

“Favoring Not Shaming”
Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23
Psalm 125
James 2:1-10
Mark 7:24-37

Jesus teaches that the best occurs in our lives when we start with God exactly where we are. Howard Hendricks recounts this encounter:

I was ministering in Fourth Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. We had a Thursday morning father-son breakfast, six-thirty. It was to be over by quarter of eight. There were many people from the military, quite a few people from various government offices, some craftsmen, laborers of various kind--really quite a mix. After I had finished speaking and the meeting was dismissed, I looked over to my right, and there was Senator Mark Hatfield, stacking chairs and picking up napkins that had fallen on the floor. Ladies and gentlemen, if you are impressed that you are a United States senator, you don't stack chairs and pick up napkins. If you are impressed that you are God's gift to the body of Christ as the great preacher of this age, you don't stoop to serve. If you are impressed that, really, you are the greatest thing that ever happened to your local church, you do not serve. You live to be served.¹

If we're impressed with who we think we are, we rarely serve. We miss out on living as God intended, to serve, not be served.

Living to serve impacts others for good. To do so requires a change in thinking. In this regard, Bobby Schuller in *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World* writes,

This is what Christians believe in.... favor. Favor is the idea that, despite what's happened so far, things will ultimately work out for good.... Suffering is part of life. When bad things happen to us, it's hard not to fall into despair and think, God has left me. It's during these times we might dwell on the past or on the mistakes we made, thinking, If only I had done this differently. We beat ourselves up or blame others. We fall into self-pity, thinking, It will always be like this. I guess this is the new normal.²

¹Howard Hendricks, “The Problem of Discrimination,” *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 76.
²Bobby Schuller, *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Books, 2019), 49-50, 53-54.

Serving moves us out of shame into experiencing favor. Remember to adapt this process about thinking and self-examination: Learn. Evaluate. Plan. Dream. Get back up after a fall. Press through the pain.³

From the Old Testament, Psalter, Epistle, and Gospel Readings, we re-discover and affirm God's offer of hope to the poor, that faith is dead without works, and the church must extend itself far beyond the comfortable boundaries of familiarity. Proverbs 22:1 reads, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold." Psalm 125:2 reads, "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people from this time on and forevermore." James 2:14 reads, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works?" And Mark 7:37 reads, "They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He [Jesus] has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'" Each of these texts speaks of living a life of favor not shame.

In Mark 7:24-37, the common thread that binds the story of the Syrophenician woman, and the deaf man together is this: a man who cannot speak and a woman who does. Society is patriarchal and the deaf are such because of a parent's sin. Both groups, women and the severely diseased, are marginalized and aren't to approach Jesus according to religious and cultural traditions. The first twenty-three verses in Mark 7 are focused on what defiles a person and Jesus flipped the tables on the religious leaders. It's not what goes in the body that defiles but what comes out of the body in words and deeds. Jesus tackles societal norms about who can have voice. Jesus always engages the

³Adapted from Bobby Schuller, *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World*, 33.

“other.” Women had no voice, but Jesus acknowledges the Syrophenician woman’s voice. Men had voice, but the deaf man’s voice was silenced due to a parent’s sin, but Jesus gives him voice. Mark focuses on the Jesus who is for the “other.” Jesus confronts closed systems and spreads favor. Favor ignites joy.⁴

The best occurs in our lives when we start with God exactly where we are. Boundaries of exclusion often dispense shame to the guest, the “other.” When it comes to being church, our boundaries exclude the very thing we want to experience.... favor. Be like the Syrophenician woman and pursue Jesus who includes your voice. Be like the deaf man and pursue Jesus who gives you voice. Wherever those “other” voices are silenced, go to them with favor. Embrace Jesus’ words, “I am the way, the truth and the life,” the words of the Greatest Commandment, and the words of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25. Those words produce outcomes of being more like Jesus and daily living that is life giving. Dispense favor not shame. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (In-Person with COVID-19 protocols and Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 5 September 2021
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⁴In the two paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Song-Mi Suzie Park, Glen G. Scorgie, Martha L. Moore-Keish, Robert W. Wall, Laura Sweat Holmes, Sandra Hack Polaski, and Leanne Van Dyk in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 282-284, 284-286, 287-289, 290-292, 292-294, 295-297 and 297-299.