

LESSON 3

NEVER THIRST AGAIN

John 4:1–15

New Year's resolutions are intriguing. Everybody makes them, but hardly anyone keeps them. Maybe you are one of the few who've kept their New Year's resolutions. If carried out correctly, resolutions can be a helpful exercise.

1. What New Year's resolution did you break the quickest?

2. What was your most creative New Year's resolution? Did you keep it?

If you have trouble keeping resolutions, maybe you should simplify. Make them more achievable. Here are some examples of some comical, doable resolutions:

- Think of a password other than “password.”
- Read the book I bought five years ago on how to be more effective in getting things done.
- Stop drinking orange juice after I brush my teeth.
- Switch my username to “password” and my password to “username.”

Tuck those away for next year and feel like a success when you are able to keep them all. Moving from the banal to the serious, what kinds of achievable resolutions do you need to make in your spiritual life? Sometimes making a resolution that involves *experiencing* something is easier than one that involves *doing* something.

Such a resolution is easier because experiencing often leads to doing. If I have a good experience at a restaurant, it may lead to doing—a decision to eat there more often. If I experience a bad car accident, it may lead to doing—a decision to drive more cautiously. If a young married couple babysits for some friends (experience), it may lead to doing—a decision to start a family. Moving to the spiritual realm, experiencing the incomparable love of Jesus may lead to doing—sharing that great love with others.

3. Name some ways we can substantively experience the love of Jesus.

4. Specifically, how have you experienced the love of Jesus through your personal interaction with the Word of God?

God's Love and Our Thirst

In Matthew 28:19 and 20 Jesus gave His followers the Great Commission. He tells us to make disciples by teaching people as much Biblical truth as possible. Those are our marching orders. This study will focus on John 4:1-15, where we see how Jesus modeled how to reach a person with God's love.

Someone might think, "It's easy for Jesus to tell us to do that. He just goes away to Heaven and makes us do the hard stuff." Not so. Jesus made the command after demonstrating time and time again what He wanted us to do. Jesus reached far and wide with the love of God.

One of the major focuses of John's Gospel is "God so loved the *world*." What does "world" mean? Jesus' ministry brought clarity to the definition of "world." In John 3 Jesus shared the love of God with a respected cleric. Now, He swings the opposite direction and shares God's love with a notorious adulterer.

Nobody is out of the reach of God's love, and that includes you. God's love isn't for the "world" as a generic principle. There's a personal element to it. All of us are

included in the word “world.” God’s love is for the world. God loves you. Jesus came to die for you. Let that settle in your mind and just worship for a moment.

Jesus proved His love is for us personally when He reached out to sinful people. Jesus led thirsty people to living water. Don’t simply observe this story from afar. Place yourself in the story. In a very real way, the sinful woman at the well is just like you and me, desperate for a touch from the Master.

5. Between a respected cleric and a notorious adulterer, who needed Jesus more?
6. How does it give you comfort to know that Jesus not only asked us to do something, but He also personally modeled it for us?
7. Read John 4:1-15. What was the most significant thought that stood out to you?

Breaking through Barriers

John 4:1-3 gives us insight into Jesus’ plan. Basically, He was not ready to escalate the tension with the religious leaders, so He moved the location of His ministry. However, even the route Jesus chose was on-mission.

Avoid like the plague

Leaving Judea and traveling to Galilee required traveling north. I remember a handful of things from high school geometry class, one of which is that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. In Jesus’ day, walking was the main mode of transportation. It was slow and inefficient; therefore, taking a direct, straight-line

path was expedient and wise. The quickest route from Judea to Galilee was a straight line, resulting in a trip through Samaria.

However, Samaria was populated by the Samaritans. The Samaritans were mixed-race people—part Jew and part Gentile. In addition to being mixed-race, they had also mixed the Jewish religion with Gentile pagan religions. The “pure-blood,” orthodox Jewish people who lived around Samaria despised the Samaritans. Hatred ran strong in both directions. Jewish people avoided contact with the Samaritans at all costs—including opting for a longer journey when travelling north-south in order to circumvent Samaria. Now that’s some deep hatred.

Jesus hated something too: racism, but these social barriers wouldn’t stop Him. John 4:4 is wonderful and convicting. It’s a short verse, but the key phrase is “must needs.” Why did Jesus have to go through Samaria? He could have gone around Samaria like His contemporaries, so the “must needs” wasn’t out of geographic necessity. Jesus *had* to go through Samaria because He *had* to share the living water of God’s love with thirsty Samaritans. He was unwaveringly on-mission.

8. As you think through your typical week, what kinds of things do you feel you have to do?

9. Certainly some of those “have to” items are necessities of life. What other passions press you to action?

10. Where does knowing and loving God rank on the “have to” scale? What about sharing that love with other people?

Socially unacceptable

Read John 4:5–9. Jesus sent His disciples to find food, and He sovereignly landed at a well outside the city where He met an ostracized woman. Carrying water was not an easy task, so visiting a well close to home would be advantageous. Instead, this woman chose to travel outside the city to a lonely, secluded well. Normally women fetched water in the cooler parts of the day, but this woman came in the heat of the day. Women often came in groups as a social outing, but this woman came alone. There was a reason for all of these things: she lived a shameful life, leading to being a social outcast.

With Jesus, there are no outcasts, because Jesus came to save outcasts. Because of our sin, we are all like this woman: broken, stained, hurt, and needy. These are the kinds of people Jesus came to love and save; therefore, Jesus came to love and save you and me.

God's love is so powerful because it can break down any kind of personal or social barrier people attempt to erect. No Jewish man would have been caught dead talking to this woman at the well. There are several reasons for such a practice, and Jesus ignored them all. Let's look at two of the barriers Jesus shattered to reach this woman:

The gender barrier: In that culture, men generally didn't speak to women, and men certainly didn't engage a woman in a theological discussion. Jesus ignored that barrier.

The prejudicial barrier: Jesus asked for a drink when He didn't have a cup. He was asking to use her vessel. The woman was shocked. Her statement in verse 9 could be understood, "Jews do not use dishes Samaritans have used." A Jew who drank from a Samaritan's vessel would be ceremonially unclean. Jesus ignored this barrier.

Jesus didn't care what the religious "elites" thought about His actions, because He came to save people. He came to save the clean and neat church-goers (but still sinful) *and* those with open, ugly sin. Jesus provided a great pattern here. He met people where they were and took them to where they needed to be.

Have you experienced the love of Jesus? If so, do you see yourself as someone worthy of being loved, or do you see yourself as you really are—similar to the adulterous woman at the well? If you have experienced Jesus' love, are you sharing the joy of that love with others? If you're wondering where to meet people, follow the example of Jesus and go to where you'll meet sinful people.

11. How does realizing your own sinfulness cause you to appreciate the love of Jesus?
12. If you're comfortable to do so, share your story of how Jesus met you and changed your life with His love.
13. Where could you go to find sinners who need to know about God's love?
14. In your group, share the name of someone you are trying to reach right now, and take a moment to pray for those people.

Thirsty and Blind

We left off with Jesus at the well asking the woman for a drink from her cup. She was shocked at the request. What did Jesus say next? How did He respond? What do we say to thirsty people to lead them to living water?

15. Read John 4:10–15. How did this woman keep missing the point?

16. What is the thirst Jesus was speaking of, and what is the water that quenches that thirst?

Physical to spiritual

Though Jesus was pressing toward spiritual realities, He legitimately asked this woman for a drink of water. For all we know, she gave Him a drink. The conversation that ensued might have been between sips. Can you imagine having a casual conversation with the sovereign God of the universe?

Jesus made it look so simple. When you meet thirsty people, what should you say to them? Jesus gave us a great example. He was at a well, so he talked about water. He used physical water as a bridge to spiritual truth. Seems almost too simple, doesn't it?

17. As you think of people who need Jesus' living water, how can you engage them in simple conversation but move it to a deeper level?

How did Jesus turn the question around to spiritual matters? He tipped His hand as to His identity when He said in essence, "If you knew Who you were talking to and what I could give you, you would have asked *Me* for a drink instead." Look at verse 10 again. What is Jesus referring to when He said "the gift of God"?

18. What do you think the "gift of God" is?

The question is answered later in the verse: it is "living water." Next question: What is living water? To answer this question, we must dip back into the Old Testament. Water was a common motif for the Jewish people and would have resonated with John's original audience. Look what Jeremiah 2:13 says: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

God's people rejected the fresh water that He provided for the stagnant waters of their own idolatry. In these Scripture passages, water represents that which satisfies and feeds us. It's the source of our joy. It's our connectedness to God. In short, the gift of God—this living water—is the gift of the forgiveness of sins and being in a right relationship with our Creator. That is the only water that truly satisfies.

19. Humans are programmed to desire a relationship with the Creator. Before salvation, how do people attempt to fill that desire?

Thirsty, but submerged in water

Jesus—the true source of living water—was standing right next to this thirsty woman, but she couldn't see it. "Living water" in those days was known to be flowing water that existed under the well. So, John 4:11 and 12 are sadly comical. Jesus offered her life and salvation, and she responded by saying in effect, "How are you going to access the living water when you don't even have a shovel?"

Jesus tried again to drive the conversation to spiritual realities and uttered some of the most beautiful words in all the Bible.

20. Read John 4:13 and 14. How do these words speak to you? How has Jesus quenched the thirst of your soul?

21. What did Jesus mean when He spoke about a spring of water inside of us?

When we trust in Jesus for salvation, believing that His death paid the penalty for our sins and believing that His righteousness becomes ours, we are instantly placed into a relationship with our Creator. He literally places His divine life inside of us in the form of the Holy Spirit. At this point in the Gospel of John, the truth about the

Holy Spirit is just a hint, but later in John 7:38 and 39, He expounded further about the matter.

Despite Jesus' clear teaching, the woman continued in her blindness toward spiritual things. She was dying of thirst while the only source of living water was three feet from her. In John 4:15 we see just how blind she was. Her response even seemed to include a little sarcasm. Basically she said, "Sign me up. Give me some of this water. I'd love to never be thirsty again, and I'd especially love to never have to come to *this* place again." More about that in the next chapter.

Leading thirsty people to living water

We live in a world full of thirsty people. Maybe you are one of those thirsty people. The good news is that God's love is for *you*. There is water available to you in the form of Jesus Christ. He died to give life and to quench your thirst.

What will you do with Jesus? Have you accepted Him? If so, are you leading others to living water? What social barriers or self-inflicted barriers do you need to break through in order to connect with thirsty people? Jesus disdained every social barrier imaginable to bring His love to one lonely, sinful woman at a well. What is God calling you to do?

22. Why are we often so afraid to share the living water with thirsty people?

23. How can experiencing and appreciating the love of Jesus motivate us to take that love to others?

Memorize: John 4:13 and 14

Pray: Thank You, Father, for going to such great lengths and great cost to save me. Please give me the courage and passion to share that love with others.

