

Confidence Trap
December 4, 2016
Study Questions
Mark 7: 24-37

Our text records two healing miracles. In the first case, a non-Jewish woman begs Jesus to deliver her daughter from an evil spirit, which Jesus does because of her humble expectation that God's kindness is also intended for gentiles. In the second case, a small group of people beg Jesus to restore hearing and speech to their friend, which Jesus did with curious conditions.

1. Compare our text (Mark 7:25-29) with the more detailed account of his "reluctance" found in Matthew 15:21-28. Why was Jesus reluctant to perform a miracle for the Greek mother?
2. Why did her reply "persuade" Jesus to help her daughter?
3. Why did Jesus move away from the crowd before healing the deaf man? How do we interpret this pattern, introduced in Mark 1:35-38, and recurring three times in our text (Mark 7:24, 33 and 36)?
4. Can you think of other instances where friends brought someone to Jesus with the hope and expectation he would make them whole? Read about the other examples cited in Mark 2:3-5 and Mark 8:22-26.
5. More miracles are reported in the *Gospels* of Jesus and *Acts* of the apostles than in any other period of Christian history. Why do you imagine this is the case?
6. Under what circumstances do believers expect miraculous interventions by God's Spirit? Under what circumstances do believers not expect divine miraculous interventions?
7. Ponder your own life experience. When have you longed for a divine intervention ... for a relative ... for a friend ... for yourself? Did these longings become active conscious prayers? Share with each other some examples of such "hopes and expectations".
8. Did you "get" what you wanted? Did you receive something else "instead of" what you desired? How has your faith been affected by not getting what you hoped for?
9. If you were God how would you have answered your own prayer? For how many people (and how often) would you intervene with a miracle (if you were God)?
10. Proverbs 13:12 says: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick [bitter], but a longing [expectation] fulfilled is a tree of life." How are our expectations of God subdued by life experience? How do lovers of God sustain hopeful expectations once many prayers have not been answered as desired?
11. What is the best possible relationship between our expectations of God and our subsequent contentment with future realities? How do hope and disappointment get reconciled for a person who trusts (or wants to trust) God's goodness?

12. Imagine that (sometimes) our prayers are meant to be a religious experience in which our longing for God to act are transformed into a discovery of God's longing for us to act. Are their prayers that God has "given back to you" or "put into your own hands" with the *divine expectation* that you would do the deeds you want to see done?