

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.
HEARING GOD FOR YOURSELF IS WAY BETTER THAN MY COMMENTS!**

Discussion Starter

- Where is one place you'd never want to live? Why?

Introduction

The fourth chapter of John is structured around encounters Jesus had with two, quite different, people – a woman from Samaria and a Gentile royal official from Galilee. To understand Jesus' remarkable encounter with the woman from Samaria, we need some historical background information.

After King Solomon died in 931 BC, Israel split in two. The northern tribes called themselves Israel and made Samaria their capital city. The southern tribes were called Judah and kept Jerusalem as their capital. In 723 BC Assyria destroyed Israel (the northern kingdom), deported most of the people and resettled the land with other conquered people. The whole region was now called Samaria.

Most of the new, mixed population began to practice a religion that combined elements of pagan religion with traditional Jewish faith.

Although the pagan elements faded over the years, the Samaritan religion continued to be unique. They Samaritans only accepted the first five books of Bible which were written by Moses, as Scripture. They rejected the Prophets and other books. They also sacrificed on Mount Gerizim (*GEHR uh zim*) instead of Jerusalem.

Most of the Jews (people of the southern kingdom) regarded the Samaritans as worse than Gentiles because they worshipped the God of Israel in a corrupt fashion. In response, the Samaritans hated the Jews for rejecting them and also for taking over Galilee to the north (see map in your notebook). Therefore, Samaritans would often refuse overnight shelter to Jews traveling to Jerusalem from Galilee and Jews would generally go miles out of their way to avoid passing through any part of Samaria.

As you read, find the places in this chapter on the **map** in your notebook.

Questions

Read John 4:1-42.

1. In 4:4, the text says Jesus *had* to go through Samaria. Jews only went through Samaria if they were in a great hurry; otherwise they walked around it (see *Introduction*). Was Jesus in a hurry to get to Galilee (4:40)? What does *having* to go through Samaria tells us about Jesus and about this encounter?

Jesus obviously was not in a hurry to get to Galilee, shown by the fact that he spent 2 days with the Samaritans at their request. He could have easily gone around Samaria, like other Jews did, but, of course, that would have been totally "out of character" for Jesus. For God so loved the WORLD. Jesus could not avoid these people in spite of the long history of resentment and antagonism between the Jews and the Samaritans. Prejudice meant nothing to Jesus and his going through Samaria was also an example to his disciples, who were learning from their Rabbi. No doubt, Jesus did feel like he "had" to go through Samaria, probably aware there was a divine encounter waiting. Jesus was always "in tune" with the Father, listening and watching for what he was to do. He was also showing us how to live and do the work God has given us to do. If we pay attention, we also will God nudging us to do this or that because he has an encounter planned for us.

- ♥ When was a time that you "felt" you "had" to do something outside your plans or routine and it turned out that God had an encounter planned for you? Do you usually pay attention to these feelings?

♥ What does 4:6 tell us about Jesus and how can this fact affect your everyday relationship with Jesus? Jesus got tired and weary just as we do. This should encourage us because he totally understands what we are feeling and how difficult it is to carry on when we feel depleted. The Word really became flesh (John 1:14). Jesus knows when we are tired and worn out and he knows when we need rest and refreshment.

♥ The sixth hour is noon (4:6). Women usually drew water in the morning or evening. Can you think of some reasons why this woman would come to draw water at noon?

The well was a social institution in the culture of the day. It was a gathering place for women to exchange small talk and gossip as they did their daily work. It seems that this woman was avoiding the other women in the village probably because she did not feel welcome if she came at the normal times. No doubt, she was somewhat of an outcast because of her lifestyle. Can you imagine how it made her feel to have Jesus treat her with such courtesy and respect?

2. Jesus asks a favor, "Will you give me a drink?" He could have *offered* a favor, like helping her draw the water from the well. Why was *asking* rather than *giving* the wise thing to do?

Jesus knew that a good way to make a friend was by asking a favor because it makes the person feel needed and wanted. It is sometimes better to have yourself obligated to another rather than them feeling obligated to you because you have done something for them. Jesus immediately put himself in the lesser, more needy place by asking a favor. His indebtedness to her helps undermine the prejudice. He eventually leads her to asking him for the living water and she is comfortable doing that because he has already put himself in her debt. God has the gift of living water for us. Jesus came in weakness to share God's gift with us.

♥ Can you think of a way you might use Jesus' method to approach someone you are concerned about?

Jesus' simple question, "Will you give me a drink?" crossed huge cultural, social and religious barriers (see *Introduction*). Rabbis of the day taught things like "To eat bread with a Samaritan is like eating swine's flesh" and "One should not talk with a woman on the street, because of the gossip of men; it is forbidden to give a woman a greeting." Women in this culture were regarded as property and a Jewish woman was just a step up the ladder from a Samaritan, yet Jesus talks in public to a Samaritan woman! Jesus obeyed God's Law as given in Scripture, but he disregarded religious tradition, especially when it dishonored or degraded a person.

♥ What social, ethnic or religious barriers have you overcome (or need to overcome) in Jesus' name? Who are the Samaritans in your life (people of other religions or denominations, races, or social-economic levels)? How has God been nudging you toward them?

♥ In what tone do you imagine the woman speaking in 4:9? Matter-of-factly? Sarcastically? Disbelief? Flippancy? Bitter? Amazement? If you were her, what tone would *you* have used?

3. Write out Jesus' answer to the woman found in 4:10.

Jesus answered her,
"If you knew the gift of God
and who it is that asks you for a drink,
you would have asked him
and he would have given you living water."

From this verse, write down as many things as you can see that are implied about God, Jesus, and people.

God has a gift for us

Jesus implies that he is God because he can give us living water

We need to ask God for his gift

If we ask, God will give us his gift of living water

The gift is available to anyone who asks

We may not ask because we are ignorant of the gift or that we need to ask

4. What is the "gift of God" in 4:10? Consider **John 3:16** and **7:37-39** in your answer.

The gift of God has several components. Jesus is God's gift to the world – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Gift is a descriptive name for Jesus.

Jesus was speaking to the woman about the living water that was also God's gift. Living water is what brings the life of God and feeds the life of God in us. In John 7, the living water is identified as the Holy Spirit that lives within us. The living water bubbles up and flows within us and from us. It never runs out and continues to feed and water our spiritual growth.

The gift of living water cannot be received without the Giver. Jesus said, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him . . ." Unless we come to know and accept the One who speaks to us, the gift cannot be ours. The Father shares his living water through the Son.

♥ Jesus speaks of the "gift of God" in 4:10 and also about *asking* for the gift. Do you usually ask for a gift? If you have to ask, is it still a gift? Why would a person need to *ask* for God's "gift"?

God does not give gifts that are not wanted or desired. His gifts come at no cost, but we must ask to show our desire and sincerity. God will not force Himself on us. He will not make us accept his gift. He will, however, continue to woo (pursue and entice) us, bringing us to the place of wanting to ask for his gift.

♥ For a woman living in a first century, mid-eastern culture, what was appealing about the image of "living water"? Considering the culture we live in today, what is appealing about the image of "living water"?

Answers will vary, but for the woman who lived in a dry, arid climate and had to go to the well to draw water in order to live, the living water seemed to be a promise fulfilling her daily needs and would mean she wouldn't have to work so hard.

For us today who have physical water in abundance, living water speaks more to our souls and spirits. We often feel dry, restless, empty, depleted from busy-ness and over-filled schedules. Living water carries the image of inner refreshment, watering the dryness of our souls and spirits.

5. Why was the Samaritan woman puzzled by Jesus' offer of "living water" (4:11)?

The woman's statement in this verse shows she was thinking of physical water. She could not understand how Jesus could give her living water when he nothing to draw the water from. Jesus was also using a play on words (see box below) that she did not understand. Living water meant running water. How could Jesus give her that kind of water when there was none to be found in her area?

Play on words - To the woman at the well, *living water* literally meant *running* or *moving* water; water that comes from a spring, river or brook. Running water was always preferred over well water. It was considered precious and valuable and according to rabbinic law, was the only water that could be used in ritual washings. Jacob's Well was fed largely by rainwater percolating into the cistern or well itself. It was good water, but not spring-fed. Everyone knew that the town of Sychar had no river or streams. Even Jacob had to dig a well. The Samaritan woman was, no doubt, wondering how some Jewish stranger would know about *living* or *running* water that no one else had found.

6. What are the unusual qualities of the water that Jesus offers (4:13-14)?

Quenches our spiritual thirst so that we will never thirst or be without God again. Living water "grows" in us – becoming a spring of water (artesian well) welling up, (surging, increasing, outpouring) within us bringing eternal life (which is knowing God more and more and better and better.) It revives our parched, dying spirits. We don't become thirsty again because the spring of water within us never runs dry.

♥ What is the *living water* that Jesus offers us? How does one "drink" it?

Living water is the life of God, the Holy Spirit, within us. We drink it by coming to Jesus, believing him, following him, deepening our relationship with him listening and obeying and loving. Jesus is a real historical person who still lives and is present with us today. It is through our relationship with him that we "drink" the living water of God.

♥ What type of things do you think happen in a person who has springs of living water welling up in them to eternal life? (Review the definition of *eternal life* from Lesson 3.)

Because eternal life is the very life, vitality and character of God, living water (the Spirit of God living in us) dramatically changes us by growing the fruit of the Spirit in us (Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control – Gal. 5:22-23). Living water welling up within us deepens our relationship to God and changes to our relationships to others (Love the Lord with all you heart, soul, mind and strength and love you neighbor as yourself). Living water satisfies the thirsting of our souls so that we stop trying to quench our spiritual thirst on all sorts of inadequate substitutes.

Extra Question: What are some other "waters" we drink to try and satisfy our spiritual thirst? Why don't these things satisfy so that we become thirsty again?

♥ Compare the value of *water* to *physical life* and the value of *living water* to *spiritual life*.

7. In **4:15**, the woman expresses her desire for Jesus' living water. Instead of giving it to her, Jesus asks her to go get her husband. Think of as many reasons as you can as to why Jesus made this request of her at this point in the conversation.

There could be several reasons, some of which may be:

- Jesus is testing her sincerity – does she want living water enough to go get her husband so he can hear about it too?
- It was the "proper" thing for Jesus to do in the culture.
- Jesus used this question to prove he was the Messiah (God). He wanted her to know that he knew all about her. After he let her know that he knew her heart, she would truly believe he was who he said he was.
- Jesus used the question to gently confront the woman with her sin and her need for God.
- It was a question that would allow Jesus to show his compassion by letting the woman know that he understood her circumstances and that he valued her anyway (see box below.)

"I have no husband" – Many Bible scholars point out that when Jesus asked the Samaritan woman to go get her husband, he was confronting her with her sin. This observation, no doubt, has truth in it. We must face and repent of our sins if we are to enjoy the living water Jesus offers and this woman was a sinner with many regrets. However, there is something much deeper going on in this encounter. We assume that this woman was "loose" because she had lived with a bunch of men – sort of the risqué divorcee. But, in her culture, a woman could not divorce a man; the man divorced the woman and he could do so for the flimsiest reasons because women were considered property. After a woman was divorced, she was "put out". She was nothing without a husband and she had no way to support herself. She was forced to find someone to take her in or starve. If she was lucky, the man might marry her, giving her some assurance of commitment. When Jesus said, "The fact is, you have had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband", he was not shaming her for "sleeping around". Rather, he was letting her know that he completely knew her heart, her past and her pain. Jesus also knew and understood her present shameful and painful situation where the man she was living with wouldn't even marry her, probably treating her like property as she did his household work. Jesus' frankness (truth) and compassion (grace) earned her trust so that she was now willing to talk about spiritual things. In a culture that degraded and often abused women, Jesus, throughout the Gospels, always related to women in a manner worthy of their true position – daughters of God, created in God's image.

♥ If you give any shameful or painful situation to Jesus, whether it's in the past or present, you can be sure he will be "full of **grace** and **truth**" as he brings love, forgiveness, cleansing and healing into the situation. What do you need to give him right now?

8. In 4:20, the woman asks Jesus a question which for years had divided the Jews and the Samaritans regarding the correct *location* for worship. What did Jesus say about the location of worship (4:21-24)? Jesus told the woman that a new way to worship God was now beginning. For centuries, God was worshiped in a sacred place. People had to come to the temple to worship, but now location was not important. We can worship God anywhere because we worship in spirit and in truth.
9. What does it mean to worship God "in spirit and in truth" (4:23-24). You may want to consider **Philippians 3:3** and **John 1:14** and **14:6** in your answer.

God cannot be confined to a place or be regarded as a material being. We cannot relate to God in physical terms. God is spirit and must be worshipped in spirit (spiritually rather than physically). Jesus revealed that worship was not about time or space, but was a matter of the heart. Worship is not about locations or formulas. We worship through the Holy Spirit, with our spirits on the basis of truth.

Jesus, as the Word of God is always identified as truth. Truth and Spirit are always interacting. The Spirit brings us to Truth and Truth leads us to the Spirit. (Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Truth (14:17; 15:26). True worship is spirit empowered based on the truth of who God is and what he has done. True worship is worship offered to the Father through Jesus the Son (in living faith-union with him) by means of the Holy Spirit.

♥ One definition of worship is *Spirit touching spirit*. Why does this define worship?

♥ What are some reasons why God would **seek** worshippers (4:23)?

When we worship God (telling him how great he is, choosing to trust and obey him), his Spirit touches or intertwines with our spirit. This is the most intimate relationship we can have with God. This is when we feel and know his greatness and his love. God seeks worshippers because he wants to be with us in this way. We were created by him and through him and for him. God wants nothing more than to be with us in a close, loving, intimate way. To be in a love relationship with God is why we were created. Out of worship flows our identity and purpose. We discover who we are and why we are here.

10. People who don't know Jesus don't just need more **information** about Jesus; they need to hear what Jesus has done **in our lives**. How does the happy ending to the story of the Samaritan woman demonstrate the **power of a testimony** rather than just the **power of more information** (4:39-42)?

The people in the woman's town listened to what she had to say because she was willing to share her story and tell them what Jesus had done for her. This was enough to get them to come to Jesus themselves and to experience him for themselves. This is always our goal when we share our own stories; we want to bring people to Jesus. Real knowing comes through direct encounter. The power of the woman's testimony is seen in the town people's statement: We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard what you said and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.

It is interesting to note that it was the Samaritans, not the Jews who first know Jesus as Savior of the world. This was the first time Jesus was identified as such. In 4:26 Jesus identified himself as the Messiah. He never did this with his own people until his trial before his crucifixion. Jesus is always reveals himself wherever he finds openness, acceptance and belief.

♥ How important is our sharing with others what God has done for us? When was the last time you told someone the story of what God has done in your life with real excitement?

Read **John 4:46-54**. The story of the royal official is all about *faith*. Faith in God is *believing in his power and promises before we see the results*. The stronger and deeper our faith, the more God is able to do in our lives. God wants to grow our faith, just as Jesus grew the faith of the desperate father in this story.

11. When Jesus said to the father, "You may go. Your son will live.", what **two choices** did the father have and **how would each choice reveal his faith or lack of faith?**

Jesus dismissing the man by saying his son would live created a dilemma of faith. If the father refused to return to his dying son without taking Jesus with him, he would show that he did not believe Jesus' words. On the other hand, if he followed Jesus' order, he would be returning to the dying boy with no outward assurance that the boy would recover. He was forced to make the difficult choice between insisting on evidence and thus showing disbelief or exercising faith without any tangible proof that his boy would live. Jesus put the official in a position where his actions would reveal if he had real faith. He could have stayed and continued to ask Jesus to come with home with him or he could leave and take Jesus at his word.

♥ When have you taken Jesus at his word (4:50), even when circumstances seemed impossible, and discovered that he did exactly what he promised?

12. Write the event from this story that reflects the growth and progression of the father's faith.

Crisis Faith (4:47) - In his crisis (his son close to death) the official comes to Jesus and asks for healing

Confident Faith (4:50) - With no proof or evidence, the man took Jesus at his word and left

Confirmed Faith (4:52-53) - He compared the time of the boys' healing to the time of Jesus' words; he did not see this as a coincidence. He gave Jesus the credit.

Contagious Faith (4:53b) - So he and all his household believed because of what Jesus did.

♥ When was a time your faith evolved and grew in a difficult situation?

EXTRA QUESTIONS:

- ♥ Jesus was never physically with the boy that he healed. How should this fact encourage us today?
- ♥ What is the difference between faith that is based on seeing miraculous signs and wonders (4:48) and faith that takes Jesus at his word (4:50)?
- ♥ What final result came from the affliction of the little boy's grave illness (4:53)? Do you think the royal official would have said it was worth it to go through the agony of a near-death sickness in order for the family to come to belief? What hardship have you gone through that has led to a greater spiritual good? Was it worth it?

response

Encounter with Jesus

In this chapter, Jesus exhibits *wisdom*, *compassion* and *power*. Which of these qualities comes through most strongly for you in the two stories? Which of them do you need most right now? In what situation?

Spend some time in prayer telling Jesus what you need and then quietly listen for what he will say to you. You may want to write out your prayer along with anything you hear or any Scriptures that come to mind.

Have several share what qualities of Jesus (wisdom, compassion or power) are most important to them right now. Discuss how Jesus shows us his wisdom, compassion and power.