



The Gospel of John

Session Eight: The Samaritan Woman at the Well and Her Testimony

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

This week's lesson is all about water—physical and spiritual. As Jesus began His public ministry, He made a surprising stop along the way. Samaria was a region the Jews generally avoided. The bad blood between the Jewish people and their distant relatives, the Samaritans, brimmed with disdain and disrespect. Christ's love penetrates ethnocentrism, however, and today's passage reminds us the gospel has the power to transform lives and communities.

As you spend time in this week's lesson, look for ways you can relate to the Samaritan woman, and think about how Christ's truth impacts the way you view yourself and the world. Examine ways you can be on a restored mission to share the good news with others and invite them to experience living water in Christ.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 4:1-42

THE MAIN IDEA

Like the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus calls each of us to a restored relationship with God, restored relationships with others, and a restored relationship with the world.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How does your relationship with Jesus impact the way you see the world around you? How might God use your unique story to make a difference in His kingdom?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 4:1-14 The Samaritan woman at the well encountered an unlikely visitor—a Jewish man, in the middle of the day, who spoke to her about spiritual things. She came to the well for water and received an invitation to experience living water. Jesus calls us to a restored relationship with Himself. As Jesus shared with the woman, we see a glimpse of the expanding nature of the kingdom of God. Jesus came to bring living water not only to the Jews, but the world.

John 4:15-26 Jesus confronted reality of the woman's social and spiritual condition. The Holy Spirit convicts to bring about repentance and reconciliation with God. God's kindness invites us to be honest about our need for Him. Through Christ, we experience restored relationships with God and others.

John 4:27-42 The woman was overcome by the good news of Jesus. She couldn't keep it to herself, and over the next days, many Samaritans came to faith. Christ calls us to a restored mission—our lives offered to His service.



START HERE

Shame is a tricky emotion. It keeps us hiding in the shadows, avoiding authentic relationships, numbing our pain in self-destructive ways, or hiding who we really are from others. Jesus calls us to live authentically by coming to Him as the source of our deepest needs. When we come to Christ by faith, we experience restored relationships with God, with others, and a restored mission to share the good news throughout our lives.

DISCUSS

When you feel spiritually dry or restless, what do you reach for to “quench” that thirst?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Jesus invites us to living water.

John 4:1-14: When Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard he was making and baptizing more disciples than John (though Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were), he left Judea and went again to Galilee. He had to travel through Samaria; so he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar near the property that Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, worn out from his journey, sat down at the well. It was about noon.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water.

“Give me a drink,” Jesus said to her, because his disciples had gone into town to buy food.

“How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.

Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would ask him, and he would give you living water.”

“Sir,” said the woman, “you don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this ‘living water’? You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and livestock.”

Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.”



Unpacking John 4:1-14

A couple of summers ago, a social media trend started called “Water Tok.” It was a movement where people shared different ways they were “zhuzing” up water to make it more palatable. Stanley cups flew off the shelves and people began writing “recipes” for flavored water—complete with fruit syrups and other flavorings. Some people even purchased special ice machines that could make “crunchy ice” just like their favorite fast-food place. “Water Tok” became a way for people to feel like they were eating healthier, while in reality, they were mostly making fancy homemade sodas! In today’s text, we’ll examine a woman who wanted real water, but she was going about it in an unusual way. She attempted to make drawing water more “palatable” by avoiding the women in her community who had likely shunned her. Instead, Jesus invited her to experience a different kind of refreshment. As we examine this story, let’s look for ways we can relate to the story of a woman whose life changed when she experienced Jesus.

As Jesus’s public ministry was taking root, He moved the center of His teaching ministry to Galilee. In today’s text, *“He left Judea and went again to Galilee. He had to travel through Samaria.”* Judea sat near the southern part of Israel, near the Dead Sea. This region held the cities of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Emmaus. Galilee sat in the more rural, northern part of Israel, near the Sea of Galilee. It was home to Nazareth, Cana, and Capernaum. The two regions were separated by more than seventy miles, a three-day journey on foot if you traveled directly north or south through the region of Samaria. Most Jews would take the longer routes along the Jordan River, or a western route near the Mediterranean Sea to avoid Samaria. A long-standing hostility and some violent attacks made Jews cautious of this route. The Samaritans were an ethnic group of Jews who did not leave during the Assyrian exile in the mid-700s BCE but instead stayed behind and mingled and married with the Assyrians. Over the years, hostility grew between the two groups as the Samaritans adopted more of the pagan practices of the Assyrians and implemented their own place of worship outside of Jerusalem. There were alternative routes Jesus and the disciples could have taken. The word “*had*” represented a compulsion to act. Likely, Jesus felt compelled to address the simmering hostility between the two groups, and wanted to establish—with His disciples and the people of Samaria—that the kingdom of heaven is larger than only Israel.

Around noon, Jesus arrived in a town called Sychar and sat down near a well that Jacob gave to his son, Joseph. While he rested, verse seven says a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. It would have been unusual for a woman to draw water in the heat of the day. Normally, women would have gone early in the morning to enjoy the cool air and the socialization with others. The text does not tell us why the woman was there at such an unusual time. Perhaps she had run out of water, or perhaps, as evidenced by this woman’s story, she faced social isolation from others because of her past. Either way, this encounter was an ordained moment as she encountered Jesus.

“Give me a drink,” Jesus said to her, because His disciples had gone into town to buy food.



“How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. (vv. 7b-9). Jesus’s request was a perfectly appropriate one for a weary traveler on a long journey. However, the woman was struck by His forthrightness. She pointed out that Jews and Samaritans did not associate. In those days, Jews would not have eaten in a Samaritan’s home nor drunk from their cups for fear of defilement. However, as Jesus would later teach His disciples in Matthew 15:11, “It’s not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth—this defiles a person.” The Samaritan woman was concerned with appearances—Jesus was concerned with her heart.

Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would ask him, and he would give you living water” (v. 10). Jesus offers living water to those who ask. He extended an invitation, and He offers the same invitation to us today. Jesus demonstrates His love by offering us the incredible gift of life and then allowing us to either receive or reject that gift. Notice, however, how Jesus prefaced His invitation—“If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you . . .” When we know God’s gift, and the reality of His Son, Jesus, our natural desire should be to give an enthusiastic “yes!”

The woman responded to Jesus by asking this question: “You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and livestock” (v. 12). Unbeknownst to the woman, the answer is a resounding “yes.” Jesus is infinitely greater than the patriarchs or the prophets. As Hebrews 1:1-3 says, *“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe, through him. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”*

Notice, however, how Jesus responded to the woman: *“Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well, of water springing up in him for eternal life” (vv. 13-14). Jesus did not immediately give His credentials. He did not try to impress her with His knowledge or wisdom. He did not get roped into a debate on whose prophet was the greatest. He simply pointed back to her need. This is a good example for us as we share our faith in Christ with others. Effective witnessing begins when we genuinely seek to hear from and care for the other person and their needs, and then lovingly point them to the One who can provide—Jesus. He is the One who satisfies every thirst for life, and He is the only One who gives eternal life.*



DISCUSS

- *Why is it significant that Jesus initiated this conversation rather than waiting for the woman to approach Him? What can we learn from this?*
- *How does the idea of “living water” challenge the things we use to quench our inner thirst?*
- *What difference does it make that Jesus offers a gift rather than a religious task?*

2. Jesus invites us to living relationships.

John 4:15-26: *“Sir,” the woman said to him, “give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and come here to draw water.”*

“Go call your husband,” he told her, “and come back here.”

“I don’t have a husband,” she answered.

“You have correctly said, ‘I don’t have a husband,’” Jesus said. “For you’ve had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

“Sir,” the woman replied, “I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”

Jesus told her, “Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know because salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.”

The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

Jesus told her, “I, the one speaking to you, am he.”

Unpacking John 4:15-26

Next time you’re out to eat with a group of friends, pay attention when everyone starts ordering beverages. If the first person chooses a tea or soda, many times the rest of the table will too. But if a few people pick water, suddenly the rest of the table may rethink their decisions, saying something like, *“Oh, change me to water too. I should ‘be good’”*. We’re social creatures by nature, and often we are influenced by what one or more people in the group are doing. The Samaritan woman had clearly been influenced by others in her community. The time of day she came to the well, the way she talked about her community’s ancestors, and even the way she



answered Jesus's question about her husband without revealing the whole story showed that she cared what others thought—perhaps more than she wanted to admit. However, Jesus isn't concerned with our social posturing and status—He wants our hearts. When we come to Him sincerely, we don't have to hide. He is the Living Water that refreshes our soul.

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water" (v. 15). The woman didn't understand the nature of this "living water." In her mind, living water meant she could escape the labor as well as the shame of having to come to this public well. She could, perhaps, have hidden away in her home, outside the watchful eyes of the town gossip. Shame makes us want to hide—from God, from ourselves, and from others. It was true for Adam and Eve in the garden, and it is true for us today. Walking in light looks like being authentic and open with Christ but also being authentic and open with safe people as well. Where Christ's light shines, shame disappears.

Verses 15-18 feel nearly too personal, too invasive, and too intimate. If reading this conversation makes you blush a little on the woman's behalf, you wouldn't be alone. However, it is important to remember that we have an inside peek at a personal and private conversation. Jesus talked to her openly about the reality of her living situation, but he honored her by doing so in private. This is sometimes where we confuse shame and conviction. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, it is for our good, that we might be restored. Romans 2:4 says, "*Or do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?*" When Christ convicts us of sin, it is not to produce shame, but to lead us to repentance and forgiveness. Conviction seeks to draw us near to God, where shame attempts to push us away. Not only that, but Scripture says that God disciplines us, not as an act of punishment, but as an act of love (Hebrews 12:5-6,10-11) Shame isolates; conviction invites.

We don't know the details of the woman's life, a grace that Christ and the Gospel writer John gave her, but we can see parts of ourselves or others in her story. The best position to take is to focus on the grace Christ extended and not trying to figure out every detail. When we focus on Christ's mercy, we find ourselves in the story right alongside the woman, the grateful recipients of the love and care of Christ.

"Sir," the woman replied, "I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem" (vv. 19-20). The woman was quick to turn the conversation away from her living situation to the difference between Samaritans and Jews. She was willing to acknowledge that Jesus was a prophet and that Jesus's knowledge she had five husbands was revealed to Him supernaturally. However, instead of moving toward the light of Christ, in her discomfort she attempted to deflect. Sometimes, we can fall into a temptation to stick with "intellectual" discussions about faith over "heart" conversations. We've all known (or we've been) someone who could engage in long-winded theological discussions, but struggle to talk about what God is doing in his or her life right now. The Samaritan woman attempted the same thing. Just like He did with this woman, Jesus will often draw us back to Himself when we attempt to use Bible knowledge as a



substitute for authentically engaging with Him. Encountering Christ's love in real and genuine ways is better, by far, than collecting knowledge of Him and failing to know Him.

Jesus told her, "Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know because salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth" (vv. 21-24). Jesus patiently turned the conversation back to what God was in the moment and did not get caught up in geopolitical discussions about the past. Christ calls us into a living relationship with Him. The one who came full of grace and truth had arrived (John 1:14), and He called this woman not to worship her past, but to worship in Spirit and truth. The center of worship had shifted—it was no longer Jerusalem for the Jews or on a mountain for the Samaritans. God had come to dwell with man, that they might worship Him rightly.

Jesus acknowledged that salvation began with the Jews, as the people God covenanted with in the Old Testament to represent Him on earth. However, salvation in the kingdom of God would extend beyond the Jews and throughout the world. The woman responded, for the first time, by looking forward rather than behind. *"The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will explain everything to us"* (vv. 25). Her conversation with Jesus gave her enough faith to look forward to a day when God would send a Savior. She didn't realize in the moment that the Savior was standing in her midst.

Jesus told her, "I, the one speaking to you, am he" (vv. 26). This is the first time Jesus publicly proclaimed Himself as the Messiah. Others had speculated, like when Nathanael declared Him the Son of God (John 1:49). Remarkably, Jesus first disclosed Himself as the Savior of the world to none other than a woman—a likely outcast woman—and a non-Jew. Christ's message was clear; the kingdom of God was expanding. In Christ, we can be set free from the shame and stigmas of our past, as we are invited into a living relationship with Him and others.

DISCUSS

- *Why do you think Jesus brought up the woman's relationships?*
- *Why might we sometimes "change the subject" when Jesus gets close to our pain?*
- *What does it mean to worship God "in Spirit and truth"?*
- *How might restored honesty with God lead to healthier relationships with others?*



3. Jesus invites us into living mission.

John 4:27-42: *Just then his disciples arrived, and they were amazed that he was talking with a woman. Yet no one said, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”*

Then the woman left her water jar, went into town, and told the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They left the town and made their way to him.

In the meantime the disciples kept urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

But he said, “I have food to eat that you don’t know about.”

The disciples said to one another, “Could someone have brought him something to eat?”

“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work,” Jesus told them. “Don’t you say, ‘There are still four more months, and then comes the harvest’? Listen to what I’m telling you: Open your eyes and look at the fields, because they are ready for harvest. The reaper is already receiving pay and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap what you didn’t labor for; others have labored, and you have benefited from their labor.”

Now many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of what the woman said when she testified, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. Many more believed because of what he said. And they told the woman, “We no longer believe because of what you said, since we have heard for ourselves and know that this really is the Savior of the world.”

Unpacking John 4:27-42

According to a new 2025 report out by WHO and UNICEF, 2.1 billion, or 1 in 4 people globally, still lack access to safely managed water. This includes more than 106 million of whom have no option but to drink from untreated surface water. The department’s goal to ensure access to treated water throughout the world by 2030 is likely to fall far short. “Water, sanitation, and hygiene are not privileges, they are basic human rights,” said Dr Ruediger Krech, Director a.i, Environment, Climate Change and Health, World Health Organization. “We must accelerate action, especially for the most marginalized communities, if we are to keep our promise to reach the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Clean drinking water is necessary for survival. Without it, disease, dehydration, and starvation ensue. Alongside government agencies, Christian aid organizations, churches, and individuals are all working together to help under-resourced areas access safe water. As believers, we know that meeting someone’s physical needs is just the beginning. Helping people access tools for life, like clean water, can often lead to conversations about Christ, the Living Water.



When the disciples returned to Jesus, the text says they were surprised to see Him talking to a woman, yet no one questioned Him (v. 27). However, once their conversation finished, the Samaritan woman ran into the town to tell everyone about the encounter (vv. 28-30). The woman had encountered Christ. She had faced the source of her shame and experienced His gentle call to truth. She had been invited into a living relationship with Him and she couldn't keep it to herself another minute. The woman who had come to the well alone, raced back to invite her neighbors—perhaps the very ones who had shamed her—to encounter Jesus for themselves.

Jesus came to do the will of God, namely the work of reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18). He saw the woman's immediate physical need (water) but met a deeper, spiritual need (salvation). Once she encountered Christ, her physical need was temporarily forgotten, as she left her jar behind to run and tell others about Jesus.

Serving others in Christ's name is an important part of our mission as believers. However, it goes beyond that. When we offer access to the living water of Christ, we offer something eternal. Serving others practically often opens doors to serve them spiritually by telling them about Jesus.

In verses 35-38, Jesus reminded the disciples they were experiencing the harvest of God's kingdom on earth. Eternal life had come through Christ, and a harvest began among them in an unlikely area—Samaria. We are invited into a living mission. Until the entire world has heard the good news of Jesus, which will in some places arrive through a door opened by clean water, medicine, or sufficient food, the mission continues. *“Open your eyes and look at the fields, because they are ready for harvest”* (v. 35).

The woman's testimony in her community had a swift and profound impact (v. 39). The most compelling testimony is someone who's been changed by Jesus. Her testimony wasn't flashy, or particularly eloquent. *“He told me everything I ever did.”* What made her testimony powerful was her willingness to be transparent about the difference Christ had made in her life. Her past became not a source of shame, but a song of deliverance. Her words carried such impact that Jesus and the disciples remained two extra days in Samaria, and many more believed.

We are called to a living mission. When we meet people where they are, attend to their physical needs, and point them to Christ, we invite them to experience living water. Like us, they will never be the same. The people in Sychar encountered Christ first through the woman's testimony, and then for themselves. They said, *“We no longer believe because of what you said, since we have heard for ourselves and know that this really is the Savior of the world”* (v. 42). As they encountered Christ personally, they too joined the harvest, and joined the harvesters, sharing the good news of Jesus with others.



DISCUSS

- *When was a time the truth about Jesus led you to forget your temporary circumstances or struggles?*
- *What can we learn from the woman's approach to sharing her story?*
- *How did Jesus redefine "food" and satisfaction in this passage?*
- *How can providing for someone's physical needs open a door to exploring spiritual needs? How are these two ways of serving obediently effective together?*

DEEPER FOCUS

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *Linger on this passage further, returning to notice how Jesus related to the woman, and how she related to Him. Does this reflect how you experience God? Reflect on why or why not.*
- *What do you see hear that you long to experience as the woman did?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

Who are the people in your community who are overlooked and cast aside? How might you seek to build relationships that you might share about living water with them? What makes this challenging in daily life?

APPLY

Who might be part of your "harvest field"—the people around you who are ready to hear? How will you go into the harvest?



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