

Did you hear the Texas tall tale about the teacher who was helping one of her kindergarten students put on his cowboy boots? ... He asked for help... and she could see why. ... Even with her pulling and him pushing... the little boots still didn't want to go on. ... By the time they got the second boot on... she had worked up a sweat. ... She almost cried when the little boy said... "*Teacher, they're on the wrong feet.*" ... She looked... and sure enough... they were.

It wasn't any easier pulling the boots off... than it was putting them on. ... She managed to keep her cool... as together they worked to get the boots back on... this time on the right feet. He then announced... "*These aren't my boots.*" ... She bit her tongue rather than get right in his face and scream... "*Why didn't you say so?*"

Once again... she struggled to help him pull the ill-fitting boots off his little feet. ... No sooner had they gotten the boots off when he said... "*They're my brother's boots. My mom made me wear 'em.*" ... Now she didn't know if she should laugh... or cry... but she mustered up what grace and courage she had left... to wrestle the boots on his feet again.

Helping him into his coat... she asked... "*Now, where are your mittens?*" He said... "*I stuffed 'em in the toes of my boots.*"

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God may have been wanting to develop patience in that teacher. ... God often uses difficult challenges in our lives to make us grow... doesn't He? We often need to be stretched... beyond what we think that we are capable of... so that God can use us. ... Are you willing to be stretched?

Could you ever pray the way Sir Francis Drake prayed?

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new Earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love."

—Sir Francis Drake, explorer and naval pioneer during the Elizabethan era

The point that our passage in Matthew today makes... is that Christ **will** do this to His followers. ... Are you willing to be stretched?

In our passage last week... we saw that Jesus began to stretch His disciples on the matter of purity. He taught these men who had been indoctrinated since birth about purity... that you actually are **NOT** pure because of the things that you eat. This must have rocked their souls! ... We know that Peter still had to struggle with this concept... because in Acts chapter 10... God had to give Him a vision of a sheet coming down out of heaven... which had unclean animals on it... and a voice telling Peter to take and eat. When Peter refused... the voice out of heaven said... "*What God has made clean... do not call unclean...*"

In our passage today... as we continue in Matthew... Jesus persists to stretch His disciples. ... Their lesson about purity was not yet finished... it needed an even stronger impact. They needed to be rocked even harder.

It is important that we have this perspective... as we read a passage from Matthew that has **confused** a lot of readers of Matthew's Gospel. ... Without understanding that this is an extended training mission for His disciples... the behavior of Jesus will surprise you. You will see Him as ...unloving ...without compassion ...and down-right rude.

Matthew 15:21

Why would Jesus walk from Gennesaret to Tyre and then from Tyre up to Sidon? It is thirty-five miles from Gennesaret to Tyre and twenty-five miles from Tyre to Sidon. That's a long way to walk. ... Why walk? ...And why walk there?

The distance is not as shocking as the destination itself. Tyre and Sidon? That's Gentile territory. What's Jesus doing out there and up there? Why is Jesus leaving the promised land for "paganland"? ... What is the Son of Abraham/the Son of David (the Jewish Messiah) doing there?

Several of the commentaries point out that "Jesus had recently withdrawn from Israel ideologically (by withdrawing His offer of the Kingdom to that generation) so now He ... withdraws geographically." But I think it is much more than that. Jesus is on a short-term missions trip. He is getting His disciples ready – BEFORE He gives them the Great Commission. This is an exploratory... a scouting... mission trip. ... Mike... Josh... and Rick took two or three of those to Colombia... before the property was purchased and Colombia Grace Foundation was launched. ... Last Spring Derek to one to Colombia to prepare for future mission trips with our youth.

Christ is stretching His disciples... and getting them ready for the Great Commission that He will later give them.

What a great place for Jesus to take these men. There was something symbolic and prophetic in Jesus' deliberate move to this territory. ... They had left a small Jewish inland lake... and gone to a place where the sea was a highway to the world. Tyre and Sidon had a history of seafaring... commerce... and colonization. It was the perfect setting to suggest that there was a vast world beyond them... that needs the Gospel.

But someone approached Jesus that would perfectly further His lesson – a Gentile... woman! ... When the Gospel writer Mark tells this same story... in Mark 7:26... he refers to this woman as a “Syrophoenician woman.” ... That is the more common way to refer to a woman from that region during Jesus' day. ... But Matthew does not use that term. ... He used a more repugnant term for her. ... Matthew used an Old Testament way of describing her race and her religion. Matthew refers to her as a “Canaanite woman.”

Now draw back on your Old Testament knowledge. What does the word “Canaanite” conjure up in your mind...? ... They were the bad guys in the Old Testament! These guys and gals are Israel's enemies!

She was a member of the accursed race... whom God commanded Joshua to exterminate... when the Hebrews entered the promised land. They were way outside the covenant God had established with the Jews.

Matthew's choice of using the word “Canaanite” instead of the more common designation of “Syrophoenician” like Mark does... shows us what Matthew wanted us to think. ... Jesus is stretching His men. Any good Jew... of proper upbringing would be on edge – at the mention of a Canaanite woman.

She was a Canaanite. That's pretty bad. Stay away from her... Jesus. ... Ah... but she's a woman too. ... Jewish men were not to associate with women... any woman who was not their wife or mother. ... And Jewish rabbis were never to associate with Gentile sinners. ... Remember how flabbergasted the disciples were when Jesus talked with the woman at the well... (a Samaritan woman)... in John 4? Well... this is a *Canaanite* woman!

We are going to read now... how she came to Jesus... and fell at his feet crying... *'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.'* ... But Jesus will not answer her straight away... and she kept crying out to Him. ... Eventually His disciples urged Him to send her away... considering her to be a nuisance. ...Jesus then spoke and said, *'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.'* Initially... this all seems rather rude and inconsiderate behavior for Jesus.

Matthew 15:22-28

Unlike His response within the boundaries of the Jewish territories... Jesus did not answer her. It seems that he might even have been avoiding her. Why? Wasn't her plight as important as the plight of a Jewish woman? Wasn't her anguish just as evident? ... Nevertheless... He refused to react to the woman's troubles. Apparently... her incessant shouting began to bother the disciples. They asked Jesus to send her away. They not only tried to avoid her... as Jesus did... but they wanted the annoying woman to be sent away.

But I would like for you to acknowledge something here. Jesus does not send her away. That would have been expected of Him. But that would also have been an uncaring and unloving thing for Him to do. ... And (most notably) He doesn't.

When she approached Him as "Son of David"... she was definitely putting herself on Jewish ground... and this... she could not do... because she was a Canaanite. ... Jesus remained silent.

Now... of course... Jesus knew her heart. This title revealed her faith in Him as the Messiah of God... because "Son of David" was a name for the Messiah. ... But Jesus stayed silent. He was not only stretching His disciples... He was also stretching her faith... as well. His silence encouraged her to persist... an important element of faith.

Matthew 15:24

The disciples soon tired of her persistence. "Send her away," they said. A short while before... they had said... "Send the multitude away" (14:15). That was their solution to a problem. ... It was not His.

The fact that He did not send her away spoke volumes about His compassion for the poor soul. It evidently spoke to her... for she persisted in her pleas. The Lord was moved by her determination... but He put her to the test... and a very severe test it was. ... His first words were chilling enough. "*But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*"

"*Lord, help me!*" was her next plea... and this time she avoided any messianic titles. ... This time... she simply came as a sinner needing help... and she offered no argument to Christ's statement that He only came to the Jews. ... It was then... that Jesus called her a "dog"! ... Can this get any worse...? ...(any more insulting?)

Matthew 15:26

What is He talking about? ... Well... **she** knows what He's talking about. Here "*the children*" (the children of God) symbolizes "Israel" and the "*dogs*" the Gentiles.

So Jesus is dealing with a Gentile "dog." But interestingly here Jesus doesn't use the common slur word "dog," (Kuon)... referring to those "wild, homeless scavenger" dogs one would have found on the streets of Palestine. ... We saw a lot of those roaming the streets in Indonesia. Its common in 3rd world countries. These dogs are not like any of the dogs we see here in Central Oregon. They are mangy... sickly... with a far-off look in their eye... without any bond... love... and affection for humans. ... But Jesus did not use the word for that kind of dog... (Kuon). ... Instead He uses the word for a "pet house dog" (kunarion).

Well, you might say, "Big deal. That's not much better. Messiah or no Messiah, He shouldn't go around calling women 'dogs' or any other animal. Most women don't appreciate that." But He is not name-calling. And she gets that. She gets the reference to her. And she gets His point. It's a loaded theological point. And rather than pushing her away – it actually draws her further in. ... And so she does just that - She sticks around.

Here is what I think she understood: Jesus is willing to let the dogs into the house. He is willing to call Gentiles “house dogs.” He is willing to let these dogs eat from the messianic table in the house of David. He is willing to let Jews and Gentiles live and dine under the same roof.

All this is quite revolutionary... and she knows it. So when Jesus opens that door just a crack... she pushes her way in. She will beg like a dog and even eat like a dog. But the Master of the house, by the end of the story, is very willing to accept her—a Canaanite woman!—as a daughter of Abraham, as a “child” of God.

Jesus was not playing games with the woman, nor was He trying to make the situation more difficult. He was drawing out of her a growing response of faith... while slowly bringing change to His disciples... as well. Jesus was using the traditional thought patterns each of His disciples had deeply ingrained in them... and allowing this woman to challenge them. ... What better way was there for all to be so greatly impacted...!

She immediately seized on His illustration about the children's bread, *which was exactly what He wanted her to do.*

Matthew 15:27

We may paraphrase her reply: "*It is true that we Gentiles do not sit at the table as children and eat the bread. But even the pet dogs under the table can eat some of the crumbs!*" What a tremendous testimony of faith!

We have to notice... and admire the persistent faith of this woman. She acted just like Jacob in the account that we read in Genesis 32... when he

wrestled with the angel of the Lord... on the night before he was reunited with his brother Esau. ... Jacob was clinging desperately to God and saying... *“I will not let you go until you bless me!”* ... This woman did the same thing.

This is a story of persistence. In verse 22 she comes to Jesus... crying out... *“Help!”* ... In verse 23a Jesus is silent... (but the silence of God doesn't mean He is uncaring or unconcerned... just ask Job). ... In verse 23b the disciples are indignant and/or annoyed—*“Will you get rid of her? Stop all this screaming!”* ... In verse 24 Jesus speaks to her... *“I can't help you. Sorry, it's just not in the plan. You're right—I'm the Son of David. I'm the king of the Jews, not the Gentiles. I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”*

But in verse 25 she persists. ... She fights through the disciples' annoyance and Jesus' seeming reluctance. ... Down she goes on her knees... on all fours... and she looks up at the Master and begs. ... In verse 26 Jesus says, *“Sorry, it's just not right to give you the food that's only for them. I can't take the Jewish messianic feast and give it to Gentiles.”* ... Here Jesus seems firm in his theological position. You can hear the disciples saying, *“Amen. Preach it, Lord. What are we doing here with her? Let's go home.”*

But she won't give up. She'll wrestle with the angel of the Lord until he blesses her. She'll knock on that door until the owner gets up and lets her in. *“Yes, Lord,”* she says, *“yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table”* (v. 27).

Martin Luther wrote about this woman's persistence:

How can Christ get out of this?" Well, he can't. He doesn't want to. He never really wanted to. He came to Paganland for pagans. He'll not feed her crumbs. He'll push the whole fatted calf onto the floor. "O woman, feast! It's all yours! Great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire."

Matthew 15:28

Jesus stretched everyone's faith. And there is plenty here for our own faith to be stretched as well. ... Are you willing to be stretched? ... Maybe there are some things going on in your life right now... through which God wants you to have your faith stretched.

Why not begin by examining your persistence? Perhaps God has seemed silent... as an effort to increase this vital part of faith in you. Persistent faith honors Him. Jacob... Job... and this Canaanite woman all testify to this.

Now... let's look closer at this woman in our passage and see what elements of faith we need to be persistent with. ... There are five things for us to notice.

#1. - She recognized His identity ('Son of David')... #2. She recognized His position, ('Lord')... #3. – She recognized her own undeserving nature, ('have mercy on me')... #4. She recognized her utter dependency on Him ('Lord help me')... and #5. She recognized His sovereignty (His ability to give to whomever He willed) ... ('even dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table').

We can be certain that Jesus knew exactly what He was doing and what the woman's need was. ... We can also be certain that He helped her when He was ready to do so — not a moment earlier or a second later.

From her... we learn an extremely valuable lesson. Persistent pleading with Jesus results in His reply... but we must be patient as we wait for Him to move in our lives and... most of all... be willing to accept the answer that He provides. ... Both His action and His timing are without flaw. ... All of us are therefore subject to the Lord's perfect will and... as His faithful followers... we should be willing to wait for His healing touch on our lives.

Recognizing who Jesus is... what He does... our utter dependency on Him... and our submission to His sovereign will... are the essential components of faith. Has God ever needed to stretch your faith...? Let me tell you... that He loves you enough... that He will.

But... let's get back to the perspective of Jesus' discipleship training. ... This whole narrative makes more sense when we consider how the narrative is playing out from the perspective of the disciples. The disciples' world had just been rocked when Jesus turned their thinking upside down about what makes someone clean.

Now He takes them into Gentile territory... a place filled with unclean people according to the standard Jewish view. Many Jews would have felt compelled to send this Canaanite woman away... yet this whole story... and the story we will look at next... is intended to be a reflection of the reality that Jesus' plan involved much more than what the disciples were thinking.

Messiah's salvation would spread far beyond Israel to the ends of the earth... an idea that may have been shocking to these 12 Jewish disciples. Through His words and demeanor... Jesus was subverting the standard

Jewish view of the Gentiles. ... According to Jews... the Gentiles had no right to the children's bread... for they were "dogs." ... Jesus was changing this well-ingrained mind-set.

Matthew 15:29

Matthew says that Jesus moved on from there and walked along the Sea of Galilee. Mark's gospel makes it clear that he traveled across Phoenicia and down along the eastern shore of the sea in an area known as the Decapolis, or the Ten Cities (Mark 7:31). Jesus did not return to the Jewish-controlled region of Galilee, but remained in Gentile territory. Somewhere on the east side of the sea, he walked up a small mountain and sat down to teach.

Matthew 15:30-31

The reactions were the same as they were in the cities of Galilee. The crowd was stunned by Jesus' miraculous ability to heal. Those who could not speak were now speaking plainly (Mark 7:32-37). Those who could not walk were now leaping for joy. Those who could not see were now able to look upon the face of their healer. They could now see God's creation. Unlike the Pharisees, who believed that Jesus healed others by the powers of Beelzebul, these Gentile people recognized that the Almighty God of Israel was the one to be credited for the miraculous healings they experienced.

We cannot help but marvel at the contrast between these Gentiles... and the Jewish leaders... who knew the Old Testament Scriptures. The

Gentiles glorified Israel's God... but the Jewish leaders said that Jesus was in league with Satan. ... Our Lord's miracles did not cause the Jewish cities to repent... yet the Gentiles believed in Him. ... The very miracles that He performed should have convinced the Jews that He was the Messiah.

Jesus was doing the same things in Gentile territory that He did among the Jews... and the disciples were taking it all in. Their perspective was challenged... and ours should be as well.

Do we need some stretching...? Are you willing to be stretched...? (LISTEN!) God's worldwide mission ought to affect everything we do. ... We do not exist as a church... for those of us who are already here. ... We exist for the ones who are not among us yet. ... We exist to go and give and send people into our neighborhoods... and to the nations. ... Our task is to make disciples... and to multiply churches among the peoples of the world. This mind-set should be in our spiritual DNA... for we want the peoples to praise our God.

Matthew 15:32-33

OK... Now I must confess to you that I have to be real careful here. ... It would be very easy for me to criticize Jesus' disciples here. They had already seen Jesus feed a crowd of 5,000 with two fish and five loaves of bread. We just read about it... one chapter previously... in Matthew. How could they be so dense? "*Common, Dummies! How could you so easily forget...?*" ... But then I realize my own forgetfulness... to the miracles God has performed in and around my life. ... Whenever I face a new

crisis... all thought of God's provision... and His loving tender care... has vanished. *"This is awful! I'm done-in. There is no way for me to overcome **this** difficulty..."* ... Aren't we all as forgetful. Why then are we so surprised when we see Jesus' disciples do the same thing you and I do... again and again...?

Are you willing to be stretched...? Count your many blessings... name them one by one... Do this on a regular basis with a thankful heart. Remember what He has already done... so that you will be ready for your next challenge.

Matthew 15:34-38

The procedure of Jesus... (just like the feeding of the 5,000 in the chapter before)... was once again to 'Give thanks'... in acknowledgement of His dependency upon His Father... and the complete sufficiency of the Father... and then to act on the assumption that His Father was going to act... Jesus broke and distributed the bread.

Are you willing to be stretched...? ... (LISTEN) The loaves and fish did not multiply in a huge pile in front of Him... and only then would He begin to distribute it. ... In both cases... it was in the act of stepping out in the assurance of his Father's working... and distributing the food... that the multiplication process took place.

There is an important principle of spiritual life involved here. We do not prove the working and sufficiency of God outside of '... the obedience that comes from faith'. ... We might agree with the theory of God's willingness

and sufficiency to interfere in our affairs and circumstances... but we will not know the reality of it... without going out on the limb of obedience. This was a demonstration to His disciples of the principles by which they are to live... (and us... as well) ... but we are so slow to learn it!

One of several differences that we see in this feeding of the masses from the last chapter's example... is the term that is used for "baskets" that they filled with left-overs.

At the end of the feeding of the five thousand in chapter 14... the disciples gathered "twelve baskets full" of leftovers. ... In Matthew 14:20 the Greek word is "*kophinos*"... which signifies a small wicker basket in which a traveling Jew would have kept his food. (It was a lunch basket) ... But here in Matthew 15:37... the disciples gathered "seven baskets full" of left overs... and the word is *spuris*... which signifies a large "platted and woven" basket... in which a Gentile would stored their belongings. ... This same word... (*spuris*) was used to refer to the kind of basket in which the Christians of Damascus lowered Paul down over the wall in Acts 9:25. It is a much larger basket. ... The left overs of the second feeding was far more!

An even greater provision was made for the Gentiles... than was made for the Jews. ... This ministry to the Gentiles was for the disciples to see... and to have a foretaste of the good things to come that God has for all the nations.

A tiny, almost imperceptible flaw led to tragedy on flight of United Air 232 from Denver to Chicago on July 19, 1989. The fan disk in the DC-10's rear engine exploded, severing all three hydraulic lines, a highly improbable

event—a billion-to-one chance. An investigation later discovered that the titanium ingot used to manufacture the fan disk had a tiny imperfection that had weakened to the breaking point. It took eighteen years and 15,503 takeoffs and landings to discover the problem. A jumbo jet with no hydraulics at 37,000 feet all but guaranteed a horrendous death for the 300 people on board, simply because a microscopically small bubble of nitrogen had not completely dissolved in the titanium ingot. The bubble was the tiny cause of a huge effect. Because of the crew's extraordinary skill, the aircraft was able to land, and 188 of the 300 passengers survived.

Flaws in our core are like that small nitrogen bubble. They may not show up for a long time, but the mounting pressures of life find that point of imperfection. Over the course of time, a metaphorical nitrogen bubble does its work eroding the integrity of our personal core. While a blind spot is something others see that we do not, a hidden area is something no one sees without intentional effort.

This is one reason self-examination and self-awareness are so important. We need to look at ourselves carefully to find those nitrogen bubbles that often show up at the worst possible times.

Does your faith need to be stretched...? Are you willing to be stretched...?