

## “Reach Out and Touch SomeONE” (Mark 5:24b–34)

Have you ever felt alone and discouraged? Have you ever agonized through a sickness, a sin, or a personality trait that alienated you from people? Have you ever felt like an outcast or a reject? If so you’ll be able to identify with the woman we’ll look at in Mark 5. This message will not be the sweetest and tidiest Mother’s Day sermon you’ve ever heard, but it may be one of the most memorable.

In the first half of Mark 5 (5:1–20) Jesus showed His great power by healing a demonized man. After Jesus healed this demoniac, the people became frightened and begged Jesus to leave their region. The demoniac pleaded with Jesus to let him join Him. But Jesus told him to go home to his own people and proclaim the great things that the Lord had done. Jesus then jumped in a boat and crossed over to the other side. As He reached the shore, Jairus, a synagogue official, ran up and fell at Jesus’ feet and told Him that he had a twelve-year-old daughter that was at the point of death. He then begged Jesus to come and lay His hands on her so that she might be healed. Jesus agreed and began making His way toward the man’s house (5:21–24a). We pick up our story in 5:24b where Mark writes: **“and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him.”** The phrase “a large crowd” is the same phrase used in Mark 6:34, 44 to describe the 5,000 people that Jesus fed. The size of this crowd is in the thousands. It was not a quiet scene. It was filled with talk, anticipation, and excitement. This observation will be important as we progress through this passage.

**1. The woman’s condition (5:25–26).**<sup>1</sup> All of a sudden, I can almost hear the words, “We now interrupt your regular scheduled reading for a late breaking news flash.”<sup>2</sup> Out of nowhere, a new story begins within a story. In 5:25–26 Mark writes: **“A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years,<sup>3</sup> and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse.”** What a tragic report.<sup>4</sup> Our hearts should ache for this woman. The Greek word that is translated “hemorrhage” (*rhusis*) here is the same word used in Leviticus 15 of the Greek Old Testament, where laws about menstruation are stated. Hence, many scholars believe that this woman was suffering from a continual period.<sup>5</sup> I’m truly sorry to have to bring this up on Mother’s Day, but this may help us to truly sympathize with this poor woman’s plight. Mark indicates that she had “endured” or “suffered” (*pascho*) much at the hands of many doctors. In other words, she kept getting her hopes up with every new physician hoping that someone would be able to help her. If you had looked at the shelves in her bathroom cabinet, you would have found all kinds of medicine. She probably had tried cold baths and hot baths, inward cures and outward cures. She had checked into every clinic available. She had made appointments with every doctor that anyone told her could do anything about her disease.<sup>6</sup> But despite all the promises for a speedy recovery, no one could provide relief.<sup>7</sup> To add insult to injury, this poor woman had spent all of her money and her condition had grown worse, not better. So here she is physically devastated and financially destitute.

It’s important to feel this woman’s pain. She had a particular condition that she couldn’t talk about in polite society. Under the Old Testament law she was “unclean.”<sup>8</sup> If she had any contact with others, they would be rendered “unclean” as well. Most commentators believe that her husband would have divorced her. Others suggest that she would have been obliged to leave him.<sup>9</sup> It can be safely assumed that friends, family, neighbors had grown increasingly distant. It’s likely that this woman was treated like a leper—shunned to avoid contamination.<sup>10</sup> In the midst of her suffering, she was deprived from those people that she needed the most. And if all of this wasn’t bad enough, according to Leviticus 15:25 this woman couldn’t take part in public worship.<sup>11</sup> She cannot bring her sacrifices to the priest. She cannot hear the priest declaring to her that her sins have been forgiven and that God has accepted her. This poor woman had to bear the burden of her illness on her own. These painful spiritual, social, and psychological consequences would be nearly unbearable.

This woman is dealing with what is labeled an “impossible” situation.<sup>12</sup> Her damaged body was irreparable, her illness irreversible. All seems utterly hopeless. Sometimes we hear the verdict “impossible” pronounced over our problem, and we give up. Unfortunately, I fear that many of us far too quickly accept some expert’s “impossible” verdict as the final word. When the accountant looks over our debts and tells us there’s no way out but bankruptcy, we meekly accept our fate. When our spouse informs us there’s no hope for our marriage, and divorce is the only way, we pack our suitcases and look for the nearest chapter of Parents without Partners. When a friend says he or she has been hurt too many times, and there’s no hope for release from the bitterness, we sigh weakly and give our friend up to misery. When a relative’s medical test reveals cancer, we start deciding what we’ll wear to the funeral.<sup>13</sup> Although this kind of thinking is natural, we’ve been called to a supernatural perspective. After all, with God “all things are possible.”<sup>14</sup>

Undoubtedly, this woman experienced discouragement, depression, and defeat. It’s even likely that she struggled with ongoing bitterness and anger toward God for allowing these circumstances.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps you can identify with this woman’s plight? Maybe there’s something about you that seems to ruin any hope for your happiness. It may be a physical problem like this woman has. It may be an injury, a disability, or a chronic problem like migraines or a bad back. It may be something in your personality. You may be desperately shy or over bearing. As a result, you struggle in your interpersonal relations. It may be an addiction like food, alcohol, drugs, gambling, or pornography. Consequently, you alienate people in your life. Whatever your area of struggle, you likely understand what it means to be cut off from people and opportunities. Fortunately, this doesn’t have to be your final fate. The story of the bleeding woman doesn’t end with despair.

**2. The woman’s cure (5:27–29).** We pick up Mark’s account in 5:27–28: “**After hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind *Him* and touched His cloak. For she thought, ‘If I just touch His garments, I will get well.’**” I love the first phrase of 5:27: “After hearing about Jesus . . .” Word about what Jesus was doing was getting around. This woman had heard what He had done in the lives of other people. It’s a wonderful thing when word about Jesus gets around.<sup>16</sup> Once this woman heard about Jesus, she decided at this point, she had nothing to lose. She had tried everything and everyone, but no one could come through for her. But that’s because she had never heard about Jesus! When she heard about Jesus, she acted.

So amidst the masses of people, this poor woman found a way to find her way to Jesus. Can you imagine the degree of difficulty in this maneuver? Remember, she’s “unclean” and she’s in the midst of a crowd of thousands of people. This must have been a stealth 007 mission. I’m sure she was wiggling through the crowd trying not to touch anyone, yet pressing forward to be able to touch Jesus. Her faith was so great that she believed if she could just touch His cloak, she would be healed. You’ve heard the popular expression, “Let your fingers do the walking?” Well, this lady, put fingers to her faith. WOW!

In 5:29 we read these exciting words: “**Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.**”<sup>17</sup> Mark tells us that once this woman fulfilled her undercover mission, she was “immediately” healed. The word “immediately” (*euthus*) is the key word in the gospel of Mark. It is used a total of forty-two times. Mark wants us to understand that the healing was instantaneous, but it happened without Jesus’ conscious participation. Such was the power He had and continues to have. This woman approaches the Savior as an unclean person; she leaves Him cleansed from a moment’s encounter. The woman didn’t make Jesus unclean; Jesus made the unclean woman clean! It wasn’t the purity or perfection of her faith that healed her—Jesus’ power healed her. Her faith was a response to His power, and the singular quality of her faith was acting in hope in spite of the things she feared. We must always remember that faith reaches out to an object. There is nothing saving in faith of itself, it is the object of our faith—Jesus Christ—He is the One who heals and saves.

**3. The woman's confession (5:30–34).** Mark's account now takes an unusual turn. In 5:30–31 he writes: **“Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power *proceeding* from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched My garments?’ And His disciples said to Him, ‘You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’”** After the woman's touch, Jesus senses a “power outage.” Although Jesus was a man He was so in tune with the Holy Spirit that He likely sensed power flowing through Him from God to this woman. However, since Jesus was also God, it is certain that He also knew who touched Him.

Now imagine this, in the midst of the sea of humanity that is pressing against Him, Jesus turns around and asks the crowd who touched His garments. Obviously, Jesus is not looking for information here. He already knows who did it. He isn't looking for information any more than God was looking for information when He entered the Garden of Eden and asked “Adam, where are you?” He isn't looking for information any more than when He asked Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?”<sup>18</sup> When God asks a question, it is so that the listener can acknowledge the truth for his or her own benefit. Of course, like us, the disciples are a little slow. Furthermore, they are absolutely bewildered. So they reply, “You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’” The disciples probably think that Jesus has been out in the sun a bit too long.<sup>19</sup>

However, in 5:32 Mark records these amazing words: **“And He [Jesus] looked around to see the woman who had done this.”** In the midst of a massive crowd on His way to heal a dying girl, Jesus came to a screeching halt to minister to a lonely and hurting woman. This must have really frustrated Jairus and the disciples. Nevertheless, Jesus is all about touching one life at a time. The imperfect tense of the verb “looked around” (*perieblepeto*) indicates that Jesus looks around and keeps on looking.<sup>20</sup> Apparently, this woman took off running after touching Jesus' garments. She's gone! You've heard of a “hit-and-run?” Well, this is a “heal-and-run.”

Once Jesus' eyes locked in on the woman, she returned to Him. Mark writes in 5:33: **“But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him<sup>21</sup> and told Him the whole truth.”** Why does Mark go out of his way to indicate that this woman is “fearing and trembling?” To remind us that her faith was willing to overcome overwhelming them with the obstacles. She was certainly afraid that she would incur more shame. Perhaps she feared that Jesus would be angry at her brazenness, or even that He might undo the healing when He realized what she had done. Maybe she feared the anger of the crowd if the others understood what she had done to them. She shouldn't be out in public, especially not in a crowd. Everyone is pressed up against everyone else and a mere touch from her renders one unclean.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps she was afraid of having the intimate details of her life revealed to everyone within hearing distance. Any of these possibilities would explain her fear and trembling. For an unclean female who risked touching her neighbors and making them unclean, to become the center of attention must have been terrifying. Women in this culture were not to even speak in public. Yet, to her credit this woman falls down before Jesus and tells Him the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help her God.

Perhaps you've been asking the question: Why did this woman suffer for twelve years? Ultimately, only God can answer this question. But we do know that God may allow problems to last a long time. He may permit us to get to a point of desperation. In this account, the woman tried to solve her problem to no avail but Jesus, the great Physician was able to heal her. The twelve years of suffering were God's instrument to bring her to seek Him. He took her to the point of desperation and He received all the glory. God also does this in our lives because most of us will never seek Him until we are desperate. For some reason, we must be broken, even shattered before we turn to God. If only we could become desperate *first*, on our own volition.<sup>23</sup> Maybe, just maybe, God would do greater things than He already does if we would humble ourselves to a greater degree. Is it possible that if we asked God to grant us the ability to believe Him for more that He would explode with power in our midst?

Our narrative ends in 5:34 with these beautiful words: **“And He [Jesus] said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.’”** This is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus calls a woman “daughter.”<sup>24</sup> In what sense could she be His daughter? This was not the first time Jesus had spoken about the family. When His mother and brothers tried to exercise some measure of control over Him (3:31–35), Jesus announced a new definition of family. His family consisted of all those who did God’s will. Here was a new definition of the family in which the bond of Spirit is thicker than blood. In this woman who had suffered so much and who had violated the law of Moses, Jesus found a daughter. She had done the will of God by reaching out in faith. The woman’s faith in Jesus brought her into His spiritual family.<sup>25</sup> She was a child of God. Her faith was the means whereby she obtained Jesus’ help. It expressed belief that Jesus could heal her and hope that He would.

This is confirmed by Mark’s choice of words. The word translated “well” is the verb “save” (*sozo*).<sup>26</sup> This word is used for both spiritual salvation and physical healing.<sup>27</sup> Yet, the strength of this word is also combined with the word “peace” (*eirene*).<sup>28</sup> Peace comes only through the forgiveness of sin. So not only did this woman experience physical healing, she also experienced spiritual salvation.

This woman finally had the relationship that she had been craving. After twelve years of being cut off from all relationships, here is one who puts Himself in relationship to her. Whatever clinging unworthiness or inferiority she felt after twelve years of isolation from everyone else in that moment He affirmed her as a person and called her into relationship with Himself. For twelve years this woman had been lost in the crowds of life. She had become all but invisible except when others feared she would contaminate them. But when Jesus reached out to her, she could not remain lost in the crowd.

Do you ever feel lost in the crowd? Do you sometimes feel invisible and unwanted? When you reach out to Jesus in faith—perhaps with only a little bit of faith—it’s enough. He will find you, lift you up, and call you His own. Even more, once He puts you into a relationship with Himself, you have all of God’s love and all of God’s power at work on your behalf.

Today, Jesus asks only that you believe that He has the power to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. As my former pastor likes to say, I can’t, you can, please help!”<sup>29</sup> Your faith may be imperfect. It may be weak. But when you come with whatever faith you have, Jesus reaches out to you with healing. And you, too, will hear His word, “Go in peace.” The Greek text can be translated, “Go *into* [*eis*] peace.” Oh, this is good! Move out of restlessness and into peace. Leave turmoil behind and move into peace. What a magnificent place to live—in *peace*. Jesus’ gift of peace will come to you as you reach out in faith and touch Him. He knows the touch of faith. He always responds.<sup>30</sup> *Reach out in faith and touch Jesus.*

As an expression of faith, will you reach out and touch the person next to you if you are seeking God’s healing touch? Jesus isn’t present right now on planet earth—He is at the right hand of God the Father praying for you. However, Jesus’ body—the body of Christ is here in this place. By courageously putting your hand on the person shoulder next to you, you are saying, “Jesus, I’m desperate and I want you to meet me here.” You may need a touch from Jesus physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, socially, or spiritually. I don’t know what your particular need is, but I do know that Jesus will meet you and give you His healing touch. This is not a guarantee of divine healing for deliverance from your circumstances, BUT it is a guarantee that He will grant you the necessary grace and perseverance to endure all of your challenges. Today, in our world, millions of people attend church, but so few are truly seeking to touch Christ and experience all that He has to offer. God wants you to touch Him. He wants you to reach out to Him. He wants that far more than you do. He is the giver of every good and perfect gift (Jas 1:17), but He yearns to be sought out. Don’t cope with pain on your own. Trust in Him to offer you relief through your pain. *Reach out in faith and touch Jesus.*

### **Scripture References**

Mark 5:24–34

Matthew 9:20–26

Luke 8:42b–48

Leviticus 15:25–27

Proverbs 31:10–31

Matthew 15:21–28

1 Peter 3:1–6

### **Study Questions**

1. Do I have a longstanding sickness, weakness, or sorrow (Mark 5:25)? How long have I suffered through this ordeal? How has this trial caused me great pain? To what lengths have I gone in order to be healed (5:26)? What has the diagnosis been? How did I respond to the news?
2. What would it be like to be “unclean” in modern times? How would this type of rejection affect my psyche? In what way(s) have I struggled through periods of ostracism? How are those that God has placed in my life hurting in similar ways? What can I do to comfort them?
3. What impresses me the most about this woman’s faith (Mark 5:27–28)? How can I exemplify similar faith? How has fear prevented me from acting in faith? Who is an example of faith that I can attempt to emulate? Will I contact this person this week and ask how I can imitate their faith/faithfulness?
4. What can we learn about Jesus’ commitment to individuals in the midst of a busy schedule of ministry (Mark 5:30)? How can I prioritize people over projects? Am I willing to reach out to someone in need today? Do I have the compassion to bring help and healing to people who feel hopeless?
5. Is faith a prerequisite to God working in our lives (Mark 5:34)? Why or why not? How does faith procure salvation and sanctification? Why is the object of faith more important than the amount of faith? How can this provide peace and encouragement?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For a similar structure, see Jerry Vines, *Mark—Exploring the Gospels* (Neptune: Loizeaux, 1990), 91. However, I don't use outline points in the delivery of narrative sermons. These points are included for clarity for the reader.

<sup>2</sup> Ironically, this past week (5/2/2011) there was a "late breaking news flash" from President Obama announcing the death of Osama bin Laden.

<sup>3</sup> Hurtado astutely asks, "Is it insignificant that the woman had a *twelve*-year ailment, and that this number has a long biblical significance as symbolizing Israel? And the girl, the *twelve*-year-old daughter of a synagogue leader, is doubly linked with Israel. In other words, the sequence of miracles among those identified with Israel, followed by rejection in Jesus' own village, affords the informed reader with a glimpse of the outcome of Jesus' ministry to Israel." Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark*. New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989), 88.

<sup>4</sup> Mark's three uses of the conjunction "and" (*kai*) intensify this woman's suffering.

<sup>5</sup> See Alice Mathews, *A Woman Jesus Can Teach* (Grand Rapids: Radio Bible Class, 1991), 81. Hendrickson writes, "There are those who believe that the drain was constant. Another view would be that throughout the twelve years an excessive loss of blood, occurring periodically, had made it impossible for her ever to feel strong and healthy, and that at this particular moment she was again suffering as a result of loss of blood." William A. Hendrickson, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 204.

<sup>6</sup> Vines, *Mark*, 92.

<sup>7</sup> The Talmud listed no less than eleven cures for this specific illness. Some were potions, but others were mere superstitious folly.

<sup>8</sup> McIntosh writes, "Perhaps before we go further, we should pause to ask what ceremonial uncleanness means. Many people have read the Old Testament, particularly Leviticus and Numbers, and have come away scratching their heads wondering why it was that you could become ceremonially unclean in a hundred different ways. You could become unclean by what you ate, by an illness you had, by the very clothes you wore. You even could become unclean by coming into contact with mildew. Why was that? It had nothing to do with the quality of your moral life. It didn't tie your hands and keep you from worshiping God privately. But it did keep you from the celebrations of worship engaged in by the people of God. The reason for it all was that the tabernacle and the temple were places where God was visibly present on earth. His glory was shown from time to time to remind all the Israelites that He lived right there among them. And they were to be qualified for worship not only internally but externally. Even diseases were incompatible with God's personal presence. "Uncleanness" reminded people of that. In fact, contact with this woman could have the effect of rendering others unclean, and they could very well resent it. That is why her touching of the garment of Jesus was such a courageous maneuver, and why she is so timid in acknowledging her action. She knew Jesus could have been justified in being angry with her." Doug McIntosh, "The Outcast" (Mark 5:24–34): [www.cornerstonebibch.org/html/Sermons/Encounters/Enc01.pdf](http://www.cornerstonebibch.org/html/Sermons/Encounters/Enc01.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Mathews, *A Woman Jesus Can Teach*, 81.

<sup>10</sup> David Garland, *Mark*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 219.

<sup>11</sup> A menstruating woman was even forbidden from worshipping in the temple (Josephus *War* 5.227).

<sup>12</sup> In a parallel account, Luke, himself a medical doctor, concludes: ". . . and she could not be healed by anyone" (Luke 8:43). The Bible is not without humor. It is interesting to note that Dr. Luke omits any references to the woman's physicians taking all her money without delivering any relief. Perhaps this was a professional courtesy to his colleagues? See also Louis Barbieri, *Mark*. Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 124.

<sup>13</sup> Frank Barker, *Encounters with Jesus* (Wheaton: Victor, 1989), 87.

<sup>14</sup> See Mark 9:23 and Luke 14:36.

<sup>15</sup> Do you know of someone who has been suffering from a long illness? Think of some concrete way you can show Christ's compassion to that person. It may be by visiting or writing a note saying that you have been praying for them. You might also think of doing something for the family, such as bringing a meal or offering to do housework.

<sup>16</sup> Vines, *Mark*, 94.

<sup>17</sup> The word "affliction" (*mastix*) refers to a whip, lash, used especially to urge on horses or laborers (BDAG s.v. *mastix*). Edwards suggests, "The term combines physical suffering and shame, hence something akin to punishment." James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 163. Cf. BDAG s.v. *mastix* 2: "a condition of great distress, *torment, suffering*."

<sup>18</sup> See Gen 3:9 and 4:9.

<sup>19</sup> Luke 8:45 makes it clear that the response given by the disciples recorded in this verse was repeated to the Savior by Peter.

<sup>20</sup> See BDAG s.v. *periblepo* 1: "*he looked (or kept looking) around to see*."

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<sup>21</sup> It is interesting that in both accounts, Jairus and the woman demonstrate great humility by falling at the feet of Jesus in faith.

<sup>22</sup> See also Mathews, *A Woman Jesus Can Teach*, 81.

<sup>23</sup> Gempf states, “Blessed are the desperate.” Conrad Gempf, *Mealtime Habits of the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 90.

<sup>24</sup> The closest parallel is the paralytic whom Jesus addresses as “child” (*teknon*) in Mark 2:5.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Isa 53:10; Mark 3:35; 7:26; 10:52.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the parallel in Matt 9:21, which uses *sozo*.

<sup>27</sup> Mark also didn’t use the normal word for being healed (*therapeuo*). Instead, he used a word (*hugies*) that has a double significance. See BDAG s.v. *hugies* 1: “pert. to being physically well or sound, *healthy, sound*.” *Hugies* is used ten other times in the NT: Matt 12:13; 15:31; John 5:6, 9, 11, 14, 15; 7:23; Acts 4:10; Titus 2:8.

<sup>28</sup> The phrase “go in peace” (Heb. *shalom*) was a common way of saying “good-bye” among the Jews (cf. Judg 18:6; 1 Sam 1:17). *Shalom* means not just freedom from inward anxiety, but that there is a wholeness or completeness of life that comes from being brought into a right relationship with God. One of the first things that happens when a person believes in Christ is that a relationship of peace is established between God and people (see Rom 5:1).

<sup>29</sup> Matt Hannan, senior pastor, of New Heights Church in Vancouver, WA. See [www.newheights.org/](http://www.newheights.org/).

<sup>30</sup> This conclusion is adapted and revised from Mathews, *A Woman Jesus Can Teach*, 87–89.