

CHAPTER 6

BREADCRUMBS

*"Then Jesus said to her,
'Woman, you have great faith!
Your request is granted.'
And her daughter was
healed at that moment."
(Matthew 15:25-28)*

By the title of this chapter, you might be wondering if this is a cookbook! Nope. I doubt I will ever write a cookbook. That would be another miracle! I'll tell you about the breadcrumbs later.

This chapter is about a woman who was desperate. We don't know her name, so we will call her Cari. Cari was at the end of her rope. Her daughter had been taken over by the enemy. The Bible doesn't say exactly what was happening to her daughter. She could have been a young child or maybe she was grown. The writer didn't tell us. In a sadly similar story, the enemy continually tempted a young man to commit suicide... making

him throw himself into the fire or the water. Was that the case with Cari's daughter? Or was she like the story of the oppressed woman who continually followed Paul, yelling out whatever the evil one prompted her to say? Maybe Cari's daughter couldn't speak at all. Or maybe she was living an abusive lifestyle of drugs, or alcohol, or promiscuity, or all of the above. Whatever it was, Cari was desperate to get help for her daughter.

We know that Cari was a Canaanite, and her culture practiced witchcraft and worshiped false gods, opening the door to demonic activity. Just as we can open the door to the Holy Spirit, we can also open the door to the evil spirits. Jesus taught us to pray "Deliver us from the evil one." Let's do that. Maybe Cari had toyed with "fire" and her daughter was getting burned. Maybe she felt responsible that her actions or inactions had put her daughter in terrible danger. Maybe Cari had been pleading with her daughter for years, to no use. Her daughter was caught in a web and she couldn't get herself out.

Whatever the case, this situation could not be solved with some "self-help" book. As Jesus told the disciples when they failed to cast out a demon, "This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." In other words, to help someone be delivered from the enemy's grip, you must walk in complete faith and surrender with the Father. No quick little rote prayer will rescue someone tangled up in sin. It will take "the effective, fervent prayer of the righteous." Sin is sticky and tricky. The harder we pull by our strength to extricate ourselves, the tighter the knots become. We need the LORD's mighty power to untangle the knots. The Bible says "sin so easily entangles us," and boy, that's true. Worse yet, when we're caught in the tangle of sin, whether it is anger or pride or lust or selfishness, our consciences stop working. We end up accepting and justifying anything! And worse even still, we don't even *want* to be delivered.

LORD, help us. Deliver us from the evil one.

Cari's daughter was not coming to Jesus herself. Maybe she couldn't. Maybe she wouldn't. But her mom just had to. Cari realized the danger her daughter was in. And she'd likely tried everything else. Canaanite prayers to the Canaanite gods, Canaanite religious ceremonies, Canaanite doctors, maybe even Canaanite witch doctors, medication, counseling, badgering...who knows? She had given up hope on any solution except for one. The solution of the true and living God.

But there was another problem. Cari was not in God's family. She was an outsider. She had worshiped lots of gods... mostly ones that let her to live as she liked. But she didn't even know who the true and living God was, much less how to pray to him. Cari had never been taught the Word of God. She certainly didn't have a Bible, or even a part of one. Yes, she'd heard of the Israelites and their God Who worked miracles. She'd heard about this God delivering the Israelites from slavery in Egypt with great wonders, like parting the Red Sea, and the people walking through that sea on dry land. Cari lived north of Israel in Syrophenicia, so how did she even know about this miracle-working Jesus? There were no TV evangelists and no Christian bookstores at her shopping centers. Her parents hadn't taught her the ways of the true God. She certainly didn't go to a Hebrew school! Maybe she heard through the grapevine about this great man who came from God who knew everything about everyone, and genuinely cared about and loved them unconditionally. Maybe the good news started with our Samaritan sister at the well, and traveled like wildfire hundreds of miles right to her! Surely news spread about a man who was making the blind to see and the lame to walk... a man who cast out demons! Maybe she'd heard of the Roman centurion whose servant was healed by Jesus, and Jesus didn't even have to go see the servant! Maybe Cari heard Jesus, said He didn't come for the healthy, but for the sick... for the down and out... the desperate. He was a man who touched the hearts of men and women and children... and those possessed by the evil one!

Hope.

Cari no doubt had heard enough about Jesus that it sparked hope in her heart. Would this God have pity on her, even though she had broken His laws? Would He rescue her and her daughter? Could she somehow be included in this great God's blessings? Would He extend His great love she'd heard about, even to her and her daughter? He did for the Samaritan woman. He knew all of that woman's faults, but He loved her anyway and transformed her life. He healed people who couldn't do anything for Him in return. She had heard that Jesus didn't care at all what the establishment thought of Him.

Hope.

So what was Cari's plan of action? She was going to have to reach out to Jesus. And she couldn't just touch the hem of His cloak like the woman with the issue of blood did. That wouldn't help her daughter. Cari was going to have to be as bold as a lion. But as humble as a little child. She knew very well she didn't deserve anything from Him. She was aware of His high and lofty position, and she of her lowly position, even though to look at Him outwardly, there seemed to be no difference between them. But He was special. One-of-a-kind. He held great power in His hands. More than that, He was compassionate – He was the embodiment of love. She felt that she could go to Him, without credentials, completely empty-handed, and He would help her.

And guess what? Jesus was in her hometown! It was extremely rare for Jesus to be outside Israel, so this was her opportunity to see Him. Here was the answer to her hopes and dreams... the answer to her prayers that she didn't even know how to pray. But Jesus had surely prayed for her and her daughter. He had heard them crying. No doubt, Jesus was coming all this way for them, because He heard their cries. That's what Jesus does.

"Ok...here's the plan. I'm going to search until I find Him and when I do, I will beg for mercy – I don't deserve His favor, so the

only thing to do is beg. I will recognize him as the Master, the LORD, the One who rules over all things. And I have heard that He is the promised Son of David, the Messiah that the Israelites have been waiting for. So that's what I will call Him... Son of David. Maybe He will save us. Just maybe He's coming here because He cares about us too!"

As Cari was searching for Jesus, she was reciting over and over what she would say when she found Him. And, then, as if it was a dream, there He was. She could tell it was Jesus, even by the way He walked... His every step conveyed humility and gentleness. No arrogant, authoritarian gait, like the religious and government rulers in Syrophoenicia. There was no doubt in her mind that this Man had the power to help her and her daughter. She could tell just by the gentle expression on His face that He was trustworthy. He was her hope. She had given up hope on any other way to rescue her daughter. No one else could help. So she took a deep breath, gathered her courage, and whispered to herself, "Here goes... I will make a fool of myself begging if I have to. I won't take no for an answer."

In case you have never heard this story before, I want to warn you to sit tight. This story doesn't go as you might expect... as you are familiar with Jesus responding to those in need. But by the end of the story, you will see that Jesus had a very good and loving reason for everything He did. So, with that said, here goes.

It seems as if Jesus and the disciples were on their way to a specific destination. (Funny thing is, that meeting those like Cari IS His destination!) Cari tried to get Jesus' attention by crying out, "*Have mercy on me, LORD, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.*" But Jesus didn't say a word to her. He completely ignored her. What? She kept following them and calling out louder. Maybe she thought He didn't hear her the first few times. Still, no response. What?! From what Cari had heard about Jesus, this didn't make any sense at all. And this doesn't sound like the Jesus we know either! I wonder what was going through

her mind. "Is this the great man I have heard about? Where's the love? Where's the compassion?" Did Cari stomp off in a huff? She could have allowed pride to well up inside her, saying, "I deserve respect – I don't have to be treated like this!" Well, Cari could have, but this mom would do whatever she had to do, bear any insult, whatever humiliation, to save her daughter from torment.

I think that even though Jesus' outward actions appeared harsh and unloving, Cari was confident that He was kind and compassionate. She was likely confused, but there is no indication that she was put off in the slightest. Cari didn't care if she had to make a fool of herself. Her pride was pretty much gone anyway, since her pride and joy had been overcome by that evil spirit. All that Cari had been through with her daughter, had taught her that pride is the enemy to healing. She wanted her daughter to be well. How she was treated just did not matter.

So Cari kept pleading. She doubled her efforts. She kept begging. She must have made a pretty good scene because the disciples were the first to pipe up. They were sick of hearing her voice. They asked Jesus to send her away. They really didn't care so much whether He helped her or not... they just wanted her to be gone! But Jesus had a plan. He always does. And it is good for us to remember that, especially when we don't get a quick response to our prayers.

When the disciples asked Jesus to send her away, Jesus only responded to the disciples, but likely Cari heard Him. He said, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" Cari knew that. She wasn't a Jew. She had no rights to the blessings. She didn't deserve for Him to give her the time of day. But she didn't turn and leave discouraged because of the facts. She redoubled her redoubled efforts! She fell at His feet begging, "*LORD, help me!*" She couldn't argue the facts... she could only beg. She plead on the basis of her need. She needed help desperately. HIS help. If He didn't help, she and her daughter were finished... hopeless.

Cari's persistence reminds me of another story Jesus told about a poor widow who needed help in the worst way. She kept badgering this unrighteous judge, but he just wouldn't pay her any attention. The poor widow knocked on his door into the middle of the night! He finally gave her what she wanted, basically to shut her up. That story teaches us that when we don't at first get what we ask for in prayer, we are to keep asking, and to keep on asking some more. He is stretching our faith. Strengthening our trust in Him. Isaiah 30:18 says, "*The LORD longs to be gracious to you.*" Many times, He longs to give us our request, but He is patiently waiting, so He can draw out our faith. By not answering immediately, He is working in us a trust in Him, that He is faithful and has us safe in the palm of His hands. He wants us to be mature, not spoiled children who pout and fuss when we don't get our way. He wants us to look to Him and walk with Him in humble, patient, peaceful obedience, as our Heavenly Father. He wants us to ask and keep on asking, in recognition of the fact that our help comes from Him.

The Psalms are filled with prayers where the writer feels like God is not answering, and the writer doesn't understand what's going on. Why is God taking so long? Ever felt like that? You pray and you pray for something, but nothing happens. Is God listening? Does He care? Listen to Psalm 22.

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; And by night, but I have no rest. Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel. In You our fathers trusted; They trusted and You delivered them. To You they cried out and were delivered; In You they trusted and were not disappointed."

There are things in everyone's life where a prayer, or maybe many prayers, have not been answered yet. The LORD clearly has the power to act. We know He's loving. But He says, "No." Or maybe

He says, "Not now." The waiting can be agonizing. When will He answer? Like the one who wrote Psalm 28,

*"To You, O LORD, I call; My rock, do not be deaf to me,
For if You are silent to me, I will become like
those who go down to the pit."*

Cari felt like that. And we have too. We know He's the only one who can truly help us. It's no use looking for help somewhere else. If He doesn't help, we're done for. But we have to wait.

Did you realize that Jesus knows the feeling of not being answered by His Heavenly Father? You might say, "Well, that's ridiculous! He and his Father were One. His Father would move heaven and earth, 'lest he strike his holy foot on a little stone!' " That's true but did you realize Psalm 22 was what Jesus prayed when He was on the cross? He felt forsaken because He WAS forsaken. His Father ignored Him. God the Father had to leave Jesus. So Jesus knows what it feels like. Whenever you're feeling alone and forgotten, or even forsaken, He understands.

So this story teaches us to remember that our Heavenly Father is up to something good for us when He does not answer. He is not being cruel. He is not toying with us. He has a perfect purpose. He promises that His grace is enough to see us through.

He truly will never leave us or forsake us, even if it doesn't feel that way.

So, back to our story. Cari was begging for help at Jesus' feet. What was Jesus going to say now? I know Jesus' heart went out to her, and He wanted to give her what she begged for. Remember, "He longs to be gracious..." I am sure He was praying for Cari the whole time. But He is so wise, and so patient, and so strong to wait. He drew out her faith even more. What Jesus said next sounds shocking.

Even rude.
Callous.

Heartless.

So buckle your seat belt. He said, *"It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."* Ouch! That stings! In other words, "You don't belong to Me. You're not in My family. Even if I wanted to, it wouldn't be good to give you what belongs to My children. Even worse... you're a dog." A dog! Did Jesus call Cari a dog?! You see, the Jews called the Canaanites "dogs"... and not in a flattering way at all. "Gentile dogs" was their derogatory term for these people they despised, and the Jews thought God despised the Gentiles too. (Side note: whenever we get so uppity as to think God is finished with someone, just wait and see. That person may be just the one He's going to reach down and save!) Jesus went there. Oh yes He did! The Israelites were the children; Cari was the outside wild dog. It's just as outrageous as it sounds. But sit tight. Jesus was not being cruel. He was testing her faith. Would she walk away? Would she give up? Honestly, what would you have done?

The fact is, by and large, the Canaanites were a pretty wild bunch. And Cari had been complicit with the Canaanite lifestyle... until now. Now she wanted no more of it. Cari wanted to be *"transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son."* She'd had a bellyfull of these false gods, and it had come to a very bad end. Cari realized she was guilty along with her people. She had been living like a dog. A dog-eat-dog lifestyle. But that was all over... if Jesus would take her in. She didn't want to have her cake and eat it too... to get the answer to her request, and then go back to living like the devil. If she did, Cari knew she would be right back in the same mess! She wanted all of Jesus. The blessings AND the obedience. Wherever He would lead, she would go.

How do I know that is where Cari's heart was? Because *"out of the mouth, the heart speaks."* We know what is going on in someone's heart pretty easily... it comes right out of their mouth! What was Cari's response when Jesus called her a dog? A quick one! She didn't take time to calculate her answer... her answer came

straight from her heart. From a place of deep humility.

"You're right, Master, but dogs do feed on the crumbs that fall from the master's table."

Woah....

Wow....

Wowee.

In other words, "You're right, LORD. You don't owe me a thing. But I'm asking for crumbs, scraps, the leftovers, the leavings'. I'll take whatever the children don't want. I'm not asking to be seated at the table. I'll gladly sit on the floor nearby and gather up the crumbs." And did you notice that Cari changed her status from the outside wild dog to the family pet? Wow! Cari desperately wanted in the family! Even if she was just the family pet! Cari was ready for God. She wasn't claiming any rights... she was admitting her wrongs... coming clean and completely empty-handed. That's the kind of heart the LORD can work with! That's the kind of heart the Spirit of God has already been working in! The LORD had used all the suffering Cari had been through with her daughter, to make her heart tender and receptive to Jesus. How beautiful! What a precious gift is a heart that has no hardness left in it!

Well that was it! Jesus couldn't hold back a moment longer. They both now knew what changes had taken place in Cari's heart. Jesus knew what He had worked in her. Now she knew it too. What a proud papa Jesus was! He was so touched by her tender heart... He was overwhelmed! If I'm getting teary-eyed thinking about it, I know Jesus must have too. *"Oh woman, your faith is great!"* Whoa! That's high praise coming from Jesus! He didn't pass out those giant trophies of praise to every little-leaguer. Jesus had tested her faith... tested it really hard... and she passed the test! Cari made Jesus shake His head in amazement. *"Be it done for you as you wish."* He was so happy to grant her request! He loves to say yes! Cari's daughter was healed at once. Cari got what she came for, and then some. Her daughter was all well....

no doubt a shining example of the grace of God. Their lives were never the same again. The Holy Spirit was ruling their home, and the blessings began to flow there, and out to countless others, to be sure!

Best of all, Jesus was proud of her. What could be better? For the one whom angels adore and the whole earth bows before, as the King of kings and LORD of lords... to look into her eyes, shake His head and say... "YOUR FAITH IS GREAT!"

We don't have a letter from Jesus to Cari, but if He had written one, I think He would say something like this:

"Cari, I'm so proud of you! You have learned from our Heavenly Father to move heaven and earth, to do whatever it takes to save your little one. This love came straight from His heart. The love and courage in your heart came from Him, because you are His special child. You are not an outsider. You do get to sit at the table and eat of all My sumptuous feast. Because you were willing to take the crumbs, now you get to enjoy it all! You *are* in My family. You and your daughter *are* My precious daughters! Both of you are loved with an everlasting love. Do you know that you are loved like that? You don't have to worry about being in the enemy's kingdom any more. He can't hurt you anymore. You're safe in My kingdom. Nothing can separate you from My love. Believe it. Rest. You are safe.

And this is only the beginning. Just wait and see... you will see blessings to you and to your daughter and to your family and to your friends! Everyone you meet will be blessed as I live through you. There won't be any mistaking it. You are mine and everyone will know it. We will walk through life together. Just follow Me. I am humble in heart. I am the servant of all, even though I created the heavens and the earth. Just follow in My steps. Come what may, trust me. I will never leave you, or your daughter.

I love you."

JESUS

CHAPTER 7 BARTIMAEUS

"A blind man, Bartimaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'"

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'"

Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.'

So they called to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.'

Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus."

(Mark 10:46-50)

Once upon a time... all the good stories start like that, so I just had to write that. Long ago, in a far away land... I know... Get serious. There was a town called Jericho. Famous Jericho, where the walls came a tumblin' down. Who doesn't love that story and the cute kids' song that goes with it? Joshua won a great victory without firing a shot, rather, shooting an arrow. All God's people did was SHOUT! What a miracle! The walls of Jericho literally