

SHORT TAKES

Week One

Opening Prayer

God, thank you for allowing us to be here together — with you and with one another. Help us to be aware of your presence and kind leadership today. Amen.

Talk it Over

Today's talk centers on a Bible story found in Mark 7. The details we will be looking at may appear rather awkward but highlight God's desire to be good to us and to be close to us.

- How comfortable or uncomfortable are you with awkward situations?
- Tell us one of your personal favorite awkward moments.
- This week's teaching came out of a posture of wanting to see the Bible in new ways. Have you ever read a Bible story you were familiar with in a new way? If so, tell us about that experience.

Read Mark 7:31-37 (ESV)

To help us capture some observations of this story, we will be rereading specific verses as we look at specific observations.

Observation One — Sometimes it takes a crowd or other people to get you close to Jesus.

Reread Mark 7:32 (ESV)

It's not uncommon for other people to play a key role in us becoming more familiar or close to Jesus. There are many reasons why this may be the case, but regardless of the why, it's safe to say Jesus doesn't care how we show up.

- In what ways did others play a key role in you drawing close to Jesus?
- On a scale of one to ten, one being you struggle with this truth and ten being you know it with all your heart, how hard or easy is it for you to really trust that Jesus doesn't care how we show up?
- Following up with the last question, what keeps you from buying into this concept or trusting this concept of God not being picky with how you draw near?

Observation Two — Jesus isn't interested in making a scene, he's interested in making a connection.

Reread Mark 7:33 (ESV)

Despite the crowd being a key part in this man experiencing God, Jesus didn't use him to make a show. While there may be many reasons why Jesus pulled this man away from the crowds in order to perform this miracle, for many people this sort of gesture from Jesus — of moving away from the crowds — highlights kindness, respect, honor, wisdom, and safety.

- Do you like to be the center of attention? If so, how has this played out in your life? If not, where does your discomfort come from?
- Have you ever not done something you may have wanted to do or felt led to do simply because it felt like doing that thing would cause a scene? Looking back now, is there a way you could have managed doing that thing while not causing a scene?

(Content continued on the next page.)

- In your own walk with Jesus, have you ever feared that Jesus or someone would make a scene if you chose to draw near to Jesus in some way? For example, have you ever kept a secret out of fear that your confession would become this big public thing?

Observation Three — Jesus is comfortable with close.

Reread Mark 7:33 (ESV)

From what we see in the Jesus stories, Jesus could have healed this man in many ways. In fact, there are times Jesus healed people without them being physically present with Jesus. But with this man, Jesus chose close physical proximity.

- When are you most comfortable and uncomfortable with physical closeness? Without feeling the need to over explain or justify your answer, tell us a little bit about why.
- Do you feel close and comfortable with Jesus this season? In what ways do you feel close and comfortable and in what ways does Jesus feel distant?

Let's look at three possible takeaways from this story:

1. In some ways, this story enables us to say that sometimes embracing closeness with Jesus, and maybe even a little bit of awkwardness, can lead to freedom.

- Have you ever experienced freedom brought by closeness with Jesus or some sort of awkwardness? If so, tell us about that process.

2. We are called to be open people. One key to this story is the fact that this man went along with Jesus' odd requests. While going along with Jesus' may look different to each of us every season, it's safe to assume Jesus will call each of us to be open to whatever he asks.

- Sometimes being open to our next step requires courage. Have you ever felt led to do something with Jesus or for Jesus you would have rather not done?
- Have you ever been closed off to doing what Jesus was asking you to do? If so, tell us about that experience and process.
- Tell us about a time you weren't open to Jesus, your next step, or what Jesus was asking of you, but you still witnessed God move in his grace.
- In what ways is God inviting you to be open this season?

Read Psalm 66:5 and Psalm 86:10

3. This story ends with people being "astonished beyond measure" (Mark 7:37) because of what they heard happened between the man and Jesus. This idea of being amazed by God's work is a common idea in the Bible.

- When was the last time you were astonished by God's movement?
- In what ways may you embrace the awkward or closeness with Jesus a bit more in order to see God's movement in your life?

Closing Prayer

God, you know us and you love us. You know the ways we are open to you and you know the ways in which we are closed. Help us to say 'yes' to our next step with you. Help us to live open to whatever it is you are asking of us. We want to live lives marked by being astonished beyond measure due to your movement, your grace, your kindness, and your freedom.

How To Use this Discussion Guide

The guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create space to grow in friendship and faith. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, consider reviewing the guide before your group to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel pressure to read all the content or to hit all the questions. The guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help foster friendship and faith in your specific group.

In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead.