

SESSION 1: THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Living Water: Psalm 42:1-2; 36:7-9; Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13; Zechariah 13:1

QUESTIONS

1. As we know from the story, Jesus chose the more difficult route through Samaria. Can you describe a time when this happened to you. What was the outcome?
2. Who are the Samaritans in your community? What steps could you make to break down those barriers?
3. **From the video/script:** *Faithful ministry requires meeting the challenge of the new, the different, and the unexpected. Have we planned out our lives so well that we don't have time for the chance encounter?* What changes in your life or your perspective are needed to be open to an encounter, conversation or experience God may be calling you to?
4. Are our congregations "birds of a feather"? What can you do to make others feel more welcome?
5. Discuss what it means to always be ready to serve regardless of life's conditions.
6. How do characteristics of water relate to characteristics of God? (Reference the Bible verses on first page)
7. Jesus didn't let judgment or the woman's personal history prevent Him from doing what was needed. What could stand in your way from doing what you're called to do?
8. When have you allowed someone's past to "define" who they were? Do you identify with the Samaritan woman, in that you have been judged by others? Did those feelings change how you responded in the future?

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9. Judging others, almost subconsciously, seems to be human nature. Discuss ways to stop yourself from being judgmental.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

SESSION 2: THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

John 4:1-42

QUESTIONS

1. As we read this quote from the Chief Apostle (below) and contemplate the discussion between Jesus and the woman at the well, we can gain new perspectives about worship. Worship isn't about the temple versus the mountain, traditional versus contemporary – it's about the One we worship. Worship is recognizing who God is, bringing this to expression, and then listening to God so that we might be transformed.

“What is a true worshipper? It is one who says, ‘Oh God, You are the Almighty. You are the God of love. You are the God of wisdom,’ and doing that he prepares himself to listen to God. And after having worshipped God, he listens to God and then he knows who is speaking now. And then he listens to God and he does what God tells him to do...To prepare our soul to listen to God and to prepare our mind to do what He tells us to do and my dear brothers and sisters I tell you that is and will remain the key of blessing: Doing what God tells us to do. Whatever happens, it is our task, our job, to become aware of who God is.”
(CA Schneider, Miami, FL)

- a. How does this perspective change your view of worship?
 - b. How would this understanding change your attitude of worship?
 - c. How would it change your congregation?
 - d. If we realized that worship was the purpose of our lives, how would that change you?
2. **From the video/script:** *...worship can sometimes reveal truth about ourselves.* Where do you think truth might be necessary in our congregations? Does our “Sunday best” cover up hurt or need that we aren’t seeing?
3. What is hard about being open and vulnerable in church?

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4. The woman came to the well to get water, but ending up leaving her jug to testify to her village. When have your priorities shifted or what have you had to leave behind because of an encounter with Christ?
5. Think about the “I am...” statements below. What do they mean to you? Do any of them inspire you to action, as Jesus’ “I am” statement inspired the woman?
 - a. John 6:35 - *I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.*
 - b. John 8:12 - *I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.*
 - c. John 8:58 - *Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.*
 - d. John 10:7 - *Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.*
 - e. John 11:25 - *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.*
 - f. John 13:19 - *Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He.*
 - g. John 14:6 - *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*
 - h. John 15:1 - *I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.*
6. Think of the disciples at this time – they wanted to get through Samaria as quickly as possible, but the longer they stayed, they saw Jesus’ love at work. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where, once you were able to shed your preconceptions, you saw God at work? What do we have to do in order to allow Jesus to transform us? What preconceptions do you need to shed?
7. Jesus stayed with the Samaritans for 2 days. How much time do we give Him to teach us? How could you incorporate Christ’s teaching into something you are already doing?

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

In this session, we'll look at the conversation that Jesus has with the woman at the well from the viewpoint of God calling this woman to help reveal something quite startling: His plan was and is to save all mankind.

Through this encounter we see God's intentions, we see how He calls everyday people to participate in His plan regardless of their past, and in the second part of this story, which we'll discuss at the beginning of next month, we see the effects of her testimony of Jesus Christ to the people in her life. Pause the video now to read the first part of the story from John 4:1-19 and to discuss the relationship between the Samaritans and Jews using the material from your guides.

The Jewish people did everything they could to not travel through Samaria. Jesus doesn't go through Samaria just because it was the shortest route; He went because He felt a calling to go there. It says in John 3:16 that *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*, and Jesus intended to prove that by showing that salvation is for all human beings. This instance in John isn't the only time Jesus breaks through traditional prejudices.

In Luke 17:1-9, Jesus heals 10 men with leprosy. When the only one to come back and praise God is the Samaritan, Jesus commends his faith. Further, in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), it isn't the Jewish priest or the Levite that help the man in the ditch, it's the Samaritan that exemplifies being a neighbor.

Are we willing to venture out beyond our comfort zone, naturally and spiritually? Into places we may not feel at home? God challenges each one of us to go through our own "Samaria" in order to discover and bear witness to the depth and breadth of God's love for the world. The challenge is to minister to people of different socioeconomic groups, races, ethnicities, genders, or other backgrounds. Faithful ministry requires meeting the challenge of the new, the different, and the unexpected. Have we planned out our lives so well that we don't have time or the chance encounter? For God to lead us to an unexpected conversation? Are we aware enough to see His direction? This narrative from John invites attentiveness to the unexpected, a willingness to risk stepping outside borders, and an openness to the Spirit.

In verse 6 of John 4 we see Jesus in His humanness; tired, weary, thirsty. Yet, even in this state, He's willing to reach out to others. We remember from our recent Good Friday service that Christ cared for others, even as He hung on the cross.

We may be called in times when we are physically weak, overwhelmed by life, not ready, or just don't feel like it. At the well, we see Jesus, perhaps weak in His humanity, yet always ready to serve others.

Now let's consider the everlasting life that Jesus mentions in verses 13 through 14. Water is an age-old symbol for human deliverance – especially for those who live in the waterless desert. In many places in the Bible, God is referred to as the fountain of living water. This image is deepened further in the person of Christ. The water that He offers leads to eternal life. Christ used the example of water because the woman was coming to the well for water. He understood her way of life and spoke to her in terms she could understand. Christ understands us and speaks to our unique situations as well.

Lastly, we find in verses 16 through 18 God revealing Himself as allknowing, yet merciful. In this interaction, Jesus shows no interest in the woman's supposed sin. She never expresses repentance, and Jesus says nothing about forgiveness or judgment. Free from accusations, we can see that the conversation about the woman's husbands serves two purposes: it illustrates Jesus' ability to see and know things, thus a prophet, and it gives the woman a revelation of God through Jesus. For us, we see that Jesus' love extends to everyone, even those we might consider on the outskirts of society.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

Relations between the Samaritans and the Jews

(Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible) The history of relations between the Samaritans, situated in the north around Mt Gerizim (their holy mountain), Shechem, and Samaria, and Jewish populations in Judea and then later in Galilee is one of fluctuating tensions. The ancient tension between the northern and southern kingdoms was revived with the return of exiles to Jerusalem under the Persian ruler Cyrus' edict (c. 538 B.C.). The entire southern area was at the time being governed from Samaria in the north by Sanballat, a native ruler of Palestine under Persian authority. The return of exiles to Jerusalem, particularly with their intentions of rebuilding the Jerusalem temple, posed an obvious political threat to his leadership in the north (Ezr 4:7-24; Neh 4:1-9). Opposition was at first politically motivated, but became religious as well when sometime later, possibly the 4th century B.C. (toward the end of Persian or beginning of Greek rule), a rival temple was erected on Mt Gerizim.

Poor relations came to a climax during the brief period of Jewish independence under the Hasmoneans, when the Jewish ruler, John Hyrcanus, marched against Shechem and Samaria, conquering and destroying the Samaritan temple on Mt Gerizim (c. 128 B.C.). Under Herod the Great, Samaria's fortunes improved, although animosity still continued between the Samaritans and Jews in Judea and Galilee. Holding the Jerusalem temple to be a false cultic center and excluded from the inner courts by the Jerusalem authorities, a group of Samaritans desecrated the Jerusalem temple in approximately A.D. 6 by spreading human bones within the temple porches and sanctuary during Passover. Hostility toward Galilean Jews traveling through Samaria on the way to Jerusalem for various feasts was also not uncommon (Lk 9:51–53). This animosity continued in Jesus' day. Both groups excluded the other from their respective cultic centers, the Jerusalem temple and the Samaritan temple on Mt Gerizim. The Samaritans, for example, were forbidden access to the inner courts of the temple and offerings they might give were accepted as from Gentiles. Thus, although probably more accurately defined as "schismatics," it appears Samaritans were in practice treated as Gentiles. All marriage between the groups was therefore forbidden and social intercourse was greatly restricted (Jn 4:9). With such proscribed separation, it is not surprising that any interaction between the two groups was strained. The mere term "Samaritan" was one of contempt on the lips of Jews (8:48) and among some scribes it possibly would not even be uttered.

The main beliefs of the Samaritans demonstrate both the close affinities as well as obvious divergences from mainstream Judaism. They held in common with Judaism a strong monotheistic faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In contrast, however, there was an elevating of Mt Gerizim in the north as the only holy place for sacrifice, based on several divergent passages in Deuteronomy and Exodus in the Samaritan text. Mt Gerizim came to be identified with the site of Abel's first altar (Gn 4:4), the site of Noah's sacrifice after the flood (8:20), the meeting place of Abraham and Melchizedek (14:18), the site of Isaac's intended sacrifice (ch 22), and many other associations. The Samaritans held only the first five biblical books (Pentateuch) to be inspired and based their dogma and practice exclusively on these books. Such a narrow canon not only determined the direction of Samaritan theology, but further separated them from contemporary Jewish thought. Moses, for example, becomes in Samaritan thought an even more exalted figure than in Judaism. He was considered not only the chief prophet, but in later thought was described as the choicest of men, pre-existing from creation, interceding with God for Israel, and being to man "the light of the world." The messianic hope of Samaritan theology also reflects this narrow canon. A Messiah from the house of David could not be anticipated, as no evidence for such could be found in the Pentateuch. Rather, the Samaritans awaited a "prophet like Moses" based on Deuteronomy 18:15–18. This anticipated prophet was also designated the "Taheb," the Restorer, for he would in the last days restore proper cultic worship on Mt Gerizim and bring the worship of the heathen to that site. It is clear, therefore, that it was primarily the claim of supremacy for Mt Gerizim that separated this group theologically and culturally from their Jewish neighbors.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 2: THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Read John 4:21 - 42 together before watching the video.

In our last session we looked closely at the first part of the encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well in the fourth chapter of John. Today, We're going to continue our discussion on the story from a different perspective: how can we use the Gospel as a model for our lives?

Jesus says to the woman at the well, *"Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father... But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*

What does Jesus mean by this? For generations, Jews and Samaritans have argued about the true location of worship. (Is it a mountain or a temple in Jerusalem?) But Jesus shifts the focus by naming the One they worship: God. Do we also place too much emphasis on the place, the building, in which we worship rather than the One we worship?

To take this a step further, one could look at this discussion between Jesus and the woman about differences in worship, and see conversations that we have today; the temple versus the mountain, traditional versus contemporary. Instead of thinking about worship in regards to what is most enjoyable or attractive, maybe we should be asking ourselves how our worship reflects the nature of God as well as His grace, forgiveness, and love.

Beyond worship that reflects God's nature, worship can sometimes reveal truth about ourselves. In the story of the Samaritan woman, Jesus speaks the truth in love to her, revealing things about her life without judgment. Do we get a glimpse of self-revelation while we worship? Do we see the truth of our daily lives? And once we get this look at ourselves, do we see that even though God knows everything we've ever done, He still loves us?

The last thing Jesus says to the woman before the disciples return is "I am He, I'm the Messiah." This revelation inspires her to testify of what she just heard. In fact, her life was given such a new direction that she left her water pot behind. Her priorities shifted from drawing water to drawing people to Jesus. Similarly, how are we reoriented when Jesus reveals Himself to us?

Look at verses 27 to 38 and imagine the experience of the disciples who wanted to get through Samaria as quickly as possible. Now they find themselves living among the Samaritan villagers as guests and witnessing how God is at work among these people. This was not only a transformative time for the village, but also for the disciples, who once again see Jesus displaying God's love where there was, in their minds, separation, prejudice, and animosity.

Verses 39-42 tell about how the Samaritan woman brings much of her village to Christ through her testimony. Her belief is new and questioning, as we can see in her remark, "He cannot be the Messiah, can He?" But that doesn't stop her from testifying, and it doesn't stop others from coming to believe in Jesus. It's her personal testimony that draws the rest of the villagers to the well. Can you think about the factors that stop you from testifying about who Jesus is?

The declaration that the villagers believe in Christ not because of what the woman said, but because they heard what Christ had to say, can apply to our approach to divine service. As members, do we come to hear the man behind the altar, or are we coming to hear Christ Himself? On the other side, as ministers, we have a responsibility to allow ourselves to be the vessel that Christ needs us to be. We don't need to have all the answers, but we need to point people to Christ, like the woman did, and let Him be the change-maker.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

Her witness...

Her witness...is invitational (come and see), not judgmental; it is within the range permitted by her experience; it is honest with its own uncertainty; it is for everyone who will hear. How refreshing. Her witness avoids triumphalism, hawking someone else's conclusions, packaged answers to unasked questions, thinly veiled ultimatums and threats of hell, and assumptions of certainty on theological matters. She does convey, however, her willingness to let her hearers arrive at their own affirmations about Jesus, and they do: "This is indeed the Savior of the world."

- Fred Craddock