



Did you hear about the man in the Peruvian air force who survived a 5000 foot free fall with a tangled parachute? Not only did he survive, but he didn't have a single broken bone on his body.<sup>1</sup> This is not the first time such a miracle as this has happened, but that's not as crazy as this guy who actually jumped out of an airplane [without a parachute](#)! It is absolutely unnerving to watch him hang by one hand dangling thousands of feet in the air.

I show this to you because this is how many people define faith. For them, faith is a leap in the dark. Faith is the difference between what they know to be true and what they hope is true. In other words, faith cannot be proven--it can only be tested. And when I take this leap of faith, I can't be sure how it will turn out. Things might go the way I want them to or they may not. My leap of faith might bring success or it might lead to failure. I can't be sure, that's why it is called faith.

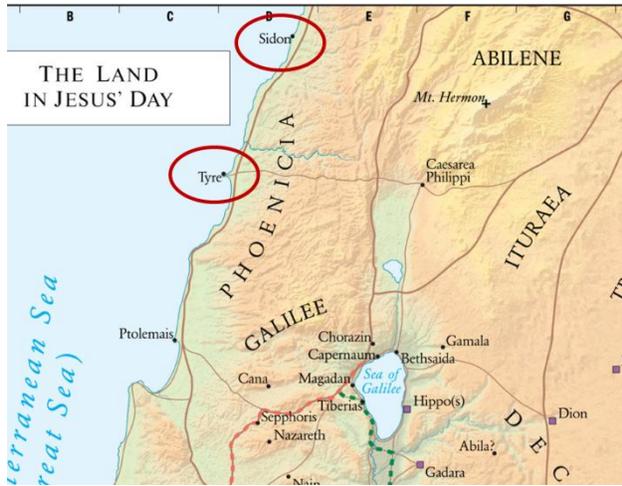
But this is not at all how the Bible defines faith. Hebrews 11:1 is one of the most succinct definitions of faith in all of Scripture. *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* Most people never associate these two words with faith--assurance and conviction. What the writer is saying is that faith is a certain faith. Faith has assurance attached to it. Faith is never a leap in the dark but rather a certain conviction. This morning we will be looking at a mother who had not just faith but great faith. And this title was given to her by Jesus himself. We will be pulling eight principles of a mother of faith from her story.

*And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son*

of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” 23 But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” 24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” 26 And he answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” 27 She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” 28 Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

### 1. Her background did not matter.

Many of the people whom Jesus encountered are not given a name and the same is true of this



woman. But we do know her background. She was a pagan from the northern district of Tyre and Sidon. These are two town on the coast of the Mediterranean north of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus spent most of his ministry. When Mark told this story he called her a Syrophenician woman but Matthew added the fact that she was a Canaanite. Canaanites were full blown pagans and ancient enemies of the Jews. They were outside of God's covenant people. This fact plays prominently in the story.

If you recall, Rahab was also a Canaanite living in Jericho. She was also outside of God's covenant. More than that, she was a prostitute. By birth by profession and by lifestyle, Rahab was the furthest thing from the God of the Israelites. Yet despite her background, she became the first recorded gentile convert in all of Scripture. Rahab was saved by her faith in the Lord and so too this unnamed woman was saved by her great faith in Christ.

So moms, this story is reminding you that your personal background does not matter. Some of you were raised in Christian homes and were given the benefit of good parenting and the Lord has allowed you to live a life free from some really bad choices. Others of you do not have backgrounds quite as neat and clean. Maybe you were more like Rahab or more like the woman in this story. Think about your life five, ten or twenty years ago. Could you imagine then what your life has become through your ongoing faith in Christ? Don't you rejoice at how God has transformed your life? Like I often say, "It doesn't matter where you are at. It only matters where you are going."

We have all made mistakes and bad choices in life. Some of these choices have led to some damaging effects of sin. But it doesn't matter where you have been or even where you are at right now. Neither Rahab nor this woman had to clean up their life before they had faith. As Paul said in Romans 5:8. *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Jesus did not die for you after you were free from sin. That would have been impossible. Jesus considered all of your sin, past present and future and still decided to sacrifice himself for

you. While you were still a sinner. So moms, your background does not matter to Jesus. He is only interested in how you respond to him today and tomorrow.

## **2. She was not a people pleaser.**

This was especially true when you consider the context of this story. This chapter began with Jesus ministering around the area of Galilee, as he usually did, and picks up in verse one. *Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat."* Jesus proceeded to call these people commandment breakers and hypocrites. He quoted from Isaiah and said, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

I love how Jesus' disciples responded to this brow beating. *Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?"* Think about how this is dripping with irony. First, the disciples ask Jesus, "Do you know...?" Now it doesn't matter what follows after those words, does it? How can anyone dare ask Jesus, "Do you know?" Does Jesus not know everything? This is a good reminder for us, because we are prone to ask a similar question. When life seems to get tough, our prayers tend to sound something like this. "Lord, don't you know how this person is treating me? Why did you allow this to happen? Don't you know how hard it is on me?" Now I am all for pouring out your heart to the Lord, but we should be careful about such things.

But the larger problem with the disciples was the fact that they were worried about the reaction from the Pharisees. They were people pleasers. They didn't want to ruffle the feathers of the Pharisees. Moms, how many of your decisions are based on trying to please those around you? By the very nature of being a mom, you will be tempted to compare your children and your home to others moms. How are they doing in school compared to other kids? How is my little girls doing in sports or dance or music compared to the other girls? Is my little guy faster or stronger than his friends? Is my house decorated as nicely as the other moms? Guys are always labeled as being competitive, but I think moms are just as competitive about their families and jobs as mothers. The green monster of envy and jealousy can creep up on moms faster than your toddler can spill his milk.



Ann Schleper is a member of the US Woman's hockey team. They are always very competitive and usually play for the gold medal against Canada--and they usually lose that match. In the 2014 gold medal game, US was up by 2 goals with 3 1/2 minutes remaining but ended up losing the game. To this day, they still are not sure how everything fell apart they way it did.

Ann is also a committed believer. She writes "AO1" on her hockey stick--"audience of one." Even in bitter defeat, she wants to be chiefly concerned about one person--the Lord Jesus Christ. She does now want to be a people pleaser on or off the ice.

But the woman in our story feared no man. Did you notice how the disciples reacted? *And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us."* Wow, nice guys, weren't they? "Hey Jesus, get rid of this chick. She is really getting on our nerves." But she was fearless in the midst of their persecution. She did not fear man. She was not a people pleaser. That is such an important goal for every mom.

### **3. She loved her daughter.**

This almost goes without saying, but it should be stated. This mom would not have asked Jesus for help if she did not have a deep love for her daughter. What mom has not set up half the night or more with a sick child? It just what moms do. Dad do it too, of course, but we don't tend to be as compassionate as the moms. A sick child tends to want mommy when they don't feel good.

### **4. She knew Jesus.**

This mother cried out to Jesus, *"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.* She knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the descendant of King David. How did this pagan woman from a Gentile town know who Jesus was but the Jews who listened to Jesus and followed him did not? That's a question that we will not be able to answer until eternity, but the Bible peppers stories like this throughout its pages.

There is a term called "redemptive history" which helps explain this. Redemptive history traces the God's redemptive plan through human history. We know that out of all of the people on the earth, God chose Abraham, a descendant of Shem. Why didn't God choose one of the descendants of Ham or Japheth? Why were the Semites favored with God's covenant and not other races? Again, these are questions that do not have answers in this life but the point is that God was laying out his plan of redemption one piece at a time. We know that his ultimate plan was for Jesus to be born as a Jew and as a descendant of David. We know that Abraham was chosen to be a blessing for what reason? So that he could in turn be a blessing to all nations. But even with all of this focus on the Jews in the Old Testament, God sent clear signals that his redemption was for every tribe, nation, people and language.

This truth almost got Jesus killed early in his public ministry.

*25But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, 26and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." 28When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30But passing through their midst, he went away. (Luke 4:25-30)*

What we can say is that in God's sovereign plan, in his redemptive plan, he allowed this Canaanite mother to learn about Jesus. Her hometown was only 20 miles from the region of Galilee so news about Jesus could have easily spread north. Regardless, she knew who Jesus was and more importantly, she believed what she had heard. She did not have the religious baggage that the Pharisees were carrying but instead had a simple, child like faith.

She believed that Jesus could heal. Moms, do you believe that Jesus can heal? Do you believe that Jesus has sovereign power over all things? Unless you do, you will struggle immensely as a mother. Jesus can and does heal but that does not mean that he always will heal. BJ Higgins is one example of this. BJ was an extraordinary kid who, as a preteen, spent lots of time studying the Bible and walking with the Lord. You can see his level of spiritual maturity in a portion of a letter he wrote to a friend when he was 14 years old.

"Love is not just an emotion, as the world sees it. It is action. While admittedly it does have emotion involved with it, it is not as unstable or changeable as emotions are. Affections come and go, grow and fade, but love does not. It is constant because it is more than an emotion; it is more of a constant state of selflessness that produces action."<sup>2</sup>

That same year BJ went on his first mission trip to Peru and while he was there, he wrote this in his journal.

"Living is all for Christ and entails many trials and persecution, and is better for those around you, but dying and going to be the Lord is better for yourself. We need to live with courage and character worthy of citizens of heaven, fight boldly in this spiritual war we are immersed in, and take our suffering boldly, for it is a pleasure to suffer for Christ."<sup>3</sup>

During his second trip to Peru BJ contracted the bubonic plague. He suffered in an intensive care unit and died six weeks later. Tens of thousands of people prayed for BJ to be healed, but he wasn't. While there is no known instance of Jesus refusing to heal someone in the gospels, God does not choose to heal everyone. Think about it. If God always healed everyone in answer to our prayers, no one would ever die. The young mother in this story eventually died. Her daughter eventually died. God can and does heal and he wants us to reach out to him in our times of desperation.

### **5. She was spiritually aware.**

She told Jesus that her daughter was possessed by a demon. How did she know this?

Matt 17.14-15--14 *When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water.*

Have you ever known someone whom you were absolutely certain was possessed by a demon? I have heard plenty of stories about such things but I have never experienced it myself. Even if you were not aware of it, do you think you have encountered demon possessed people in your lifetime? I don't think there is any doubt about that. The Charismatics and Pentecostals seem to have the corner of the market on the casting out of demons. Other evangelicals, like myself, have never ventured into such territory. We get a little uncomfortable when anyone starts talking about casting out demons.

Here's my quick take on the subject. The casting out of demons is described in the gospels and Acts, but it is never commanded for the new Testament believer. Paul never once tells us how to do it or why it needs to be done. He does instruct believers on how to resist the devil and temptation. He teaches about numerous things which can destroy a Christian and destroy the

ministry of a local church--like pride, disunity, gossip, false teaching, etc. But he never once mentions demon possession as a problem. Nor does he say that casting out of demons is the solution.

This young mother had a spiritual awareness that told her that her daughter was suffering with a demon. It was part of her desperation and why she took the risk to call on Jesus for help.

#### **6. She understood her desperation.**

One of the reasons we often do not turn to the Lord in times of need is that we really don't grasp our level of desperation. We like to solve problems on our own. We like being independent and self-sufficient and that is a dangerous place to be. Moms, whatever your age or the age of your children, it's OK to feel desperation. You face decisions and problems every day which are beyond your natural ability and accumulated wisdom to handle. Desperation is normal. Self-sufficiency is not. As the impetuous and self-sufficient apostle Peter wrote, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

#### **7. She was persistent and steadfast.**

Here is the real heart of this story. She persisted against all odds. First, the disciples begged--they didn't ask, they begged Jesus to send her away. An even greater challenge than the disciples whining was Jesus' answer. *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* What was Jesus doing here? Was he refusing to heal her daughter?

This is one of the keys to understanding this whole story. Jesus had two purposes in making this statement about the house of Israel. First, he was testing the woman. he was testing her to see if she would easily turn away in despair or if she really did believe that Jesus had the power to help her. Was she desperate enough to persevere? Did she see Jesus as her only hope?

Jesus' second purpose was in line with what we already talked about. He was making a clear statement about redemptive history. The Lord of heaven and earth intentionally chose the Jews. He did not give his covenant to the Canaanites. In fact, the Canaanites were the very people who stood in the way of God's covenant because they were spread all over the Promised land. They needed to go in order for part of God's promises to be fulfilled. The gospel was not only for the Jews but the Jews came first in priority. This principle continued to be carried forth in Paul's letters. The purpose of the book of Romans is summed up in 1:16. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* When we read this verse we tend to skip over the last phrase-- *to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* Paul used this same phrase two more times in Romans.

So in God's economy, there was a salvation priority and the Jews were always first. Except for a few rare exceptions, Jesus did not minister among the Gentiles. This alone ought to demonstrate his priority. The disciples understood this priority so completely that it took a miracle to convince Peter that the gospel was also meant for the Gentiles. So what Jesus said to the woman was a true fact. he wasn't being mean or bigoted toward a Canaanite. It was true. But remember, Jesus was also testing her faith. It's like when a ship approaches a shoreline. They take soundings. They measure the depth of the water at intervals to see how close to shore they can

sail. In the same way, Jesus was sounding out this mother's faith. How deep was it? How far can I test her before she will give up?

But here's the thing. Jesus already knew the depth of her faith. He didn't need to take measurements in order to discover this information. Jesus knew this woman intimately and perfectly. By his actions, he was drawing her faith out into the open and actually deepening her faith in the process.

Moms, in the same way, Jesus has peered into your soul and he knows the depth of your faith. And then he uses everything in life to draw out your faith and send it deeper into himself. He doesn't waste a bad day and neither should you. In fact, if what you call a bad day was intended to be a faith deepening kind of day, should you even call it a bad day.

How did the young mother respond to Jesus' little lesson in redemptive history. *But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."* You've gotta love this woman. She's tenacious. She's tough as nails. The Messiah just told her "no" but yet she refused to give up. It's almost as if she knew how the story was going to turn out? It's almost as if she was convinced that Jesus was going to heal her daughter. Especially when you consider what Jesus said next.

"He answered, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.'" Wow. What do we do with this? Was Jesus actually calling her a dog? In today's politically correct culture, there is NO WAY Jesus could have avoided the accusation of racism. The media would have gone ballistic with this one.

I don't normally take these little quizzes but couldn't resist finding out what kind of dog I am, but yikes! A Pit Bull?! Really!? Am I that scary?



I'm a Pit Bull - What Kind Of Dog Are You?

You're a Pit Bull. You are misunderstood by the simple-minded, but once people get to know you, they realize how lovable and fascinating you really are. It may take a second for you to warm up, but you're leagues ahead once you do. You're sincere...

This much is clear. The children at the table were the Jews and the Gentiles were the dogs. There is no mistake about that. For most of history and still today, for most of the world, dogs are pests. They carry disease. they are food in China. It would have been inconceivable for anyone to have a dog as a pet. Do you know how much Americans spend on their pets? In 2013, we spent 61 billion dollars on our pets, probably the lion's share of that being spent on dogs. We take facebook quizzes to find out what sort of dog we are. There was simply no category for this in Jesus' day. And I don't mean just because they

did not have facebook. People tolerated dogs, they did not have them as pets.

So the reference to being a dog was in no way a positive thing. But neither was it racist. Jesus was simply stating in another way that priority was given to the Jews. The woman was not offended by Jesus' words. In fact, they emboldened her all the more. *She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."* Do you understand what she was saying? She was saying, "Yes, Lord, I understand that the Jews come first. They are seated

at the table eating bread which you provided. But I don't need a whole loaf of bread, Lord. I don't need *all* that you have because the crumbs of your power are *enough*. The morsels that fall from the table of your infinite goodness are all I need.

### **8. She had great faith.**

*Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.* Great faith. In the Greek it says mega-faith. Remember, this story is set in the context of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Theirs is the dark backdrop to the blazing light of this mother's faith. But if you back up one chapter we also see another context; Peter walking on the water. And what did Jesus say to him when he began to sink? "*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*" Peter, a leading disciple, had tiny faith and this formerly pagan woman had great faith.

Moms, I trust you were challenged this morning but also I want you to be encouraged. When your head spins and the wheels are constantly turning with all that is involved in being a mom--and in general---moms carry these burdens in a way that men do not--know that the Lord is intimately aware of every last concern that you are carrying. To feel desperate is perfectly normal, but don't hold onto it. "Cast ALL of your anxiety on the Lord, for he cares for you."

Rich Maurer  
May 11. 2014

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ndtv.com/article/offbeat/peru-man-survives-5000-feet-fall-with-tangled-parachute-520191>

<sup>2</sup> I Would Die for You, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> BJ Higgins, Peru Journal, July 4, 2004.