



LESSON 4 ~ DRINKING FROM THE WELL

John 4

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.

PREPARATION

1. Before you read **John 4**, ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and guide you into all truth (John 16:13). You may want to make the following prayer your own:

Spirit of the Living God, the One who comforts, strengthens and encourages me.

I admit that I cannot understand the truth found in God's Word with only my mind.

I agree that spiritual truth has to be understood with my heart as well as my head.

So I ask You to give me spiritual understanding as I do this lesson.

*I pray that You would enable me to see, hear and understand,
with my spirit, all that You want to teach me.*

I ask this in the powerful Name of Jesus (as if Jesus were asking it).

Amen

2. Read **John 4** slowly and thoughtfully in your own Bible. As you read and reread, **underline or highlight** any verses, phrases or words that are meaningful to you. Put a **question mark** beside anything you don't understand. Put a ✓ beside anything you would like more information about.
3. **You may also want to read this chapter in another translation.** The Scripture handout for this lesson is the *Amplified Version* of the Bible. It is important, however, that you don't try to answer the questions in the lesson from just the *Amplified Version*. It is only given as a supplementary text.

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?

- ♥ 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?
 - ♥ 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?
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?

♥ 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? Flippant? Bitter? Amazement? If you were her, what tone would *you* have used?
3. Write out Jesus' answer to the woman found in 4:10.

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

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

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

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**)?

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

"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**)?
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.

- ♥ One definition of worship is *Spirit touching spirit*. Why does this define worship?
- ♥ What are some reasons why God would **seek** worshippers (**4:23**)?

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**)?

- ♥ 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**?

- ♥ 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**) _____

Confident Faith (**4:50**) _____

Confirmed Faith (**4:52-53**) _____

Contagious Faith (**4:53b**) _____

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

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.