results! Jesus didn't even move from His location. All He had to do was speak the word and her daughter was healed. *Distance poses no problem for deity!*



Interpretation: The Promises of God for All

When we interpret a passage, we ask broader questions about the text that help us make sense of its deeper meaning in order to learn key theological principles.

Look at your Bible *atlas*. The twin cities of Tyre and Sidon were in a region known as Canaan—where many of Israel's historic enemies dwelled. Jesus' choice to travel there may seem odd, but the Greek verb in *Matthew 15:21* shows Him leaving Galilee to avoid danger from the Pharisees.

What do the four images in the metaphor represent in Jesus' exchange with the woman in *Matthew 15:26–27*? For some guidance, see pages 332–334 in Pastor Chuck's commentary *Insights on Matthew 1–15*.²

Children: _____

Dogs: _____

Bread/Crumbs: _____

Master: _____

Wait . . . did Jesus really just call her a dog? If someone addressed us this way, we'd be insulted! As we already have seen, though, Jesus used a complex metaphor and spoke with nuance we can easily miss. Here's how . . .



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The Greeks had two separate words for “dog.” A *kyōn* was a wild dog with vicious behavior and an unclean nature. A *kynarion*, however, was a more pleasant dog kept as a house pet. This conversation reflected how a family would feed its *kynarion*. Parents would feed their children first. Then, they would give the leftovers to the dog at the end of the meal.

Jesus did not intend to insult the Gentile woman at all! Rather, He used a common image to show how His ministry focused on the Jews first. The woman, however, understood that Gentiles had a share in His promises too. Based on your study, why do you think Jesus handled the situation this way? Feel free to use your *Bible study tools* to help you.²

How did the woman demonstrate great faith that amazed Jesus? Also, what did she believe specifically about Him that is instructive for us today?

She overlooked all those cultural barriers, all the norms that she was raised to observe. The reason is, she had a need that was impossible. . . . And she found Him because she knew what she was unable to do, He was able to handle. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

No one understood Jesus and trusted in Him quite like this Gentile woman. Not the religious leaders who were constantly steeped in the law. Not even the disciples who lived with Jesus and witnessed Him perform miracle after miracle. Having only *heard* about Jesus, she still *believed* that He had the power to heal her tormented daughter. What a woman! What a mother! **What faith!**



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Correlation: The Gentile Woman Compared to the Disciples

We see very little of the disciples in this passage even though Matthew focused on them so closely in the preceding sections. Comparing the disciples' reaction with the woman's responses clues us into Matthew's teaching on faith.

Review the account of Jesus walking on the water in [Matthew 14:25–31](#). How did Matthew contrast the disciples' faith with the woman's faith to teach the meaning of faith (see especially [Matthew 14:31](#) and [15:28](#))?

When you see yourself before God as you truly are, you come bowing, waiting for Him, knowing you don't deserve His attention. When you're broken and contrite, you have no expectations. You make no demands. You expect no favors. You bear no grudges. You have no blame. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Living with Great Faith

This account of the Gentile woman reveals four elements of exercising great faith in Jesus:

1. *Persistence*: Even though Jesus did not respond to her request immediately, the woman asked again and again and again until He answered her.
2. *Humility*: No pride, no entitlement, no arrogance. Such vices would have stopped the woman from recognizing that only Jesus had the power to meet her need.
3. *Focus*: This troubled mother set her mind on a singular objective: finding healing for her daughter.
4. *Confidence*: When Jesus said, “Your request is granted,” she walked away *knowing* that she would return home to find her daughter liberated from her demonic tormentor.



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The cords of these four elements weave together to create a rope of great faith. Which of these threads needs to be strengthened in your life right now? What can you do to strengthen that thread?

What prayer request has burdened your heart lately? How can you offer this prayer to God with more persistence, humility, focus, and confidence?

For faith to be great, you must persist in it. Persist in the request. Ask it over and over and don't back down. The Lord loved the persistence of the Gentile woman.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What an incredible example of great faith! The Gentile woman had heard of Jesus and knew of His power and decided to stop at nothing until He healed her daughter. If the *least* likely person in Jesus' culture could demonstrate such powerful faith, what's stopping us?



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A FINAL PRAYER

As you conclude your study, offer to God this prayer from Pastor Chuck:

Help me, Father, not to give up so quickly but to persist. Guard me from the slimy ooze of indefiniteness. Enable me to focus on the need and to keep it before You. May I do so with humility and with confidence. May I not waver, so that I might be known as one with great faith. I bring this to You, to provide the healing, the hope, the recovery, the relief, the answer. I leave it with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 80.
2. Other tools we recommend are a whole-Bible commentary, such as the two-volume *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Pastor Chuck's favorite Bible dictionary is the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. A variety of versions of the Bible are available at BibleGateway.com, and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at netbible.org.

