Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

Summary and Goal

Jesus had a conversation with a Samaritan woman He met at the well of Jacob. In their discussion, Jesus claimed to have the living water that will satisfy the soul, and He revealed the truth that God seeks people to worship Him in Spirit and truth. As Jesus’ followers, we resemble the Samaritan woman as we exalt Jesus for who He is and then tell others about the living water He offers.

Main Passage
John 4:1-42

Session Outline
2. Jesus is the Prophet who makes true worship possible (John 4:16-24).
3. Jesus is the Messiah who sends us out on mission (John 4:25-42).

Theological Theme
The Father is seeking true worshipers who worship Him in Spirit and truth.

Christ Connection
Jesus told the Samaritan woman that a day was coming when worshipers would not focus on the physical location of Jerusalem or the mountain but worshipers would worship in Spirit and truth. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, our worship is no longer confined by geography. We worship Jesus as the Savior of the whole world.

Missional Application
God calls us to open our eyes to see the harvest of people across the world who need the living water that only Christ can provide.
Introduction

Start by articulating the good news that God can save anyone—people from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and lifestyles (leader p. 130; PSG p. 101).

When you think of people who are “beyond the reach” of God’s grace, what characteristics come to mind?

How do accounts of Jesus showing grace to all kinds of people challenge these stereotypes?

Summarize this session about Jesus’ conversation with a Samaritan woman He met at the well of Jacob (leader p. 130; PSG p. 102).


Read John 4:1-6. Provide background on Samaria (referencing the region and the location of Jacob’s well on Pack Item 3: Jesus: The Early Years Map) and how Jews at this time viewed the Samaritans. Then note how Jesus took the direct route into Samaria (leader p. 131; PSG p. 102).

What are some examples of “earthly” water that people drink from in order to quench their spiritual thirst?

How do we know that these other sources of water do not satisfy?

For Further Discussion

What can we learn from Jesus’ example of transitioning from the natural realm to subjects related to the gospel?

How have you steered a conversation in this manner?
2. Jesus is the Prophet who makes true worship possible (John 4:16-24).

Ask a volunteer to read John 4:16-24. Comment on how Jesus took the conversation in a personal direction, and He kept the focus on the woman’s heart as one of the worshipers God was seeking (leader pp. 133-134; PSG pp. 104-105).

What are some ways we sidestep certain subjects in order to avoid talking about the state of our relationship with God?

Explain what Jesus meant by worshiping in Spirit and truth. Such worship must be saturated in the Scriptures and must focus our attention on Jesus (leader p. 134; PSG p. 105).

What are the characteristics of worshiping in Spirit and in truth?

Can worship be in Spirit but not in truth? In truth but not in Spirit? Why or why not?

3. Jesus is the Messiah who sends us out on mission (John 4:25-42).

Read John 4:25-42. Emphasize that this passage is all about mission. First, understanding that Jesus was the Messiah, the woman went and told others about Him (leader pp. 135-136; PSG pp. 106-107).

Has there been a season in your walk with Christ where you were more sharing of the gospel than in your current season? What made the difference?

Why is it easy for us to lose our passion for sharing the good news of Jesus with the lost? What can we do about it?

Second, Jesus told the disciples about the joy of ministry and how the sacrifice of doing God’s will outweighs all other concerns. Third, many Samaritans in the city trusted in Jesus (leader pp. 136-137; PSG p. 108).

How was the message of Jesus sown in your life, drawing you to faith in Him?

Conclusion

Help your group see the great harvest of people from every geographic location, gender, and ethnicity who need to come and see Jesus (leader p. 137; PSG p. 108). Apply the truths of this session with “His Mission, Your Mission” (PSG p. 109).
Introduction

The good news of the gospel is that God can save anyone, and He does. He saves people from different backgrounds, different ethnicities, and different lifestyles.

I love seeing God work in the hearts of people who are economically well off and those who are disadvantaged. I love seeing Him change the hearts of people you’d least expect. After all, that’s what God did for me. While I was running away from God, His grace chased me down. Jesus’ followers shared the gospel with me, and the Spirit used their words to stir up within me a desire to worship God in Spirit and in truth.

In previous sessions we saw how Jesus interacted with Nicodemus—a religious man who came to visit Jesus at night; we saw how Jesus’ ministry intersected with and then transcended the ministry of John the Baptist. Now the apostle John shows us another scene of Jesus’ interaction. This time Jesus speaks with a woman whose ethnicity and past would have made her seem “beyond the reach” of God’s grace.

When you think of people who are “beyond the reach” of God’s grace, what characteristics come to mind?

How do accounts of Jesus showing grace to all kinds of people challenge these stereotypes?

Session Summary

In this session we listen in on a conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman He met at the well of Jacob. In their discussion, Jesus claimed to have the living water that will satisfy the soul, and He revealed the truth that God seeks people to worship Him in Spirit and truth. As Jesus’ followers, we resemble the Samaritan woman as we exalt Jesus for who He is and then tell others about the living water He offers.

The story of Jesus’ interaction with the woman at the well begins with a couple of geographical details—but take note! These details are essential to understanding the dynamics of the conversation about to take place.

1 When Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard he was making and baptizing more disciples than John 2 (though Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were), 3 he left Judea and went again to Galilee. 4 He had to travel through Samaria; 5 so he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar near the property that Jacob had given his son Joseph. 6 Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, worn out from his journey, sat down at the well. It was about noon.

The route Jesus selected to travel from Judea to Galilee was quick but not common. It took Him through Samaria, an area that most Jews would avoid. The Samaritans were considered “half-breeds” because their forefathers were Israelites from the Northern Kingdom of Israel (conquered in 722 b.c.) who had intermarried with other Assyrian captives. As a result of their mixed bloodlines, they were despised by almost all Jews.

A parallel in our day would be the lingering racial and economic segregation in North American cities. It reminds me of a time I helped a couple get to the Kansas City airport and had to travel from one side of Kansas City to the other. They had been given a circuitous route that was going to take them a long time. Why the longer route? Because it would have kept them from having to go through the inner city!

In a similar setting, Jesus rejected the culturally acceptable route for Jews that went around the Samaritans. Instead, He took the direct route, and this decision put Him at Jacob’s well around noontime, when the social outcasts came to draw water.

How does the gospel speak to the forms of segregation our society has created?

What do we learn from Jesus’ model of breaking down cultural barriers in His search for the lost?

Further Commentary

“No wonder Jesus constantly got in trouble with the rules-keepers—He believed people were more important than rules. Jesus’ behavior inflamed the hatred of the Pharisees, who were known for keeping all the rules—not only the Law of God but also the commandments of men. Additionally, when Jesus set aside social convictions for the sake of the kingdom, even His disciples were occasionally puzzled over His unconventional behavior (John 4:27). Like any culture, society dictated certain things a person should and should not do. These social convictions were informed by religious beliefs, ethnic history, community expectations, and family obligations. Anyone who ignored these unspoken rules was considered arrogant and dangerous. This was especially true in Jesus’ day, where a person’s social group defined his or her identity. Compliance was the norm; individuality was not tolerated. So, Jews were expected to behave like Jews. Men were to behave like men. To do otherwise was to invite the judgment of your people. Jesus seemed to break all the rules when He made a simple request of a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (vv. 5-42).”

—Rodney Reeves, Biblical Illustrator
7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water.  
“Give me a drink,” Jesus said to her, 8 because his disciples had gone into town to buy food.  
9 “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.  
10 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.”  
11 “Sir,” said the woman, “you don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this ‘living water’? 12 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.”  
13 Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. 14 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.”  
15 “Sir,” the woman said to him, “give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and come here to draw water.”

Here we listen in on a dialogue between Jesus and a woman who was likely considered a social outcast. Jesus was the One who initiated the conversation when He asked for a drink of water. In Jesus’ day, such a conversation was taboo. A teacher of the law or a rabbi would avoid talking to a woman, especially one from this ethnic background and with her social history, which we will see in the next section.  
The woman’s response included an element of surprise: “Don’t you realize I’m a Samaritan?” She saw herself as “out of bounds” and “cast out” by the Jews and perhaps devalued because of her ethnicity.  
But Jesus advanced the conversation in a way that implied this conversation was God’s gift to her. He steered their discussion about water to the need for living water that only God can offer—the gift of salvation, the gift of God Himself through the work of Jesus the Son and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. To a woman whose soul longed for satisfaction, Jesus spoke of living water that quenches spiritual thirst.
One summer when I was a kid, I was playing outside in the backyard with my friends. When I grew thirsty, I was faced with a choice. I could stop the fun that I was having and go inside for a cold drink of water, or I could drink the water in the swimming pool that had been outside since the previous winter—water that had turned a few shades of green with leaves and algae growing on top. Not surprisingly, I chose the running water from inside!

What we see in this scene with Jesus is a promise of flowing water, not the dead, moldy water that simply stays in one place. The picture Jesus created for this woman was that of living water that quenches thirst forever, as opposed to water found in one place or water that doesn’t fully satisfy.

What are some examples of “earthly” water that people drink from in order to quench their spiritual thirst?

How do we know that these other sources of water do not satisfy?

2. Jesus is the Prophet who makes true worship possible (John 4:16-24).

As the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman continues, we see a shift toward the woman’s personal situation. Take a look:

16 “Go call your husband,” he told her, “and come back here.”
17 “I don’t have a husband,” she answered.
“You have correctly said, ‘I don’t have a husband,’” Jesus said. 18 “For you’ve had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”
19 “Sir,” the woman replied, “I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”
20 Jesus told her, “Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 21 You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. 22 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. 23 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.”

Further Commentary

“This God who is spirit can be worshipped only ‘in spirit and truth.’ Both in v. 23 and in v. 24, the one preposition ‘in’ governs both nouns... There are not two separable characteristics of the worship that must be offered: it must be ‘in spirit and truth,’ i.e. essentially God-centred, made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in personal knowledge of and conformity to God’s Word-made-flesh, the one who is God’s ‘truth,’ the faithful exposition and fulfilment of God and his saving purposes... The worshippers whom God seeks worship him out of the fullness of the supernatural life they enjoy (‘in spirit’), and on the basis of God’s incarnate Self-Expression, Christ Jesus himself, through whom God’s person and will are finally and ultimately disclosed (‘in truth’); and these two characteristics form one matrix, indivisible. Indeed, the association of ‘word’ and ‘Spirit’ is strong in the Old Testament (e.g., Neh. 9:20,30; Ps. 33:6; 147:18; Isa. 59:21) and it is just possible that this connection is in the Evangelist’s mind, since Jesus the ‘Word made flesh’ (1:14) and ‘the truth’ (14:6) is also the one to whom God gives the Spirit without limit (3:34).”

–D. A. Carson
It is interesting to note how Jesus took the conversation in a personal direction after having engaged this woman on friendly terms. The discussion about water prompted Jesus to speak the truth about spiritual thirst that only God can quench. Then the discussion about the woman’s marital history led to a demonstration of Jesus’ ability to know the hearts of people. “You are a prophet,” the woman said in response, and she was right.

We see Jesus’ heart in how He engaged in conversation. He did not just talk. He also listened. He did not condemn the woman for her past; He continued having a meaningful conversation.

Even when the woman tried to redirect the topic away from her marital history and toward the location of worship, Jesus kept the focus on her heart. He claimed that God was seeking worshipers in Spirit and in truth. Don’t miss what He was implying—this woman was one of the people God was seeking.

What are some ways we sidestep certain subjects in order to avoid talking about the state of our relationship with God?

Jesus informed the Samaritan woman that worship would no longer be bound by geographic location. God was calling people everywhere to pursue Him, to worship Him rightly. The doors of salvation were opening wide to the whole world.

The key, however, is that God desired people to worship Him rightly. To worship in Spirit and truth means we must be born again in order to give acceptable worship to God. He alone is the One who can lead us to worship in Spirit and truth. This worship must be saturated in the Scriptures and must focus our attention on Jesus.

As Kevin Vanhoozer writes: “Right worship proceeds from right knowledge of God…Focusing on the right object is everything in worship. Ignorant worship fails to invigorate or to quench our spiritual thirst. Ignorant worship is a liturgy of death, not life. In Jeremiah God says: ‘My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water’ (Jer. 2:13). Through our own efforts we can attain neither a right knowledge nor a right worship of God.”

What are the characteristics of worshiping in Spirit and in truth?

Can worship be in Spirit but not in truth? In truth but not in Spirit? Why or why not?
3. Jesus is the Messiah who sends us out on mission (John 4:25-42).

We’ve seen in this conversation that Jesus offers living water that satisfies spiritual thirst forever. We’ve also seen that Jesus is the Prophet who reveals the truth that the Father is seeking worshipers in Spirit and truth. Now we see the response of the disciples when they noticed Jesus was talking with this woman. We also see the woman’s response to this conversation.

25 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.”

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

27 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?”

28 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?”

29 They left the town and made their way to him.

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

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

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

33 “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.”

39 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.”

Further Commentary

“Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman were both part of the prepared harvest for which Jesus came. As disciples of Jesus, we follow him into a great grace story that has secured the salvation of men and women ‘from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages’ (Rev. 7:9). All of history is bound up with God’s commitment to redeem his covenant family through the work of Jesus… The gospel comes to us in order that it might run through us. Having believed on Jesus, the Samaritan woman went back to her community to share the good news with her family and friends. In doing so, she gives us the paradigm of a good testimony. Jesus is the hero of her story. She drew attention to the One who exposed her sin and gave her life; and in doing so, she invited her friends to do the same. The gospel is personal, but it is not private.”

—Scotty Smith, Gospel Transformation Bible
This passage is all about mission! First, the woman made a comment about the Messiah coming to make things right. It was an attempt to put off any decision or claim that Jesus as a prophet might make on her. But Jesus instantly revealed to her that He was the Messiah she was speaking about!

That's when the plot thickens. The disciples who had gone into town to find food arrived at this pivotal moment of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman. They wondered about His motives for breaking cultural protocol, for ignoring ethical and cultural barriers. While they were questioning in their hearts what Jesus was doing, the Samaritan woman left her jar of earthly water and ran back into town. As soon as she understood that Jesus was the Messiah, she dropped everything and told others about Him.

A few years ago, my family was gathered at my in-laws’ house watching a football game where our team was about to lose. In the closing seconds of the game, our team scored an incredible touchdown and (unexpectedly) won the game. I will never forget my brother-in-law’s reaction. He left his food and family in the living room, bolted out the front door, and started telling people on the street, “We won!” The excitement electrified him and he couldn’t help but share the news.

An even deeper, more incredible passion was at work in the Samaritan woman. She had just met Jesus, and she was ready for everyone else to meet Him too. Some of the greatest and most passionate evangelists are people who have recently embraced Jesus. They are filled with excitement to tell others about the good news of what God has done. Unfortunately, it’s easy to lose that initial awe and wonder at God’s salvation. And with that loss of passion, we share the gospel less and less. For this reason, it’s vital that we see people like the Samaritan woman and ask God to rekindle our hearts and refresh us with a desire to share His love with the world.

Is there been a season in your walk with Christ where you were more sharing of the gospel than in your current season? What made the difference?

Why is it easy for us to lose our passion for sharing the good news of Jesus with the lost? What can we do about it?

As the Samaritan woman was running through town telling people about the Messiah, the disciples urged Jesus to eat, but Jesus told them He found satisfaction in doing the will of God. Jesus was hungry, but His purpose in this conversation was to emphasize the joy of ministry and how the sacrifice of doing God’s will outweighs all other concerns. Serving people the food of God’s Word is more important than any other kind of feast.
Through the ministry of the Samaritan woman, God brought many in that city to trust in Jesus. They were made curious by the words of the woman, but then when they encountered Jesus the Messiah, they believed for themselves. This is the model for evangelism. The grace-filled content of our conversations with unbelievers should make them curious about Jesus. Following this, it is our responsibility to unpack the glorious riches of the gospel to them in ways they can understand. As we walk them through the Scriptures, they encounter the God who gives us living water.

How was the message of Jesus sown in your life, drawing you to faith in Him?

Conclusion

As we saw in the previous sessions, when God the Holy Spirit begins to do the supernatural work that only He can do, regeneration takes place. Through faith, sinners are born again and made saints and are now able to worship God in Spirit and in truth. God has privileged us with the call to go and make our Messiah known because He is looking for worshipers.

Through the ministry of Jesus, worshiping God is no longer bound by geographic location, gender, or ethnicity. Galatians 3:26-28 makes us aware that salvation is open and available for sinners from every imaginable background. Like Jesus told the disciples, the harvest of people in our vicinity is great. We need God to open our eyes to see people around us and to open our mouths to speak His truth and lead them to Christ. And like the Samaritan woman, we say, “Come and see!”

CHRIST CONNECTION: Jesus told the Samaritan woman that a day was coming when worshipers would not focus on the physical location of Jerusalem or the mountain but worshipers would worship in Spirit and truth. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, our worship is no longer confined by geography. We worship Jesus as the Savior of the whole world.
Get expert insights on weekly studies through Ministry Grid at MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject. Grow with other group leaders at the Group Ministry blog at LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry.

**Study Material**

- “The Insider and the Outcast”—Chapter 2 from Encounters with Jesus by Timothy Keller
- “The Woman at the Well”—Devotional from Ligonier Ministries; find a link to this devotional at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources
- Previous Biblical Illustrator articles, including “Breaking All the Rules: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman,” can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator. Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

**Sermon Podcast**

Matt Chandler: “Gospel-Centered Worship”

Find a link to this at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

**Tip of the Week**

**The Example of the Master Teacher**

“As Christian educators engage in their endeavors of all types, the character of Jesus serves as a role model for them to follow. Their lifestyle, like that of their Master Teacher, must be consistent with their teaching. They dare not communicate (either explicitly or implicitly) the cliché, ‘Do as I say, not as I do.’ Actions speak as loud as words, and any teaching, mentoring, discipling, modeling, or other educational actions that are not backed up by consistent Christian living will at best fall on deaf ears or, at worst, cause others to fall badly. This means the lifestyle of Christian educators must be above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2); they must be people of integrity and known as such. This regards not only their outward behavior but their motives as well. As the Master Teacher lived authentically, so too must Christian educators be typified by genuineness without even a hint of hypocrisy.”

References

3. Andrea J. Köstenberger, in HCSB Study Bible (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 1811, n. 4:10-15; n. 4:31; n. 4:12; n. 4:14.
7. Ibid., 112.
10. Ibid., 1414, n. 4:39-43.
Unit 1:  
**Michael Card** has recorded over 37 albums, authored over 25 books, hosted a radio program, and written for a wide range of magazines. He has penned such favorites as “El Shaddai,” “Love Crucified Arose,” and “Emmanuel.” He has sold more than 4 million albums and written over 19 #1 hits, but the popularity of his work seems a stark contrast to his goal in life—to simply and quietly teach the Bible.

Unit 2:  
**D. A. Horton** currently serves as a pastor at Reach Fellowship, a church plant in Los Angeles, California, and as the Chief Evangelist for UYWI. He is also working toward his PhD in Applied Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Elicia, have three children, Izabelle, Lola, and Damon Jr (aka Duce).

**Special Session—Easter:**  
**Richard R. Melick Jr.** serves as a Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Affiliated Faculty, at Gateway Seminary. He is a consulting editor for *The New American Commentary*, for which he also contributed the volume *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. He and his wife, Shera, coauthored *Teaching That Transforms*. They have three children and eight grandchildren.