

# WEEK THREE

## MARK 7:1-9:1

### DAY ONE

*The more you see your own flaws and sins, the more amazing God's grace appears to you.*

— Timothy Keller

In today's culture, it is commonplace to see a large group of people assigned blame for the majority of the world's problems. Liberals and conservatives, evangelical Christians and atheists along with entire classes, races, and cultural groups have been pinpointed by some as the source of most, if not all, societal breakdown.

This idea perpetuates the concept that what is bad, evil, and immoral in the world is out there — wrapped up in the agendas of the parties and organizations we disagree with. We think that if their efforts could somehow be stopped and the problems they have caused could be corrected, that the world would be a better place.

In Mark 7, Jesus speaks some powerful words that turn this idea on its head. He claims that our biggest problems begin from the inside. "For it is from within — out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come — sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly" (Mark 7:21-22).

The truth is, there are thoughts, decisions, and regrets hiding in the shadows of all of our hearts. Our biggest problem isn't out there — it's in here. God's plan is not to reform our lives and make us better people, he wants to make us entirely new people whose lives have been completely transformed from the inside out.

### READ

Mark 7:1-23

#### Mark 7:1-23

##### That Which Defiles

<sup>7</sup> The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus <sup>2</sup> and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. <sup>3</sup> (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. <sup>4</sup> When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

<sup>5</sup> So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?"

<sup>6</sup> He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

"These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.

<sup>7</sup> They worship me in vain;  
their teachings are merely human rules."

<sup>8</sup> You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."

<sup>9</sup> And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" <sup>10</sup> For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' <sup>11</sup> But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God) — <sup>12</sup> then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. <sup>13</sup> Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

<sup>14</sup> Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. <sup>15</sup> Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them."

<sup>17</sup> After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. <sup>18</sup> "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? <sup>19</sup> For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)

<sup>20</sup> He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. <sup>21</sup> For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come — sexual immorality, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”

**REFLECT**

**1** What thoughts or behaviors have I engaged in this week that I’m not proud of or would be embarrassed if someone else found out about? Use Mark 7:21-22 as a guide.

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**2** How do I try to fix my problems from the outside in? For example, do I spend an unnecessary amount of time focusing on my appearance or how I come across on social media?

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**3** How can I seek healing from the inside out?

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## **RESPOND**

The secrets we keep maintain all of their power in the darkness. In his short New Testament letter, James writes, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). While we receive forgiveness from God when we confess our sins, this Scripture points to the reality that we heal in our relationships with one another. Who can you take a risk to confess something you’re really struggling with this week?

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## **PRAY**

Set aside some time for a period of self-examination and confession. In light of God’s grace and forgiveness toward you, ask yourself this question: Who have I hurt recently through my thoughts, words, and actions? As the Holy Spirit brings people and situations to mind, ask God to forgive you and, if necessary, to give you the courage and grace to forgive them.

### **DAY TWO**

*If you want to do the work of God, pay attention to people. Notice them. Especially the people no one else notices.*  
— John Ortberg

One of the most compelling aspects of Jesus is the way that he consistently draws in and is drawn toward people with whom you would least expect a really religious person to associate. He seems to take special care to notice the outcasts, the forgotten, the marginalized, and the morally questionable.

At this point in history, access to God was reserved primarily and exclusively for the Jewish people. During his ministry, Jesus spent the majority of his time reaching out to the people of Israel in hopes that they would recognize that he was the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament promises of God.

In today’s reading, we will be introduced to a mom in a desperate situation who approaches Jesus. This woman is not a Jew, but she is bold and willing to do whatever it takes in order to save her daughter’s life.

At first, Jesus’ response to this woman appears insulting when he essentially refers those outside the Jewish faith as “dogs” (Mark 7:26-27). Author Timothy Keller explains that Jesus is using a parable and that the word “dogs” could be better translated as “puppies” — meaning that in a household, the family eats first and afterward the pets are permitted to eat the leftovers.

This woman refuses to take no for an answer saying, “I may not have a place at the table — but there’s more than enough on that table for everyone in the world, and I need mine now” (Timothy Keller, Jesus the King).

This interaction shows that this non-Jewish woman understood who Jesus was better than the Jewish people did. She grasped the reality that she was undeserving of Jesus’ love and provision in her life, but also that he had more than enough grace and compassion to extend to her.

This conversation between Jesus and a quick-witted outsider paved the way for the future of the church. After his death and resurrection, Jesus would give a charge to his disciples to go out into the world with the message of the gospel, claiming that there is a place at the table for everyone.

## READ

Mark 7:24-8:10

### Mark 7:24-8:10

#### Jesus Honors a Syrophenician Woman's Faith

<sup>24</sup> Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. <sup>25</sup> In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. <sup>26</sup> The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

<sup>27</sup> "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

<sup>28</sup> "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

<sup>29</sup> Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

<sup>30</sup> She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

#### Jesus Heals a Deaf and Mute Man

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup> There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

<sup>33</sup> After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. <sup>34</sup> He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). <sup>35</sup> At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

<sup>36</sup> Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. <sup>37</sup> People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

#### Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand

**8** During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, <sup>2</sup> "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. <sup>3</sup> If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."

<sup>4</sup> His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?"

<sup>5</sup> "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked.

"Seven," they replied.

<sup>6</sup> He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so. <sup>7</sup> They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. <sup>8</sup> The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. <sup>9</sup> About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away, <sup>10</sup> he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

## REFLECT

**1** What is one of the boldest, most desperate prayers I have ever prayed? What was the outcome?

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## DAY THREE

*Give up yourself, and you will find your real self.*

— C.S. Lewis

Now that we are about halfway through Mark's gospel, we will see the story take a major turn. Up until now, Jesus has been successfully able to avoid the spotlight and the anger of the religious leaders enough to keep going. From this point on, we will see a decisive shift of Jesus toward the cross as he shares the knowledge of his impending death with his disciples for the first time.

Before this series of events is set into motion, Jesus pulls together his disciples and the crowd who had been following him as he traveled and preached and said these words — “whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me ... will save it” (Mark 8:34).

We live in a culture where finding ourselves — discovering and harnessing our strengths to their fullest capacity — is seen as an essential part of forming a sense of identity and launching into adulthood. And yet, no matter how fully we maximize our potential through our careers, financial successes, and relationships, we often feel disappointed, lonely, and empty. If we fail, lose a job, or a relationship ends, it's easy to feel as though we no longer know who we are — we lose ourselves.

The death that will soon await Jesus is not that of a hero, but a criminal. Because of his great love for us, Jesus endures weakness, humiliation, and loneliness to set us free from the need to earn and prove that we are worthy and valuable. Whether employed or unemployed, wealthy or struggling financially, romantically involved or single, WE ARE LOVED.

When we follow Jesus, we see that the path to life is not in asserting our strength, but owning our weakness. We trade our self-sufficiency for trust in the one who loves us and has a better idea for the life we were made for than we ever could.

### READ

Mark 8:11-9:1

#### Mark 8:11-9:1

<sup>11</sup> The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. <sup>12</sup> He sighed deeply and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.” <sup>13</sup> Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

#### The Yeast of the Pharisees and Herod

<sup>14</sup> The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. <sup>15</sup> “Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”

<sup>16</sup> They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.”

<sup>17</sup> Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? <sup>18</sup> Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? <sup>19</sup> When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

“Twelve,” they replied.

<sup>20</sup> “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

They answered, “Seven.”

<sup>21</sup> He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

#### Jesus Heals a Blind Man at Bethsaida

<sup>22</sup> They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. <sup>23</sup> He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?”

<sup>24</sup> He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.”

<sup>25</sup> Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. <sup>26</sup> Jesus sent him home, saying, “Don’t even go into the village.”

**Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Messiah**

<sup>27</sup> Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

<sup>28</sup> They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

<sup>29</sup> “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

<sup>30</sup> Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

**Jesus Predicts His Death**

<sup>31</sup> He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

<sup>33</sup> But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

**The Way of the Cross**

<sup>34</sup> Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup> What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? <sup>38</sup> If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

**9** And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”

**REFLECT**

**1** What is one thing in my life (a job, relationship, etc.) that — if I lost it today — would make it really hard for me to know who I am?

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2 What would the people who know me best say that I'm most attached to?

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**RESPOND**

Practice intentionally letting go of something that you're attached to. Perhaps it's an article of clothing, sharing your car, or offering your time to someone. You could also choose a communication pattern you're attached to like sarcasm, always needing to have the last word, or brushing things off with humor. If you're struggling to come up with an idea, ask a friend or family member who knows you well what they think you might be overly tied to.

**PRAY**

Have an honest conversation with God today about your feelings and fears associated with what it might mean to lose your life and follow him. Ask God to help you see people, things, and behaviors that you have become overly attached to or dependent upon that you need to loosen your grip on.



## A DEEPER LOOK ASKING GOD FOR A “SIGN”

*“The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus.  
To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven.”  
— Mark 8:11*

It’s fairly common for Christians to talk about receiving a sign from God. When it comes to crucial moments and life-altering decisions, it’s normal to want reassurance that God is real, that he is with us, and that we’re doing the right thing. What does the Bible have to say about the idea of asking God for a sign?

In Mark 8:11-13, the Pharisees demanded that Jesus perform a sign in order to prove his truthfulness and legitimacy. What is important to understand about this conversation is that the goal of the Pharisees was to test Jesus. Looking back at our study about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, we see that they firmly believed that Jesus’ power was the result of dark, demonic forces — and they were out to prove it.

Interestingly, they don’t ask for Jesus to perform a miracle. Many of them had witnessed Jesus curing the sick, casting out demons, and healing those with physical disabilities. Instead, they were demanding something extra — an additional supernatural act that would prove that what Jesus did really was the result of the power of God.

Jesus responds by refusing to participate in the game the Pharisees are playing. He sees the heart motive behind their question, knowing that they are seeking to discredit and vilify him. This is not a genuine case of faith seeking understanding — it is an attempt at public character destruction.

What does this mean for us today? Most of us are approaching God with a very different set of motives and circumstances. We believe in him, but are wrestling with doubt, seeking wisdom in a seemingly impossible situation, or simply want to know that he is really listening. The truth that we see in the whole of Scripture is that **Jesus reveals himself to those who genuinely seek him**. Yet, if there’s anything we’ve learned from the life of Jesus thus far, it’s that he often shows up in ways we don’t expect. While it does sometimes happen, most people who ask for God to show up in a very specific way are often disappointed.

Wise Christians have used the following three filters to seek direction and confirmation from God:

### **1 Does this decision align with Scripture?**

It can be easy to forget that the primary way God communicates with us is through the Bible. The more that we read Scripture, the more we understand the character of God and what it means to live a life that honors him.

### **2 Do I feel a prompting from God in any particular direction?**

As Christians, we have access to the Holy Spirit within us to provide us with direction and guidance in our day-to-day lives. As a result, we have the opportunity to experience promptings from God, or a pull toward a course of action that is God-initiated within us. However, it’s important to always line up promptings with the Bible, because it can be easy to confuse our own desires with God’s voice.

### **3 What do wise, spiritually mature people in my life think?**

When it comes to important decisions in our lives, it is often helpful to ask for input and wisdom from trusted people who have been Christians longer than we have.

## **MESSAGE NOTES (OCTOBER 28/29):**

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