

To Your Calling We Will Be True

III. Growing in our Commitment to the Body – the Need for Community

Being Church

- Two Individuals – Nicodemus and a Nameless Woman of Samaria
- Both are only listed in the Gospel of John
- Both are confronted by the Messiahship of Jesus Christ BY JESUS HIMSELF (What would that be like?)
- Form of the conversations: Statement. Misunderstanding. Clarification.
- Jesus' interaction: Personal, He knows them. He is committed, He answers their questions and spends the time they need to process. He goes to them. Into their world...and is comfortable there.

I. Being Nicodemus

SL #2&3

John 3:1-21 The New Birth

3 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

³ Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

⁹ Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"

¹¹ Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man ^[b]who is in heaven. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should ^[c]not perish but have eternal life.

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

¹⁸ "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

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What Nicodemus thought:

- When the Messiah comes, it will be the end of history. Ushered into the Supernatural state of existence.

SL #4

“The uniqueness of Jesus’ message and mission, which took Jews like Nicodemus completely by surprise, was the fact that with the arrival of the Messiah, the kingdom (eternal life) was *inaugurated but not consummated*. Thus there ensues an unexpected ‘period between’, when the kingdom has been established (eternal life is truly received), and yet the full realization of the kingdom (the full possession of eternal life) has still to take place.”

Milne, B. (1993). [*The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide*](#) (pp. 74–90). InterVarsity Press.

Nicodemus KNEW his place in society:

- Orthodox Jew (His race and circumcision = acceptance in the Supernatural kingdom)
- A leader religious professional (perhaps THE leading theologian of their day)
- Pharisee
- Member of the ruling council

What does JC say to this list:

“YOU must be born again.”

Incredulously? A 2nd birth?

Your truth, Jesus, does not fit into my understanding.

Yep. You should know this Nicodemus.

Born of water and spirit.

YOU ARE a teacher of the law.

SL #5

Ezekiel 36:25-27

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Yep. You should know this Nicodemus.

No record of Nicodemus conversion.

He did bring the burial spices for Jesus after the Crucifixion. A LARGE AMOUNT FIT FOR A KING.

Seely, K. A. (2016). [Nicodemus](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

II. Being Samaritan

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- Jesus and the woman each speak seven times.
- Note the process of the woman's seven responses.
(The woman's seven statements proceed from an insulting response to JC to finally recognizing Him as the Messiah)
- Concludes with: The community recognizes him as Savior

NOTE: Historical Bigotry – Too sophisticated (styling/writing) of a story to be true.

SL #6

John 4:1-4

*Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John ² (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), ³ He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. ⁴ **But He needed to go through Samaria.***

- Only Gospel to record this visit to Samaria
- Why did John include it? What is so important?
- John the Baptist's ministry was being surpassed now by Jesus' so the Jewish leaders were watching Him more closely.
- Left to put distance between Himself and John?

WHY?

- Was it because he was tired and needed to get to Galilee and this was the shortest route?
- Show those ruling Pharisees that going around Samaria because it 'defiles' them is no longer an act of piety?

Samaria:

- The main road to Jerusalem actually went AROUND Samaria.
- Built as the capital city of Northern Kingdom of Israel before it fell to Assyria (722A.D.)
- Fertile farmlands (Grain, Olives, Grapes)
- Five major roads intersected – Phoenicia, Syria, Egypt
- Prosperous

Dirty Samaritans:

- When Assyria conquered – exiled ??% of the Israelites and replaced with peoples of other conquered nations. (1 Kings 16:24)

Hatred between Jews and Samaritans was fierce and long-standing. It dated to the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 a.d. The victorious Assyrians deported 20,000 Israelites, mostly from the upper classes, and replaced them with settlers from Babylon, Syria, and several other nations. These foreigners introduced pagan idols and intermarried with the Hebrews, creating an ethnically mixed population (see "The Origin of the Samaritans" at 2 Kin. 17:24). [Word in life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Jn 4:4-27). (1996). Thomas Nelson.

- Eventually, intermarriage = DIRTY ISRAELITES SAMARITANS

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- Ezra/Nehemiah (538 B.C.) – When the Jews began to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritans rebuffed them, interfered, resisted...Dirty Samaritans.

SL #7

John 4:5-6

⁵ So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶ Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

Sychar: [SIGH car]

- Only mentioned once in scripture.

(Exact location unknown, though it could be the same as ancient Askar, one mile north of Jacob's well, or possibly Shechem ((Shĕk' əm)), a city of great historical significance (Gen. 33:18).)

[Word in life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Jn 4:4–27). (1996). Thomas Nelson.

- Town in Samaria
- One mile from Jacob's well
- Another well was closer but the Samaritan woman chose to walk this far to get water – WHY? Avoid other women.
- John makes note throughout his Gospel about Jesus' humanity...here, He is physically tired.

SL #8

John 4:7-8

⁷ A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." ⁸ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

- The woman should not have been there.
- Wrong time of day to get water (too hot).
- At a well that is farther from her home.
- She came ALONE. (Why some believe she was a prostitute)
- Jesus risked His reputation by asking for this drink.
- Man alone to woman alone – having a conversation.
- He would drink from her cup.

The Jewish ceremonial laws described not only certain people as ceremonially unclean, but also anything they touched. In strict religious terms, many Jews of Jesus' time considered the Samaritans to be permanently unclean. Barton, B., Comfort, P., Osborne, G., Taylor, L. K., & Veerman, D. (2001). [Life Application New Testament Commentary](#) (pp. 387–392). Tyndale.

SL #9

John 4:9

⁹ Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

- Jew to a Samaritan
- Is this why He had to go through Samaria? Did He receive some supernatural direction telling Him to do so? (Acts 16:6-10 Paul & Silas (eventually Timothy))
- Note her shock and perhaps a dismissive response.

SL #10

John 4:10

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”

- Is this why He is here? ⁴ **But He needed to go through Samaria.**

John sets up this conversation:

- This woman is ignorant of most of Jewish history.

SL #11

John 4:11-12

¹¹ The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? ¹² Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?”

- Samaritans used the Torah (Pentateuch) only.
- She was able to boldly converse = meaning what?
- Was she hiding her lack of understanding by steering the conversation into something she knew?

SL #12

John 4:13-15

¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

¹⁵ The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.”

- She has a natural reaction to a supernatural truth.
- She did not engage like Nicodemus did...your truth does not fit into my understanding.
- You could better my earthly life with this hooky, spooky water thing you are speaking of.
- Much like those who sought Jesus for the miracles He could do to better their lives.

John 6: ²⁶ Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷ Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

SL #13

John 4:16-18

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”

¹⁷ The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.”

Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.”

- She was married 5 times. (Divorced – Any Cause Divorce? Matthew 19)
- Was she just living a guy now? Or did she have to sell herself as a concubine to be able to live?

SL #14

John 4:19-20

¹⁹ The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.”²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.”

- Now, she engages with what she does know about religion.
- Or is she deflecting the hard truth of her life?

SL #15

John 4:21-24

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.”²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ 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. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

- Nicodemetan statement: Spirit & Truth
- There will be no more need to have a Temple because...You are now.

SL #16

John 4:25-26

²⁵ The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things.”

²⁶ Jesus said to her, “**I who speak to you am He.**”

- THIS IS THE FIRST TIME JESUS REVEALED HE IS THE MESSIAH.
- He did not reveal this to Nicodemus. **WHY?**

SL #17

John 4:27

The Whitened Harvest

²⁷ And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, “What do You seek?” or, “Why are You talking with her?”

- Couldn't say but thought...Why are talking with HER?!?!
- Um, Jesus, don't you know....

SL #18

John 4:28-30

²⁸ *The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men,*

- Why did she leave her water pot? (She knew she was coming back)
- Did not speak with the women.

²⁹ *“Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”* ³⁰ *Then they went out of the city and came to Him.*

- Why did the men listen to her?

³¹ *In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”*

³² *But He said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.”*

³³ *Therefore the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?”*

³⁴ *Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. ³⁵ Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! ³⁶ And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. ³⁷ For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”*

SL #19

John 4:39-42

The Savior of the World

³⁹ *And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I ever did.”* ⁴⁰ *So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of His own word.*

⁴² *Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”*

Thus, the necessity must be understood in a different way: Jesus went to Samaria to give the Samaritans what he had given to Nicodemus—the offer of eternal life by being born again. And, furthermore, by going to Samaria and bringing the gospel to the despised Samaritans, he showed that he was above the Jewish prejudices.

Barton, B., Comfort, P., Osborne, G., Taylor, L. K., & Veerman, D. (2001). *Life Application New Testament Commentary* (pp. 387–392). Tyndale.

SL #20

Matthew 5:6

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they **shall** be filled.*

- FIRST missionary
- Established Jesus is the Messiah of ALL the world.

But, wait, there’s more...does she actually have a name?

III. Photina: The Samaritan Woman

Prior to the nineteenth century, the story was interpreted as a factual report from the actual life of Jesus. Even so, others gave it a symbolic allegorical meaning (e.g., Origen), a sacramental perspective (e.g., Cullmann), or some other spin.

¹ Pilch, J. J. (2012). *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible* (pp. 93–98). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.

The Eastern Tradition

Recently the Polish biblical scholar Swietłana Wiśniewska published the Eastern Church's interpretation of the Samaritan woman (*Ruch Biblijny I Liturgiczny*, 2004). **To begin with, this tradition accepts John 4 as a factual report of an event in the life of Jesus.**

The woman's name is Photina

- Greek word for light (*phōs, phōtos*).
- The Lord himself is thought to have given her this name, which means “enlightened one” or “the one shining with light.”
- She is said to have had two sons, Joseph (or Josiah) and Victor (also known as Photinus or Photides), and five sisters: Anatolia, Phota, Photida, Parasceve, and Kyriaka.
- Tradition says that Photina lived with her younger son, Joseph, in Carthage, where she preached the gospel.
- Victor, the elder son, was in the Roman army.
- As a reward for success in battle, Emperor Nero promoted Victor to a leadership role in the military and assigned him to a city where a certain Sebastian was the official functionary (“mayor”).
- The emperor also instructed him to persecute Christians there.
- Sebastian, who knew that Victor was a Christian, advised him to obey the emperor and to cease proclaiming his faith publicly.
- In the event Victor encountered some untoward event, Sebastian pledged to rescue his mother and brother in Carthage from persecution.
- Victor refused this advice and preferred to die rather than to obey Caesar.
- At this, Sebastian began to threaten Victor and his family.
- As punishment, God blinded Sebastian for three days and three nights and struck him mute.
- Regaining his voice at the end, Sebastian loudly acknowledged Christ as the one true God.
- Victor baptized him and his household.
- Many fellow citizens followed Sebastian's example, and eventually the news reached Nero, who summoned them all to Rome for judgment, that is, martyrdom.
- Christ appeared to the entire gathering as they traveled to Rome and pledged that he would remain with them in their imminent suffering for the faith.
- Victor also received a new name from Christ: Photinus, “because many enlightened by you will turn to me.”

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- At the very same time, Photina, her son Joseph, and all the Christians of Carthage were on their way to Rome in reply to a summons from Caesar.
- Photina had already learned from God of their imminent suffering.
- When the group entered Rome, the entire city was stricken by her appearance. Everyone wondered who this woman might be.
- She was, of course, also accompanied by her five sisters, of whom she was the oldest.
- All the Christians refused to obey Nero's command to deny the faith.
- He sentenced them to harsh torture, but after a few hours it produced no results.
- They did not even feel any pain.
- So the family was cast into prison (Photina, her two sons, and Sebastian),
- but they continued to preach and convert prisoners.
- The most noteworthy of Photina's converts was Domnina, Nero's daughter.
- This resulted in further torture, which finally ended in their deaths.
- Photina spit in Nero's face and, laughing at his stupidity, said: "Oh you profligate blind man, you erring person without a smidgeon of understanding. Perhaps you consider me to be just like yourself, since you wish that I would renounce Christ and offer sacrifice to those blind idols who resemble you?" For this remark, she was drowned in a well.

The Roman martyrology mentions the names of Photina, her sons and sisters, and Sebastian. Their feast was observed on March 20 in the Western church.

The eminent historian, Cardinal Cesare Baronius (1538–1607), identified her with the Samaritan woman in John 4.

A Greek tradition (around 984 C.E.) noted that Victor was sent to Galilee (another tradition says Gaul, i.e., France; still another, to a place in Italy) to kill Christians there.

Jesuits (Bollandist) assigned in 1643 to investigate if this is historical, say it is not. (Nicodemus?).

With a name, a character acquires individuality.

Photina is no longer a cipher for the Samaritan people, but rather she now holds a place in the social system. She is no longer a woman of puzzling reputation but rather a mother, an elder sister, and even an evangelist. Thus, the name establishes for her a personal identity. And since homonymous names indicate a sharing in another's identity, the woman named Photina bears a very special relationship with Jesus, "the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5).

¹ Pilch, J. J. (2012). *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible* (pp. 93–98). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.

Much like Simon who Jesus renamed Peter...The Woman at the Well, The Samaritan Woman Is renamed. History states it is Jesus who renames her.

**What would Jesus name you if He was here today?
How would you Being Church affect that name?**

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Is today your first day of hearing the Messiah being spoken to you?
The Messiah being revealed to you much like to Photina.
Is today the beginning of your learning of what scripture means to our lives today?
DON'T STOP. GET TO KNOW HIM.
Just Be Church: SHARE HIM WHEREVER YOUR LIFE IS, WHEREVER YOUR LIFE GOES.

Was Photina sad that her name was never included in John's Gospel?
Whose passion do I want mine to mimic as Jesus' reveals Who He Is to me?

Nicodemus or Photina?

- ? **Does it matter where I BEGIN my relationship with JC?**
- ? **Does it matter where I BEGIN my relationship with OTHERS?**
- ? **WHERE do I HAVE to go?**
- ? **WHAT do I HAVE to do?**

Matthew 5:6

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they **shall** be filled.*

To Your Calling We Will Be True
III. Growing in our Commitment to the Body
Need for Community

Being Church – What's My Church Name?

NOTES:

JOHN 4

JESUS TALKS TO A WOMAN AT THE WELL / 4:1–26 / 27

Jesus had to pass through Samaria on his way to Galilee. In Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman and with the Samaritans in Sychar, he revealed that he is the expected Messiah (4:25–26). Furthermore, Jesus pointed the Samaritans to the truth about salvation, God's nature, and the worship of God: Salvation comes from among the Jews (the Messiah is a Jew), God is spirit, and God must be worshiped in spirit and in truth.

4:1–2 Jesus realized that his popularity had come to the attention of the **Pharisees**. They had scrutinized the activities of John the Baptist and sent emissaries to question him about his identity (1:19–28). John always pointed his followers to a greater one, the coming Messiah. Because the greater one had come and was in fact drawing the crowds away from John, the Pharisees began to watch Jesus closely.

Jesus had gained many more disciples than just the Twelve. We know that he had at least seventy-two committed disciples (Luke 10:1–17). We are also told that various disciples came and went, especially when times were difficult or when Jesus predicted troubles ahead (Luke 9:57–62; John 6:66).

Part of the information received by the Pharisees was incorrect because **Jesus didn't baptize** anyone—**his disciples did**. This parenthetical remark helps to explain John the Baptist's statement in 1:33 that the Messiah would baptize in the Holy Spirit—in contrast to John who baptized in water. Thus, Jesus never personally performed water baptism; his disciples continued to perform that task during the early years of the church. These baptisms, still following the pattern set by John the Baptist, indicated repentance and confession of sin (see Matthew 3:6).

4:3 Knowing that the Pharisees (in Jerusalem) had heard about his popularity and that they would begin watching him closely, and at the same time knowing that his "hour" had not yet come (see also 2:4), Jesus wisely decided to withdraw from possible conflict by leaving **Judea** and returning to **Galilee**. Thus, Jesus' first Judean visit had come to an end—a visit begun by his coming to Jerusalem for the Passover (see 2:13). **The other Gospels do not record this visit.**

4:4 The territory of Samaria lay between Judea and Galilee—thus Jesus' itinerary meant that **he had to go through Samaria on the way**. Since the Samaritans were hated by the Jews, many of the strict Jews traveling from Judea to Galilee took a route around Samaria (through Perea, east of the Jordan River), even though that route took more time. But for those who were trying to make the best time, it was faster to go through Samaria to Galilee. The context does not indicate that Jesus was in a hurry to get to Galilee (see 4:40, 43). Thus, the necessity must be understood in a different way: Jesus went to Samaria to give the Samaritans what he had given to Nicodemus—the offer of eternal life by being born again. And, furthermore, by going to Samaria and bringing the gospel to the despised Samaritans, he showed that he was above the Jewish prejudices.

Where did these prejudices come from? Samaria was a region between Judea and Galilee where Jews of "mixed blood" lived. In Old Testament days, when the northern kingdom of Israel, with its capital at Samaria, fell to the Assyrians, many Jews were deported to Assyria. King Sargon of Assyria repopulated the northern kingdom with captives from other lands to settle the territory and keep the peace (2 Kings 17:24). These captives eventually intermarried with the few Jews who remained in the land to form a mixed race of people who became known as Samaritans. The Jews hated the Samaritans because they were no longer "pure" Jews. The Jews who lived in the southern Kingdom felt these Jews

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had betrayed their people and nation through intermarriage with foreigners. And the hatred continued down through the years. The Samaritans had adopted the Pentateuch as their Scriptures and set up a place for worship on Mount Gerizim using for their guidelines Deuteronomy 11:26–29; 27:1–8. Although they knew about a coming Messiah, they were far from having an accurate knowledge of the truth.

4:5–6 According to Genesis 33:19, **Jacob** purchased a piece of land in this vicinity and then later gave **Joseph** some land in Shechem (Genesis 48:22). Joshua 24:32 says that Joseph was buried on that land (the Jews had brought Joseph’s bones with them when they made their Exodus from Egypt). **Jacob’s well was there** indicates that the land must have included the parcel on which Jacob’s well was dug. Thus, this well was highly valued by the Samaritans who claimed Jacob (also called Israel) as their father (4:12), just as the Jews do. The trip made Jesus **tired**. He had walked from Judea to **Sychar**—a trip that probably took two days. Jesus’ weariness shows his true humanity. He waited while his disciples, more rested, or hungrier, than he, went to find food. He never seemed to worry that the limitations he took in becoming human might somehow undermine his claims to be the Son of God. Such expressions about Jesus’ humanity help us identify with him. So he **sat wearily beside the well** at about **noontime**, the hottest part of the day.

4:7 Two facts are unusual about the woman’s actions: (1) she could have gone to a closer well (scholars have identified wells that were closer to Sychar); (2) women generally drew water later in the day, when the temperature was cooler. This woman, whose reputation seems to have been well known in the small town (4:18), probably chose the well farther away from home and came to that well at an unusual hour in order to avoid contact with other women. It was also highly unusual for a man to address a woman, but Jesus said, **“Please give me a drink.”** Again, this statement reveals Jesus’ true humanity; he was really thirsty. Even though such a request startled her (4:9), it drew her into a conversation with Jesus.

4:8 This statement serves to inform the reader that Jesus was alone with this woman. Jesus could not ask his disciples to help him get water, for they had gone into Sychar to **buy food**. Thus, we see Jesus, weary from his journey, depending on others for food and drink.

4:9 The **Samaritan woman** was very surprised—first, that a **Jew** would even speak to a Samaritan; second, that a Jewish male would speak to a Samaritan woman (she also had a bad reputation and this was a public place); third, that a Jew would drink from a Samaritan’s cup. The Jewish ceremonial laws described not only certain people as ceremonially unclean, but also anything they touched. In strict religious terms, many Jews of Jesus’ time considered the Samaritans to be permanently unclean.

4:10 The woman was ignorant of **the gift God** had for her—the gift of life, represented by **living water**—and she did not know the giver, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus makes an extraordinary offer to this woman—living water that would quench her thirst forever.

4:11–12 Jesus’ remark concerning “living water” produced several practical questions in the mind of the Samaritan woman. Like Nicodemus, she did not immediately sense the depth of Jesus’ words. Obviously, if this **living water** was at the bottom of the well, Jesus was in no position to offer it because he had no **rope** or **bucket** for drawing it. She began to wonder if Jesus had access to some source of water other than Jacob’s well. She asked if he thought he was **greater than** their ancestor Jacob and could somehow **offer better water**. Perhaps the woman sensed in Jesus’ words a possible dishonoring of the well provided by their great ancestor. Or perhaps the woman was beginning to have some inkling of who Jesus was claiming to be. He certainly accepted her in a way that must have challenged her thinking.

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4:13–14 People need water daily because they **soon become thirsty again**. The water from Jacob’s well would indeed satisfy the woman’s thirst, but only temporarily. So also are all the other “drinks” of life—they never satisfy. Some of them even create more thirst. The human needs for love, food, sex, security, and approval, even when met, do not give complete satisfaction. Attempts to find full satisfaction will lead only to disappointment and despair. But the **water** Jesus offers **takes away thirst altogether**. Jesus’ “water” continually satisfies the desire for God’s presence because **it becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life**. The gift that Jesus gives—this **perpetual spring**—suggests the availability, accessibility, and abundance of the divine life for believers.

4:15 The woman’s response reveals that she took Jesus’ words literally. The woman must have been thrilled to think that this man could give her water that really quenches thirst and would not have to be drawn from a well. Obtaining water was hard work—requiring trips to the well twice a day and carrying heavy jars full of water home. If she had **some of that water**, she would **never be thirsty again** and wouldn’t have to **haul water** every day.

4:16–18 Jesus abruptly shifted the subject from his living water to her style of living. The woman perceived her need for living water at one level; Jesus knew that her need was far deeper, so he turned the conversation to reveal his knowledge of her personal life—and her sin of adultery. By asking her to **go and get her husband**, Jesus wanted to make this woman see her sin and her need for forgiveness and then offer her the living water—salvation. She must have realized that this was not a man who could be fooled, for she answered transparently, **“I don’t have a husband.”** The woman spoke the truth without any explanation.

Although he confronted the woman’s sinful life, Jesus managed to affirm her truthfulness. He did not accuse or excuse; he simply described her life so that she could draw some clear conclusions about the mess in which she was living. The conclusions we reach without knowing the facts will usually err in one of two directions: We will accuse others and raise their defenses, or we will excuse others and enable their denial. We see in Jesus’ communication with this woman that when faced with an accepting confrontation, people will often respond positively. When we speak to others about themselves, we must limit our words to what we know.

4:19 The woman acknowledged the truthfulness of Jesus’ remarks about her life. At the same time, she recognized that he must be a **prophet** who had the power to “see” the hidden past as well as the future. The theme of people “seeing” Jesus appears several times in John (especially in chapter 9). The persons Jesus encountered saw him many different ways, but he consistently directed their attention to recognize him for who he really was—their Savior.

Many commentators have pointed out that the woman may have been purposely attempting to avert any further disclosure of her personal, sinful life by shifting the conversation to religion. Notice how Jesus responded to her change of direction. He was not presenting a system or a gospel outline; he was having a conversation with someone who needed the living water. Jesus made no attempt to turn the discussion back to her lifestyle; rather, he entered into a dialogue about the true place of worship. Jesus kept the woman’s interest by demonstrating his willingness to let her direct the discussion.

4:20 The unspoken question is, If you are a prophet, who’s right? The Samaritans had set up a place for worship on **Mount Gerizim**, basing their authority to do so on Deuteronomy 11:26–29; 27:1–8; the Jews had followed David in making **Jerusalem** the center of Jewish worship. The split had come in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 4:1–2; Nehemiah 4:1–2) when the Samaritans had offered to help rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem but had been rebuffed. So there was an ongoing debate between the two groups as to who was correct. The Scriptures authenticated Jerusalem as the place of worship (Deuteronomy

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12:5; 2 Chronicles 6:6; 7:12; Psalm 78:67–68); thus, the Jews were correct and the Samaritans in error. The Samaritan woman wanted to hear what a Jewish prophet had to say about this.

4:21 Both the Jews and the Samaritans were convinced the correct way to worship God depended on a particular geographical location. But Jesus pointed to a new realm—not at Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem, but in the Spirit of God. He also knew that the Temple in Jerusalem soon would be destroyed. The first readers of John would have known this as a historical fact because it would have already happened!

4:22 The **Samaritans** worshiped, but their system of worship was incomplete and flawed because it had no clear object. Because the Samaritans only used the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) as their Scriptures, they did not know what the rest of the Old Testament taught about worship. The **Jews**, with whom Jesus explicitly identified himself here, did know whom they worshiped, for they had the full revelation in the Old Testament Scriptures. These Scriptures revealed that **salvation comes through the Jews**, for the Messiah would come from the Jewish race (Genesis 12:3). The message is: “You are demonstrating a good quality in desiring to worship, but your worship is misdirected; the perfect object to be worshiped, the Messiah, has come.” The living water that comes from Christ and is ever present in the believer makes the idea of continual worship a possibility. Worship becomes, at least in part, the enjoyment of our relationship with Christ wherever we are at any moment.

4:23–24 The new worship **is already here** among Jesus’ followers (including both Jews and Samaritans who are united in Christ), although the end of worship in the Temple or on Mount Gerizim is still future—**is coming**. Jesus announced that a new time had come, a time in which **true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth**. True worshipers are to be recognized by the way they worship. After making the place of worship and order of worship secondary to our spiritual relationship with God, Jesus defined real worship. According to him, worship would take on two new aspects: It would be **in spirit and in truth** (see also 4:24).

The expression “in spirit” refers to the human spirit—the immaterial, inner being in each person, the God-breathed entity that corresponds to the nature of God himself, who is Spirit. Using the terms of Jesus’ conversation, worship involves the person’s awareness of that personal “spring of living water” that God has planted in him or her. God indwells believers—that is where true worship takes place. Our body can be anywhere, yet worship occurs as our attention and praise are turned toward God. We need to consciously focus on God when we are in a house of worship because we easily assume that our presence in church is all that we need in order to worship. We can usually remember how long the worship service lasted, but can we remember exactly when we actually worshiped the Lord?

The phrase **in truth** means “in a true way” or “with genuineness.” This would speak to all people—Jews, Samaritans, and even Gentiles; all need to worship God by recognizing God’s character and nature as well as our common need for him. We worship in truth because we worship what is true.

In the Greek text, the word **Spirit** comes first for emphasis: “Spirit is what God is.” Here is a simple yet sublime definition of the nature of God. He is Spirit. God is not a physical being limited to place and time as we are. He is present everywhere, and he can be worshiped anywhere, anytime.

4:25 Talk of a new kind of worship must have reminded the Samaritan woman about the coming of the **Messiah**. Her comment was only loosely related to what Jesus had just said. She probably uttered it with a sigh, revealing her uncertainty about an unknown future. The Samaritans believed in the coming of “the Prophet” predicted by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15–18), whom they called “the Restorer.” The Samaritans may have also heard of the coming Messiah from John the Baptist who had been baptizing in northern Samaria (3:23). They, as with the Jews, probably did not consider “the Prophet” and “the Messiah” to be the same person. Either way, both groups were expecting someone who would be a

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political liberator. They could not accept the idea that the long-awaited one would be a suffering servant before he would become the conquering king.

The woman had already perceived that Jesus was a prophet (4:19); his comments made her wish for the coming Prophet who would **explain everything**.

4:26 Although Jesus avoided telling the Jews directly that he was the Christ, he told this Samaritan woman that he, the one who sat there with her on the well, was the promised **Messiah**.

JESUS TELLS ABOUT THE SPIRITUAL HARVEST / 4:27–38 / 28

The sudden arrival of the disciples interrupted the conversation. Jesus seems to have made no effort to continue the exchange. He had placed himself before the woman as the one she was expecting. What the woman would have said in response to Jesus' revelation is unknown. But what she did is clear. She immediately went and told her neighbors that she had just encountered a unique and wonderful person whom they should also meet.

4:27 The disciples returned from getting food (4:8) and were **astonished to find** Jesus **talking to a woman**. Jesus had broken two cultural taboos: (1) Jews did not speak with Samaritans, and (2) a male did not normally speak with a female stranger. Yet the disciples did not query him concerning his motives, for they must have come to realize that all of his motives were good. Anyone else would have been called to account.

4:28 Beyond displaying the woman's excited state of mind, her action of leaving **her water jar beside the well** as she **went back to the village** has several significant explanations: On the one hand, it speaks of the woman leaving behind her water jar representing her thirst for true life and satisfaction; on the other hand, it also reveals her intention to return. The water jar was a valuable and practical household object. But as useful as it was to get water from the well, it was useless for obtaining the water of life. However, she had just met someone who promised living water and who had displayed intimate knowledge of her life and profound understanding of spiritual truths. We can't be sure how much she understood of what Jesus had told her, but she was convinced that everyone in town ought to hear what he had to say.

4:29–30 In essence, the Samaritan woman was saying that Jesus *could have* told her everything about her life, for in telling her about her relationships with various men, he revealed his knowledge about her history. She made no promises about what Jesus might know about everyone else, but she appealed to their curiosity. What was it about this stranger that could make a woman who had every reason to be ashamed of her life now speak publicly about her experience of transparency before him? Yet she said to the townspeople, **"Can this be the Messiah?"** Her invitation proved irresistible. She probably knew that her reputation preceded her, and any assertion on her part regarding her belief in this man would go unheeded. But her question did serve to stir up curiosity and had the desired effect—**the people came streaming from the village to see him**.

4:31–33 After the woman left for the town, the disciples urged their master to eat. His response was baffling: **"I have food you don't know about."** The disciples thought he was talking about physical food; instead, Jesus was saying that he was spiritually satisfied by having shared the Good News with the Samaritan woman.

4:34 This statement shows that Jesus lived to please his Father and in so doing found spiritual **nourishment** (17:4). **Doing the will of God** meant that Jesus submitted himself to the Father's plan and enjoyed carrying out his Father's desires. Satisfying the Father gave Jesus true satisfaction. **Finishing** God's **work** speaks of completing the task—all the way from sowing the seed to reaping the harvest (see

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following verses). According to 17:4, Jesus accomplished all that the Father wanted him to do before leaving this earth. Preeminently, Jesus had revealed the Father to the world.

4:35 For farmers, approximately **four months** elapsed between the end of sowing and the beginning of reaping. From Jesus' spiritual perspective, the time for harvesting had already arrived. The Samaritans, who were coming from town, were ready to be harvested. In telling the disciples to **look around** and see the **vast fields**, Jesus may well have been directing them to look at the approaching Samaritans.

4:36–38 The **harvester** of this spiritual harvest derives satisfaction from bringing others to experience eternal life. This parallels Jesus' experience with the Samaritan woman; he was satisfied by offering her the gift of life. Jesus also here mentions the **planter** in addition to the **harvester**. Jesus, as both, sowed the seed through a single Samaritan woman and reaped a **harvest** from many in a Samaritan city. This sowing and reaping transpired so quickly that the planter and harvester could rejoice together.

The planter and the harvester do not have the same role—the point of the next verse: **“One person plants and someone else harvests.”** This saying may have come from verses like Deuteronomy 20:6; 28:30; Micah 6:15; Job 31:8, but it is not a direct quotation of any known biblical passage. That the disciples would **harvest where they didn't plant** probably refers to the coming harvest of Samaritan believers reaped by Jesus and his disciples, as well as to the harvest that would come after Pentecost (see Acts 1:8; 2:41; 9:31; 15:3). The **others** who labored may have been some of the Old Testament prophets or, more likely, John the Baptist and his followers (see 3:23).

MANY SAMARITANS BELIEVE IN JESUS / 4:39–42 / 29

As a result of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman, her bold witness in town, and the people's curiosity, many became believers. Jesus' proof was compelling. John was convinced and believed; the Samaritans were convinced and believed; so have millions of others. The unavoidable question each person must ask is, “Have I believed in Jesus?”

4:39–42 Many of the **Samaritans** who believed in Jesus were first drawn by the testimony of the **woman** about the mysterious man who told her everything she had ever done. **They begged** Jesus to **stay at their village**, and because of that, others believed when they heard Jesus for themselves. Many Samaritans had come to know absolutely and positively that Jesus was **the Savior of the world**. This last statement is the climax of this passage (4:1–42), for it speaks of how Jesus had come to be, not just the Jews' Messiah, but the world's Savior as well.

JESUS PREACHES IN GALILEE / 4:43–45 / 30

After his wonderful experience in Samaria, Jesus went to Cana in Galilee, where he healed a government official's son. But along with the healing came Jesus' rebuke that the people's belief was based on seeing signs and wonders, not on trusting in Jesus himself. These events stand in contrast to Jesus' experience in Sychar (4:1–42), where without miracles and through an unexpected witness, many placed their trust in him.

4:43–44 According to verse 3, Jesus left Judea and headed for Galilee. He passed through Samaria on the way and stayed there for two days (4:40). So after those two days, **Jesus went on into Galilee**, called **his own country**, as he had been raised in Nazareth, a town in Galilee. Jesus went to the Galileans, knowing that they would welcome him as miracle-worker but not as a **prophet**, much less as the Messiah.

4:45 This statement that **the Galileans had seen all his miraculous signs** refers to 2:23, which says that the people assembling in **Jerusalem** (among whom were these Galileans) during the **Passover** believed in Jesus because of the signs they saw him perform.¹

CONSIDER THIS 4:4–42 THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

For Jews in Jesus' day, the main road to Jerusalem went around Samaria. But He intentionally went through Samaria (John 4:4), where He taught His disciples a lesson in cross-cultural communication.

Finding a woman at Jacob's well in Sychar (4:5–7), Jesus struck up a conversation which quickly turned personal. Before long, the woman was on the verge of conversion. But Jesus understood that in her culture women lacked authority to make substantive decisions on their own. Those were made by men, often tribally, within clans. In fact, it was unusual for a man, particularly a rabbi, to hold serious conversation with a woman in public, as Jesus was doing. Perhaps that's one reason why the woman left as soon as the disciples showed up (4:27–28).

However, another reason was so that she could go and tell her "significant others," her network of family and friends, about Jesus (4:28–30). The woman left her waterpot at the well, maybe because she was in a hurry, though she may have left it there to avoid having to carry it around; after all, she clearly intended to return. At any rate, verse 28 specifically points out that she approached "the men" in the community first—perhaps a clue that they were indeed the decision makers.

But it was also true that she had been married to, or had lived with or been intimate with, a number of the men in that clan (4:17–18). In that respect, she was like many public aid mothers today living in common-law marriages. Those connections might have made her a unique "gatekeeper" or social organizer in the community. She could unlock the village for Jesus. Once she did, He stayed there for two days (4:43).

What does Jesus' example say about communicating the gospel message today? Northern European and American cultures tend to value individual choice. But elsewhere, many cultures are more clannish. Inter and intra-family relationships have a powerful bearing on how the message will be received. Western believers need to respect that and use it to advantage as they cross over into cultures different from their own.

Jesus followed the less-traveled road directly into Samaria to bring not just an individual woman, but an entire community to faith. Have you chosen the road less traveled to walk with Jesus into cultures different than your own? ♦

SAMARIA

YOU ARE THERE 4:4

- The central province of Palestine under the Romans. Its key city, also called Samaria, had been the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel before its fall to Assyria (722 A.D.).

¹ Barton, B., Comfort, P., Osborne, G., Taylor, L. K., & Veerman, D. (2001). *Life Application New Testament Commentary* (pp. 387–392). Tyndale.

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- Noted for rich, fertile farmlands that produced valuable grain crops, olives, and grapes.
- Served by five major roads, which encouraged trade with Phoenicia, Syria, and Egypt.
- Historically, a prime target of invaders due to its reputation for prosperity.

Samaria was the only major city known to have been founded by the Israelites. It was built as the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. To learn more about Samaria in the Old Testament, see the city profile at 1 Kin. 16:24.

SYCHAR

YOU ARE THERE 4:5

- A Samaritan city mentioned only once in the Bible (John 4:5).
- Exact location unknown, though it could be the same as ancient Askar, one mile north of Jacob's well, or possibly Shechem, a city of great historical significance (Gen. 33:18).
- Today some 300 Samaritan descendants live in Nablus, site of ancient Shechem.

CONSIDER THIS 4:9 "JEWS HAVE NO DEALINGS WITH SAMARITANS"

Hatred between Jews and Samaritans was fierce and long-standing. It dated to the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 a.d. The victorious Assyrians deported 20,000 Israelites, mostly from the upper classes, and replaced them with settlers from Babylon, Syria, and several other nations. These foreigners introduced pagan idols and intermarried with the Hebrews, creating an ethnically mixed population (see "The Origin of the Samaritans" at 2 Kin. 17:24).

When the Jews of Judah returned from the Babylonian captivity, they met resistance from the Samaritans as they tried to rebuild the temple, Jerusalem, and the rest of their society. They looked down on their northern cousins because of their mixed marriages and idolatrous practices. Soon, permanent walls of bitterness had been erected by both sides. By Jesus' day, the hostilities were so severe that the woman at the well was astonished that Jesus would even speak with her. As John explained, "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (John 4:9).

There are countless modern parallels to the Jewish-Samaritan enmity—indeed, wherever peoples are divided by racial and ethnic barriers. Perhaps that's why the Gospels and Acts provide so many instances of Samaritans coming into contact with the message of Jesus. It is not the person from the radically different culture on the other side of the world that is hardest to love, but the nearby neighbor whose skin color, language, rituals, values, ancestry, history, and customs are different from one's own.

Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. With whom do you have no dealings? ♦
Jesus taught His followers a series of courses on relating to Samaritans. For two of the more memorable, see "Who Was the Neighbor?" at Luke 9:51–56, and "Who Was the Neighbor?" at Luke 10:37.

In going from Jerusalem to the end of the earth, the gospel had to go through Samaria. See "The Conversion of Samaritans to the Gospel—and of Peter and John to the Samaritans"

at Acts 1:4, and “The Conversion of Samaritans to the Gospel—and of Peter and John to the Samaritans” at Acts 8:4–25.

Unfortunately, faith in Christ does not automatically change one’s view of the world and its people. One may reproduce and even defend sinful attitudes such as racial prejudice because it is accepted in the culture. See “Society’s Divisions Affect Believers” at Acts 6:1.

ETHNIC GAMES WITH RELIGIOUS ROOTS

CONSIDER THIS 4:19–23 Jesus must have made the woman at the well very uncomfortable when He spoke with such detailed, personal knowledge of her past (John 4:17). Perhaps that’s why she began to play ethnic games with Him, falling back on her religious roots (4:19–20).

Samaritans were good at that. Nearby was Mount Ebal, where Joshua had renewed Israel’s covenant with God (Josh. 8:30–35). According to the Jewish Torah (Deut. 27:4–6), Mount Ebal was also where Moses built an altar to celebrate the Israelites entering the Promised Land. But the Samaritans held that Mount Gerizim, also nearby, was the only true place of worship. The Samaritans built an altar there in 400 A.D., but the Jews destroyed it in 128 A.D. That only added to the historic enmity between the two groups—and provided ammunition for the woman to challenge Jesus.

Today, many people still play ethnic games with their religious roots. In Mexico City, for example, some churches are located on top of Aztec or Mayan shrines. Some Mexicans, seeking to recover their Indian roots and throw off their Spanishness, literally dig deep into their past to promote paganism and reject Christianity. Similar behavior can be found among other groups exploring and recovering their roots. Like the Samaritans in Jesus’ day, they want to affirm who they are as a people.

Jesus understood this woman’s need for ethnic identity and security. But He challenged her and her neighbors with a deeper issue—their need to turn to God and become true worshipers of Him. He refused to play ethnic games when there was a matter of eternal life and death at stake.

JESUS SPEAKS TO A WOMAN

CONSIDER THIS 4:27

The disciples marveled that their rabbi was speaking to a woman (John 4:27). In their day it was considered disreputable and beneath his dignity for a rabbi to speak to a woman in public. But Jesus chose a more inclusive posture than His religious peers.²

8. Photina: The Samaritan Woman

The story of Jesus’ encounter with a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob in Sychar is well known to readers of the Bible (John 4:1–42). It is read on the third Sunday in Lent in Year A of the liturgy for those who use the Common Lectionary. Since this set of readings is associated with the

² [Word in life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Jn 4:4–27). (1996). Thomas Nelson.

Catechumenate, it is often read also in Years B and C, replacing their own assigned readings. Prior to the nineteenth century, the story was interpreted as a factual report from the actual life of Jesus. Even so, others gave it a symbolic allegorical meaning (e.g., Origen), a sacramental perspective (e.g., Cullmann), or some other spin.

Contemporary biblical scholars recognize that the account is well crafted by the evangelist to make a point in the course of his gospel. In John, the Samaritans represented by this woman quickly come to understand the authentic identity of Jesus (Messiah, Savior of the world). They and the Samaritan woman stand in stark contrast to Nicodemus (John 3:1–21, the story immediately preceding), a ruler of the Judeans and a man of very high status. The woman meets Jesus at high noon. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night and carries on a conversation with him in which he completely misses Jesus' point and play on words ("again" and "from above").

The dialogue between Jesus and the woman is noteworthy. It proceeds along the lines of a pattern that is repeated frequently in John: statement, misunderstanding, clarification. Jesus makes a statement (e.g., in v. 7 Jesus asks for a drink of water), his conversation partner misunderstands him (in v. 9 the Samaritan woman thinks that he means well water), Jesus clarifies (in v. 10 he says, "I can give you living water"). Moreover, Jesus and the woman each speak seven times. The woman's seven statements proceed from ground zero (an insulting response to Jesus: "Judeans and Samaritans do not interact"; v. 9) to recognition of his identity as Messiah (vv. 25, 29). At the conclusion of the story, the community recognizes him as "the Savior of the world" (v. 42). The sophisticated quality of this literary composition, along with the recognition that centuries-long hostility between Samaritans and Judeans would not be so easily and readily set aside, caused interpreters to read the story somewhat skeptically. Notre Dame biblical scholar Fr. John Meier writes: "All this makes one wary of claiming that behind this magnificent theological composition, foreshadowing as it does the Christian mission to the Samaritans, lies a particular event from the life of the historical Jesus" (Meier 2000: 228–29).

The Eastern Tradition

Recently the Polish biblical scholar Swietłana Wiśniewska published the Eastern Church's interpretation of the Samaritan woman (*Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny*, 2004). To begin with, this tradition accepts John 4 as a factual report of an event in the life of Jesus. The woman's name is Photina (in Polish: SwietOana; in Russian: Svetlana), derived from the Greek word for light (*phōs, phōtos*). The Lord himself is thought to have given her this name, which means "enlightened one" or "the one shining with light." She is said to have had two sons, Joseph (or Josiah) and Victor (also known as Photinus or Photides), and five sisters: Anatolia, Phota, Photida, Parasceve, and Kyriaka.

Tradition says that Photina lived with her younger son, Joseph, in Carthage, where she preached the gospel. Victor, the elder son, was in the Roman army. As a reward for success in battle, Emperor Nero promoted Victor to a leadership role in the military and assigned him to a city where a certain Sebastian was the official functionary ("mayor"). The emperor also instructed him to persecute Christians there. Sebastian, who knew that Victor was a Christian, advised him to obey the emperor and to cease proclaiming his faith publicly. In the event Victor encountered some untoward event, Sebastian pledged to rescue his mother and brother in Carthage from persecution.

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Victor refused this advice and preferred to die rather than to obey Caesar. At this, Sebastian began to threaten Victor and his family. As punishment, God blinded Sebastian for three days and three nights and struck him mute. Regaining his voice at the end, Sebastian loudly acknowledged Christ as the one true God. Victor baptized him and his household. Many fellow citizens followed Sebastian's example, and eventually the news reached Nero, who summoned them all to Rome for judgment, that is, martyrdom. Christ appeared to the entire gathering as they traveled to Rome and pledged that he would remain with them in their imminent suffering for the faith. Victor also received a new name from Christ: Photinus, "because many enlightened by you will turn to me."

At the very same time, Photina, her son Joseph, and all the Christians of Carthage were on their way to Rome in reply to a summons from Caesar. Photina had already learned from God of their imminent suffering. When the group entered Rome, the entire city was stricken by her appearance. Everyone wondered who this woman might be. She was, of course, also accompanied by her five sisters, of whom she was the oldest.

All the Christians refused to obey Nero's command to deny the faith. He sentenced them to harsh torture, but after a few hours it produced no results. They did not even feel any pain. So the family was cast into prison (Photina, her two sons, and Sebastian), but they continued to preach and convert prisoners. The most noteworthy of Photina's converts was Domnina, Nero's daughter. This resulted in further torture, which finally ended in their deaths. Photina spit in Nero's face and, laughing at his stupidity, said: "Oh you profligate blind man, you erring person without a smidgeon of understanding. Perhaps you consider me to be just like yourself, since you wish that I would renounce Christ and offer sacrifice to those blind idols who resemble you?" For this remark, she was drowned in a well.

The Versions

Differing and conflicting versions of the story of Photina, her family and companions are found in many sources but especially the martyrologies. It seems that initially these were drawn up by local congregations and featured persons known to or cherished by each congregation. The Roman martyrology mentions the names of Photina, her sons and sisters, and Sebastian. Their feast was observed on March 20 in the Western church. The eminent historian, Cardinal Cesare Baronius (1538–1607), identified her with the Samaritan woman in John 4. A Greek tradition (around 984 C.E.) noted that Victor was sent to Galilee (another tradition says Gaul, i.e., France; still another, to a place in Italy) to kill Christians there. This martyrology describes their tortures: some are imprisoned with poisonous snakes, some have their eyes plucked out or have their hair pulled out, still others have their male members cut off or are crucified. Victor was torn in two, having been tied to two bent trees, but Photina died in prison. These notices testify to the cultural acceptance of violence and human torture in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Sorting It Out

In the sixteenth century, John Bolland, a Jesuit, was asked to complete the work previously begun by a Dutch colleague to critically evaluate information available about the saints. Bolland resolved to use the work of his predecessor and thought he could complete the task alone and

in a short while. When it became overwhelming, he recruited assistance from fellow Jesuits, who eventually became known as the Bollandists. The first critical evaluation of sources (*Acta Sanctorum*, or *Lives of the Saints*) was published in 1643, and the process continued through a bumpy history. In the nineteenth century, the project was oriented along more strictly scientific lines, particularly in line with new philological methods, and it continues until today. The Bollandists presently play a role in “vetting” candidates for canonization. Relative to St. Photina, the Bollandists sorted through the data and concluded that it was spurious and unreliable.

Significance of the Story

Cultural scholars recognize that 80 percent of the current population of the planet are collectivistic personalities living in collectivistic cultures. They stand in contrast to individualists who seek to stand out from any and every group to which they belong. Individualists relish distinctive names, and even if they carry the same name as their father or grandfather, they are careful to indicate which place in the series they hold, for example, John Smith IV. Collectivistic personalities prefer to be identified by their family (the blind “Bar-Timaeus”). They are also identified by their city (“Jesus of Nazareth”) or often stereotyped by some characteristic (“a leper,” “a possessed person”). This, of course, is “real life,” “how it really is.”

Story is different. In traditional storytelling, either the author or the audience will eventually name any anonymous personage. The name is an essential aspect of the human personality, as much as the body, soul, or double counterparts (*doppelgangers*). In storytelling, the name either has a clear-cut and self-evident meaning (this is certainly true of Photina), or it has an implied, allusive, puzzling, or ambiguous meaning. This latter may be true of the nickname which Jesus bestowed on Simon (“Rock”), since in the gospels Simon is anything but as solid as a rock.

In the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, her name, Photina—whoever may have given it to her—seems to have derived from the context of the story (John 4) and the dyadic relationship she has with Jesus there. Scholars note that in this brief story, she is the most intensely catechized character in the New Testament. She is enlightened personally by Jesus, and she in turn enlightens the townsfolk. In the Byzantine tradition, a Troparion (a chant) of St. Photina, the Samaritan woman, proclaims: “Thou wast illumined by the Holy Spirit/and refreshed by the streams of Christ the Saviour./Having drunk the Water of Salvation/thou didst give copiously to the thirsty./O holy Great Martyr Photina,/Equal-to-the-Apostles, entreat Christ our God that our souls may be saved.” Thus it is a small step from the significance of her name to creating a mission of evangelization for her in Carthage. The Bollandists correctly suspected the authenticity of this assignment since she was probably already an adult woman when she met Jesus and would have had to have lived more than sixty years longer to carry on such activity. Such longevity was rare if not impossible in that time and place. Moreover, the Bollandists also find no evidence that Nero had a daughter.

With a name, a character acquires individuality. Photina is no longer a cipher for the Samaritan people, but rather she now holds a place in the social system. She is no longer a woman of puzzling reputation but rather a mother, an elder sister, and even an evangelist. Thus, the name establishes for her a personal identity. And since homonymous names indicate a sharing in another’s identity, the woman named Photina bears a very special relationship with Jesus, “the light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5).

Conclusion

Though largely unfamiliar in the Western tradition, the story of St. Photina carries rich significance in the Eastern Church. Cardinal Baronius included Photina in the Roman martyrology because he was influenced by the tradition that the head of Photina was preserved in the church of St. Paul's outside the Walls in Rome. In the Orthodox tradition (which celebrates her feast on April 2), she is recognized (along with five others) as a powerful intercessor against the demon of lust. Yet another tradition recognizes her efficacy in the healing of trembling or shaking diseases. And so, the story crafted by John the evangelist to make a point in his gospel was detached from that gospel. As a free-standing literary unit, it took on a life of its own and continues to inspire the faithful according to their needs. As honorable as the ancient Eastern tradition may be, the challenge to the Western tradition is to square such pastoral creativity with the 1964 Instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on the Historical Truth of the Gospels to "those who instruct the Christian people in sacred sermons.... When they narrate biblical events, let them not add imaginative details which are not consonant with the truth" (par. XIII). The advice would serve all Bible readers in good stead.³

3. Conversation with Nicodemus (3:1–21)

The two incidents recorded in John 2 clarified the terms of Jesus' relationship to Israel's religious heritage: he brings the wine of the kingdom to the water of Judaism, and as the crucified and risen One he re-establishes and renews its worship. In the next section, containing the first of his extended discourses, he dialogues with one of Israel's teachers, clarifying the radical nature of the kingdom he is inaugurating. John 2 ended with an exposure of the inadequacy of a 'faith' based simply on miraculous signs (2:22f.). Nicodemus may be seen as a representative of this class of superficial respondents (*cf.* his reference to *miraculous signs* in his opening comment, 3:2). Note that, in interpreting this section, it is helpful to bear in mind John's stated aim (20:31) to teach his readers about Jesus and lead them to true faith in him.

Nicodemus comes with the best of credentials, a member of the Sanhedrin, a Pharisee (and therefore a zealot for the law and pure religion (1)) and a highly regarded teacher in Israel (10). His coming by night (2) may have been occasioned by the difficulty of finding time to talk with Jesus during the day. There may well have been an element of furtiveness, however, in his approach. Jesus was not likely to have been the kind of company he would be expected to keep. Nicodemus' approach, while not without some warmth (*cf.* 'Rabbi', a generous note since Jesus had not gone the official route to obtain accreditation as a teacher), is also somewhat patronizing (*cf. we know*—'this is how we have judged your ministry to date').

Whatever the precise terms of his approach, Nicodemus is immediately rocked back on his heels by Jesus' rejoinder which unceremoniously exposes his spiritual need. *I tell you the truth* (Gk. *amēn, amēn*; *cf.* comments on 1:51), *no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again*. The Greek word *anōthen*, here translated *again*, can also be rendered '**from above**'. If rendered *again*, the emphasis is on the nature of the experience of entry into the kingdom (*born again*; 'it is a crisis akin to physical birth'). If rendered 'from above', the emphasis is on the origin of the experience. It is from the heavenly order, *i.e.* an essentially supernatural

³ Pilch, J. J. (2012). [A Cultural Handbook to the Bible](#) (pp. 93–98). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.

experience. 'Kingdom of God', also rendered as 'kingdom of heaven',²⁸ is at the heart of Jesus' teaching as recorded in the gospels, 'In the thought of the kingdom of God Jesus lives, and works and dies.' John's preferred category is 'eternal life', or 'life', which is a synonym for 'kingdom of God'. Literally it translates a phrase 'life of the age (to come)', *i.e.* the coming era when God would manifestly be king over Israel and the nations. 'Salvation' is another New Testament equivalent.

As a devout and well-taught Jew, Nicodemus anticipated the arrival of the kingdom at the end of history. The uniqueness of Jesus' message and mission, which took Jews like Nicodemus completely by surprise, was the fact that with the arrival of the Messiah, the kingdom (eternal life) was *inaugurated but not consummated*. Thus there ensues an unexpected 'period between', when the kingdom has been established (eternal life is truly received), and yet the full realization of the kingdom (the full possession of eternal life) has still to take place. This 'period between' covers the lifetime of John's first-century readers and of those who read his gospel today, the period in which John seeks to 'do the work of an evangelist' by revealing the glory of Jesus and eliciting from his readers a faith-commitment to him (20:31), a commitment which will mean entry to the kingdom (receiving eternal life).

Jesus' statement in verse 3 of the terms of entry into the kingdom represented a further and even more shocking surprise as far as Nicodemus was concerned. As a devout, orthodox Jew he presumed that his place in the coming kingdom was assured, by virtue of his race and circumcision. Besides that, he was a leading religious professional, and moreover, a Pharisee and a member of the ruling council. There could be few Jews, if any, in the entire city that night whose credentials were more impressive as far as acceptance with God was concerned. Yet, Jesus tells him he needs to be *born again (anōthen)*.

In his response to this unexpected allegation (4), Nicodemus understands Jesus' words as implying a 'second birth', and that another physical one, with consequent absurdity. Jesus offers two helps to clarification, one biblical and the other meteorological (5–7). The former is a saying of much disputed interpretation, *no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit* (5). In eliciting Jesus' meaning here, much depends on the historical context. His surprise at Nicodemus' difficulty with the concept of new birth (10) is the key to correct interpretation. Jesus obviously thinks Nicodemus has knowledge he should be drawing upon to understand the new birth, a clear pointer to Nicodemus' area of expertise, *viz.* the Old Testament, *cf. are you the teacher of Israel and you do not understand ...* (10). (The 'the' in the original Greek may imply that Nicodemus was the leading theologian of his day). A clear Old Testament reference to a birth associated with water and Spirit is Ezekiel 36:25–27, which refers to the new order of the messianic age in which there will be a new experience of cleansing. There it states, 'I will sprinkle clean *water* on you, and you will be clean', as well as an experience of the Spirit, 'I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees'. Jesus is therefore informing Nicodemus that this new day of cleansing and power anticipated by the prophet is now to hand, the long-awaited messianic age is now present. (By implication this is because the King, the Messiah—Jesus himself—is now present.) For entry to this kingdom, racial inheritance, circumcision, energetic law-keeping, acts of piety or scriptural knowledge, avail nothing. What is needed is the receiving of a new spiritual life from God (*cf.* 1:12–14) through personal faith in Jesus himself as the one who had come from God (3:14f.), and was to be *lifted up* as the object of faith. Significantly John

the Baptist had also spoken of an experience of the Spirit in association with an act of cleansing (cf. Mt. 3:11). Jesus responds to Nicodemus' superior *we* of verse 2 with a *we* of his own in verse 11. Over against the partial, fluctuating viewpoints of the current Jewish teachers, Jesus sets the eternal truth of God from the lips of one who has seen 'heavenly things' at first hand as the *one who came from heaven* (13).

Jesus' second explanatory aid to Nicodemus is the wind and its essential mysteriousness (8). While today we have better knowledge of its origin and nature, we have no better mastery of its direction. Essentially therefore the new birth is from God; it is supernatural, beyond human control or exhaustive human knowledge. Like the wind, however, and despite its mysteriousness, its effects can be experienced at first hand.

Jesus then resorts to a further vivid Old Testament image to present Nicodemus with the invitation to experience this new life of the kingdom of God. (Since John did not write with quotation marks in his text, however, we cannot be sure where Jesus' words finish and John's editorial exposition begins.) Numbers 21:4–9 records the Israelites escaping physical death from a plague of serpents when they looked trustingly to a giant bronze serpent which Moses raised on a pole in the centre of their encampment. So, says Jesus, the Son of Man himself will be *lifted up*, and all who look trustingly to him will experience the eternal life of the kingdom. The verb *lifted up* is ambiguous—covering both exaltation and crucifixion. John makes much of this ambiguity later in the gospel.

Verse 16 is the best-known and most often preached text in the entire Bible. It is a masterly and moving summary of the gospel, cast in terms of the love of God. The love of God was present (in the prologue) in the allusion to the 'grace' brought by the coming Word (1:14–17) and it is the silent presupposition of the entire ministry of the 'Word made flesh'. All that is so magnificently expounded in these chapters, as the glory of the Son is progressively revealed, is here traced back to its ultimate origin.

The *unfathomable depth* of the love of God is stressed: *God so loved....* In his love, God went so far as to 'give (up)' his *one and only Son* (we should probably see here a reference to incarnation as well as crucifixion). The 'giving up' of Isaac by Abraham may lie in the background as a faint foreshadow of the sacrifice made in the heart of God. If the depth of love is measured by the value of its gift, then God's love could not be greater, for his love-gift is his most precious possession—his only, eternally beloved Son. He could not love more. 'The true looking of faith is placing Christ before one's eyes and beholding in him the heart of God poured out in love.'

The all-inclusive *scope* of God's love is also here. John's readers would have been familiar with the thought of God's special love for Israel, but in truth his love is (and always was) indiscriminate, embracing every man, woman and child. However astonishing this scope, John's primary wonder is probably the gracious embrace of God's love, for its object is *the world*, which John consistently sees as fallen and organized in rebellion against God. It is against the background of the wickedness of the world, even more than its vastness, that God's love shines out most gloriously.

John moves on to the world's response to God's love in the gift of Jesus the Son. In an echo of 1:12, he notes that 'those who receive the Son, that is who believe in his name' (my translation), receive the new, endless, supernatural life of the kingdom of God. But this life is not automatic. Where the response is unbelief and rejection, the end result is unutterably

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solemn (verse 16 uses the word *perish*) a fate about which John will have more to say later in the chapter. This condemnation is not God's specific purpose; rather his purpose is salvation for all through faith in his Son.

The division between those who find *life* and those who *perish* is expanded in the following verses in terms of the vivid contrast between light and darkness. Jesus came as *light* (19). This picks up on the prologue with its reference to the light-bringing ministry of the Word. The coming of the light forces a choice on every person (cf. Gn. 1:4). Darkness already reigns; the need of the world is a reality before the light comes. Indeed, as we have seen, it is precisely in his response to the darkness that God's love is so wonderfully expressed. In other biblical terms, 'all have sinned' (Rom. 3:23) and 'sin reigned' (Rom. 5:21). The appearance of the light therefore precipitates a crisis. Tragically, in an astonishing act of self-destruction, multitudes refuse the light and continue to embrace the darkness; the supreme expression surely of the 'mystery of iniquity' (2 Thes. 2:7, AV). John, however, offers a certain rationale. The hatred of the light in the fallen human heart is fathered by a revulsion against being exposed by the light—*Everyone who does evil ... will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed* (20). By contrast, whoever 'lives by the truth' (lit. 'does the truth') is willing to have his deeds exposed, not to parade his own righteousness, but to allow Jesus, who is the light, to 'do the truth' through him (21).

To summarize:

1. In their essential moral lives prior to the hearing of the gospel, all people live in 'darkness'.
2. Believers are willing to open their lives to God's scrutiny, to 'come to the light'. This is painful, but a necessary preliminary step to finding salvation.
3. This 'coming to the light' leads, in the larger terms of verses 14–16, to 'believing in the Son', and in his sacrifice for our sins.
4. After 'coming to the light', believers live a new life expressing new moral power, but their 'open secret' is that the Light has now come and is the real, 'plainly' recognized source of this new life of 'doing the truth'. Believers live, therefore, as they are saved, by grace alone.
5. In contrast, by refusing the light of Christ, unbelievers face the deepening of the condemnation already hanging over them because of their sinful lives.
6. Condemnation of unbelievers is not God's ultimate purpose, or by implication his pleasure, but is the solemn, negative result of the light coming into the world.

The dialogue with Nicodemus is a crucial section of the whole Bible, since it expresses most clearly the truth of regeneration by the Holy Spirit; the fact that it is by the secret, powerful operation of God the Spirit alone that one can experience salvation. *You must be born again*. In our interpretation we have shown that this teaching is anticipated in the Old Testament. It is taught elsewhere in the New Testament,³⁹ and is also congruent with other New Testament images for salvation—entering the kingdom of God, believing in Christ, receiving eternal life, and the like. The specific contribution which regeneration by the Spirit makes to our understanding of salvation is in its stress on salvation as a supernatural work of God involving a radical change of nature. Only God can save. At a time when 'religion' is again generally in vogue, with ancient world faiths experiencing some resurgence, and new brands such as New Age appearing on the market, the idea that religion cannot save is as startling in our ears today as it was to the ears of religious Nicodemus. To experience God's salvation 'is not simply a

matter of illumination; it is a matter of regeneration. It is not just new seeing, but new being'. *You must be born again.*

This truth of new birth has far-reaching implications for those engaged in evangelism, for it teaches us that becoming a Christian is always a miracle. The Christian witness therefore will inevitably be a person of prayer, and churches which engage in evangelism with integrity will inevitably be prayerful churches, beseeching God for his intervention to enable dead people to be reborn. Salvation is of God, and no advance in Christian evangelistic methodology will ever eliminate or replace this. As truly today as in the first century, the key to effective mission *for* the living God is prayer *to* the living God. Only God can save.

Regeneration also makes clear the radical difference between Christians and non-Christians. We are either one or the other, born again, or dead in sins; we have come to the light, or are still in darkness; we are saved from condemnation, or under condemnation. There is no middle ground. We may not necessarily recall the details of our regeneration. That is not the primary issue, which is that we are now living in constant dependence on Jesus Christ as our living Lord and Saviour and growing in our spiritual life, which is God's ever-renewed gift.

4. John the Baptist and Jesus (3:22–36)

Jesus now embarks on a more general preaching and teaching ministry in the Judean region. His proclamation apparently includes invitation; those responding are baptized (22). Though Jesus is not recorded as performing baptism at later points in his ministry (possibly in order to distinguish his ministry from that of John? *cf.* 4:1–3), he would later endorse it without qualification (Mt. 28:18f.). Practising baptism at this point generally enabled Jesus to express his affirmation of John the Baptist's preparatory ministry, which was continuing (23). More particularly, baptism, especially if by immersion, expressed most fittingly the radical life-change involved in response to Jesus. Further, if our interpretation of 'water and the Spirit' (5) is correct (*viz.* an allusion to Ezk. 36:25–27) then baptism in water was an obvious vehicle to convey entry to the new life of the promised kingdom.

Not surprisingly, with all this varied religious activity going on, controversy broke out, initially between followers of John the Baptist and a particular Jew, but spilling over into a potential rivalry between John and Jesus (26). John is sensitive to the inappropriateness of rivalry and the damage it would do (as is Jesus *cf.* 4:3), and seeks to defuse the situation in four ways.

1. He cites a maxim: *a man can receive only what is given him from heaven* (27). Jesus repeats a form of this to Pilate in 19:11, explaining Pilate's present power over Jesus. God's sovereign rule means that ministers are allocated by him as he pleases and for his purposes.

2. He resumes his earlier stance (28) and refocuses on Jesus. This affirmation of Jesus' unique and pre-eminent role enables John to reaffirm his own position as one *sent ahead* of Jesus as his servant.

3. John uses the vivid image of a wedding to re-express the emotion he feels towards Jesus and his commitment to the task he has been given to do for his Messiah (29). He, like the bridegroom's friend, does not seek pre-eminence—it is not his day! Rather he rejoices at the union of the bridegroom with his chosen bride. The reference to Jesus as a bridegroom has echoes of Old Testament passages depicting Israel as God's bride, and anticipates later New

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Testament teaching on Jesus as the bridegroom of the church.⁴³ Used of Jesus against this background, it is another clear pointer to his deity (*cf.* Mk. 2:18–20).

4. He states a great principle of ministry. *He must become greater; I must become less* (30). Jesus must advance into the centre of the stage and John must retire to the wings, as the Messiah assumes his rightful rule in his kingdom and the bridegroom takes increasing claim over his bride. Few greater motto texts for ministry have ever been uttered. ‘Only a great man can accept his own demise with joy.’

Each of these four points has its relevance when we are tempted to thoughts of jealousy.

Verses 31–36 appear to represent the evangelist’s further comments, drawing out the implications of the Baptist’s contrast of the two ministries, and expounding more fully the pre-eminence of Christ. This pre-eminence is threefold.

First, Christ’s is a pre-eminence of *origin*. Jesus is *from above* (31), *i.e.* from heaven, from the very presence and heart of God. By contrast, John is *from the earth*, a human, derived from a human process of generation. Jesus is therefore over all human ministers and witnesses.

Second, Christ’s is a pre-eminence of *word* (32–34). Because Jesus is sent from the very presence of God, *he testifies to what he has seen and heard* (32). The words he speaks are God’s words. Because God is truthful and the very expression of truth, so too are the words of the one who has come from him. In further guarantee of this truthfulness, the Spirit of God is given to the Son *without limit* (34), in contrast to the more fitful and spasmodic giving of the Spirit to witnesses and preachers in the Old Testament period. John the Baptist is probably to be included in this Old Testament company. He stands in the line of the prophets, the last and greatest of them all (Mt. 11:11–14). They all passed on God’s Word as it has been variously given them. Jesus, however, *is* God’s Word come among us.

Third, Christ’s is a pre-eminence of *resource* (35). Not only is the Spirit given to Jesus but, because he is the beloved Son of the Father, everything which the Father possesses has been made available to him—*and has placed everything in his hands* (35). It may be in keeping with the movement of thought here to recall that the Baptist, like all ministers and witnesses, must fast and petition for resources. Jesus by contrast has all things immediately at his disposal.

Verse 36 is a fitting summary statement to a chapter in which the cruciality of Jesus’ mission for human salvation has been expressed. What is at stake in the ministry of the Son is nothing less than the bringing of salvation to the world. Jesus is the one from heaven, come from the loving heart of God to the world to offer salvation to everyone who will believe in him. Believing in him brings eternal life, a rebirth into a new order by the Spirit, the personal reception of the supernatural, endless life of the kingdom of God. Conversely, and there is no third alternative, all who do not come to the Son for this life, but reject him and his salvation, consign themselves to the most terrible of judgments—they *will not see life* (36; *cf.* 3). Rather they will ‘see’ the wrath of God.

The wrath of God is a difficult notion to hold together with the love of God, also affirmed in this chapter (16). The place from which to view these divine perfections in their mutual relationship is the cross, to which John will bring us before long. At this point, however, we should note that the Bible in general, and Jesus in particular, take the wrath of God with an awesome seriousness. For Jesus, God’s wrath is not the outworking of some impersonal principle of retribution. It is a personal reality. God personally resists those who resist him. Further, God’s wrath, unlike our fitful and often uncontrolled emotion, is without sin or error in

its exercise. The cleansing of the temple (2:12–17) gives some glimpse of the righteous wrath of him who *comes from heaven* and who *testifies to what he has seen and heard* (31–32, cf. Rev. 19:1–3, where ‘the wrath of the Lamb’, 6–16, is extolled by the host of heaven). God is not endlessly passive about the presence of evil in his world, or the despite it does to his great glory. If we are regularly able to express wrath in reaction to acts of extreme brutality or injustice, how much more is that felt by him whose love for the brutalized and oppressed is so much more than ours! God is not mocked—‘It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God’ (Heb. 10:31; Gal. 6:7–8).

Paul in Romans chapter 1 recognizes that the wrath of God is already to be seen at work in his ‘giving up’ people to the bitter fruit of their evil choices (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). That, however, is only the faintest foreshadowing of ‘the wrath to come’. ‘Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all those who take refuge in him’ (Ps. 2:12). While we have opportunity we are to embrace the Son by believing in him, beseeching him for his mercy and the new life of his eternal kingdom. While we have opportunity we should urge others to do likewise in response to his great and eternal love, for his wrath is real and is coming.

5. The mission to Samaria (4:1–42)

This next section finds Jesus once again in conversation. The contrast with his partner in chapter 3 could hardly be greater. Nicodemus was a Jewish male, a highly learned teacher, a Pharisee scrupulous in his adherence to all the tenets of the law, and as a member of the Sanhedrin a person of considerable public repute and authority. His new conversation partner by contrast is a Samaritan female, illiterate (necessarily so since women were shut out from educational opportunities), with a lifestyle in flagrant contradiction to the law, and therefore publicly despised and ostracized. Yet, ‘both needed Jesus’.

What is also striking about the two dialogues is Jesus’ remarkable ability to be ‘at home’ with each and to present the good news of salvation meaningfully and attractively to them. There are other echoes from chapter 3, in that water is again used to symbolize spiritual blessing, and more generally Jesus appears once more as the fulfiller of Old Testament promises, **though a fulfilment which sends the old religious order into a fundamentally new orbit.**

Verses 1–3 have already received comment. Competitiveness is not to be tolerated in the service of God, even if that means one leader moving away. So Jesus returns north to Galilee (4), which meant passing through Samaria *en route*. John notes Jesus’ physical weariness: ‘the Word became flesh’ (1:14). Not for the first or last time in his gospel John reminds us that the **heights of christological confession are balanced by the realities of human limitation.**

Jesus’ request (7) invited censure on two accounts—she was a woman, and a Samaritan. Regarding relations with Samaritans, John’s editorial comment in verse 9 says it all: *Jews do not associate with Samaritans*. The reasons were historical, dating from the division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon (1 Ki. 12:1–24) and the annexation of the northern territory by the Assyrians in 722–721 bc. The Assyrians resettled the area with foreigners (2 Ki. 17:24–41) which meant a loss of both racial and religious purity from the standpoint of the Judaeans in the south. The religious divide was deepened when the Samaritans (as they came to be called) built

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their own temple at Mount Gerizim around 400 BC. On the issue of gender prejudice, male Jewish attitudes at the time are reflected in the following rabbinic citations: 'One should not talk with a woman on the street, not even with his own wife, and certainly not with somebody else's wife, because of the gossip of men,' and 'It is forbidden to give a woman any greeting.'

Jesus' request was a simple and sincere one; he was thirsty (7). Not for the first time Jesus' point of contact with a 'seeker' was a confession of personal need (*cf.* Lk. 5:1–3; 19:5). The living water which Jesus holds out to the woman was a particularly vivid image in an arid country like Palestine. But there are possibly Old Testament themes in the background in addition. Ezekiel 36:25–27 has already been seen to underlie the teaching on the 'new birth' of 'water and Spirit' (3:3, 5). God himself is a 'fountain of living waters' (Je. 2:13; 17:13, RSV), and there are also first-century rabbinic references to show that at times both the law (the Torah) and the Holy Spirit were referred to using this image. The image of 'living water' for Jesus' gift of eternal life continues to strike a chord. Over against the dissatisfying lifestyle of modern hedonistic culture, Jesus still issues his invitation: 'if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink' (see 10–14).

The sheer satisfaction of that living water can rarely have been more authentically stated than in this testimony of Malcolm Muggeridge:

I may, I suppose, regard myself, or pass for being, a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets—that's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Inland Revenue—that's success. Furnished with money and a little fame even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of trendy diversions—that's pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time—that's fulfilment. Yet I say to you, and I beg you to believe me, multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing—less than nothing, a positive impediment—measured against one draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are.

The woman, like Nicodemus (though probably with more excuse), misunderstands Jesus' allusion, however, thinking in merely physical terms of some 'magic' water source which would dispense with the need for laborious drawing (11–12, 15). Jesus' penetrating request that she bring her husband (16) elicits her evasive, but truthful, reply that she had no husband (since the Jewish law did not recognize a common-law arrangement). Serial marriage was not altogether frowned upon, though the rabbis generally taught that three marriages were the maximum allowable. The deeper point is that Jesus brought to her awareness the relational desert in which she was living. His offer of *a spring of water welling up to eternal life* must have appeared wonderfully attractive. The woman, by now 'caught' because of Jesus' obviously supernatural knowledge of her, raises the issue of the Jewish-Samaritan division.

The author recalls similar recourse to the 'religious question' (in this case the relationship between Protestants and Roman Catholics), when presenting the gospel in Ulster. In neither case need this be viewed as deliberately evasive. Faced with the claims of Christ we all, understandably, want some awareness of what following Jesus will imply for our present relationships, particularly so in a religiously polarized community.

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Jesus' response (21–24) includes some of his most basic teaching on worship (*cf.* comments below). The Samaritans confined 'Scripture' to the Pentateuch, which gave them no loyalty to the account of David's decision to build a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem (1 Ch. 17:1–15). The Samaritans had a messianic anticipation based on the Pentateuch, so they anticipated the *Taheb* (meaning 'converter'), who, in the terms of Deuteronomy 18:15–18, would be a second Moses, revealing the truth, restoring true belief and renewing true worship. Jesus informs the startled woman that she is speaking with the Promised One in person: *I who speak to you am he* (26). This statement possibly reflects Jesus' divine consciousness (*cf.* Temple's rendering, 'I that am talking to you, I AM').

While this story sounds deeper notes than the provision of a model for personal evangelism, it would be remiss to omit all comment on that aspect. Jesus has much to teach about sharing our faith. Among the most obvious points to note are these:

1. His *relevance*. The whole conversation is couched in terms which the woman could understand. Even when Jesus attempts to take her beyond present experience by talking about *eternal life*, his teaching is shaped by her experience (so, *living water*), and she is given handles from her experience to help her grasp it.

2. His *humanity* and naturalness. At no point is Jesus 'odd'. The conversation appears to flow easily, despite the major social taboos which Jesus is breaking and the profoundly disparate lifestyles of the participants. Jesus is clearly 'at ease' with her, which frees her to confront her deepest needs.

3. His *knowledge*. He is well aware not only of the woman's lifestyle and background, but also of the finer points of the historic relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans, and so can relate competently to her questions. While clearly supernatural dimensions appear in the story, much of Jesus' knowledge had come from dedicated study of the Scriptures in his early years and his willingness to acquaint himself with the social and religious history of his people.

4. His moral *integrity* and directness. What Jesus offers her is no 'easy believism'. The effects of the fall in her life are not swept under the carpet. The woman's response to Jesus' invitation was an emotional one, but it was also moral, involving new relationships and a new sensitivity to her behaviour.

5. His *positive presentation*. Although the moral needs of the woman are confronted and the call to repentance is issued, Jesus' presentation is a thoroughly positive and winsome one. He plainly tells the woman what she is offered, *viz.* eternal life, and he takes pains to ensure that she grasps the full terms of it.

6. His *refusal to be side-tracked*. Jesus' goal is clear and he keeps it in sight, *viz.* the woman's putting her faith in him. The question concerning the Jew/Samaritan divide is not dismissed, but neither is it allowed to deflect Jesus.

7. His *compassion* and sensitivity. Through the entire conversation Jesus deals with her as a person in her own right, with her unique history and special longings. She emerges in the account as a credible character with personal dignity—because Jesus treats her as such. Simply put, Jesus loved her and was prepared to breach age-old conventions to reach her. Our failures in evangelism are so often failures in love. Nothing is so guaranteed to draw others to share our *living water* than an awareness that we genuinely care about them. 'People want to know that we care before they care about what we know.'

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The disciples' astonishment at Jesus conversing with the woman reflects their conformity to the sexual prejudices of their society; risking the scandal involved in speaking with a woman, especially one like this, was simply not to be tolerated.

The woman *leaving her water jar* as she hurried to share her discovery with her fellow-townfolk is a nice eye-witness touch (28). Despite her likely unpopularity, due to her questionable character, they are moved to investigate (30). There are no more attractive evangelists than those who have newly discovered Jesus.

Jesus, meanwhile, shares with the disciples some basic realities of his mission. He talks about its essential character (34) as an act of obedience, the doing and completing of all the Father had called him to do. He speaks of the consuming satisfaction of his mission (34). The service of the kingdom is like a food which sustains and fulfils. He observes his mission's urgent opportunity (35–36). As Jesus has just demonstrated in his winning of the Samaritan woman, the time for reaping is at hand. All the generations of preparation within the life of Israel, the witness of seers, prophets, priests and leaders, culminating in the ministry of John the Baptist, have brought the harvest to fruition. The day of reaping is at hand, with its attendant joys. *Four months more and then the harvest* was probably a proverb. Finally, Jesus refers to the necessary partnership of his mission: *One sows and another reaps* (37). Jesus is probably thinking specifically of John the Baptist, who had ministered recently in this area (3:23). His point is that there is a partnership in mission; none is sufficient to him or herself; we need each other; it is the church that can reach the world.

The saying *I sent you* (38) anticipates the disciples' mission, which will be a major theme of chapters 13–17 of the gospel and will find specific focus after the resurrection (*cf.* 20:21; 21:1–23). It also makes the point, however, that the mission of Jesus and that of the disciples are indissolubly linked.

The section concludes with the response of the whole community as they progress from the woman's testimony (*what you said*), to their own living experience (*we have heard for ourselves and ... know*; 42). Their title for Jesus, *Saviour of the world*, is a great and stirring one. Known in the pagan world of the first century, it was given to various Greek gods, and the emperor in Rome was likewise acclaimed. Philo in North Africa spoke of God as 'Saviour of the universe', and the later chapters of Isaiah clearly enunciate that role for God without actually using the specific words:

Turn to me and be saved,
all you ends of the earth;
for I am God, and there is no other.

On the lips of the Samaritans, however, it has its own special nuance. For centuries they have been told they were shut out from God's mercy, second-class people in the eyes of the Jewish leadership down in Jerusalem. As long as they clung stubbornly to their own tradition and religious credentials, the stigma continued to apply. But now at last the Promised One had come, born of the stock of David, a Jew by race, but one who had also come for them. The excluded were included, the circle of God's purpose embraced them too! Having experienced the inclusive love of Jesus for them despite their disadvantages, it was not a difficult step for the Samaritans to arrive at the conviction that this same love was big enough, wide enough and indiscriminating enough to embrace the whole world.

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Today we can affirm this as never before through all the long centuries since the Samaritans made their claim. It has become visible in this twentieth century in what Stephen Neill has called the 'unquestionably new fact of our time', the worldwide church of Jesus Christ embracing people from every continent and all the major people groups of the earth. And so we unite our song of thanksgiving with these Samaritans—*this man really is the Saviour of the world*.

In the light of Jesus' teaching in verses 21–24, a final theme for comment is *worship*. In response to the issue of the correct location for worship, Jesus makes a number of points which are timeless in their application.

First, the critical hour (NIV's *time* in verse 21 is literally 'hour') for human worship of God is about to dawn. What is this? 'Hour' in John's gospel consistently means the hour of Jesus' exaltation through death and resurrection. This impending crisis will throw the whole course of human relationship with God into a new dimension, rendering location, whether Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim, an obsolete issue. Jesus here goes a step beyond his statement in 2:19, where the raising of the temple of his body is the 'sign' which authorizes his cleansing of Israel's worship. Here he states clearly that the destroying and raising of his body will in fact lead to the replacing of the temple worship by a new *spirit and truth* worship, based on his sacrifice and living presence.

Second, the revelation given in the Old Testament (22), which has been preserved and cherished by the Jews, *is* valid, and gives a true knowledge of God. Hence, despite their periodic apostasy, the Jews remain the historic vehicle for the coming of God's salvation to the world. Jesus' messianic renewal of worship will therefore be based on the Old Testament revelation and will affirm it while transforming it.

Third (23–24), the time of true worship is now at hand (because by implication Jesus, the Son and Messiah, is now at hand). This is a worship in *spirit and truth*. He is the truth. He receives and dispenses the Spirit to all who believe in him, a dispensing experienced as a second birth. True worship is accordingly the worship offered through the Son and in living faith-union with him by means of the Holy Spirit.

The same conclusion is reached by another route in verse 24. The spiritual nature of God (*God is spirit*) means self-evidently that we cannot relate to God satisfactorily in physical terms. He is invisible and intangible and hence beyond our immediate sense-apprehension. For God to be known and focused by us, thus making worship possible, he must take initiative to disclose himself to us. This he has done initially in the Old Testament Scriptures (verse 22, the Jews 'know' whom they are worshipping). But the further and fuller revelation of God is now at hand in the Son who makes the Father known (1:18). Hence, we reach the same conclusion. True and satisfactory worship is worship offered in and through Jesus Christ; only through the truth he embodies, and the Spirit he imparts, can we know God and worship him.

Worship is one of the great preoccupations in the churches today, and sadly a frequent cause of division. This section has something to teach about hindrances to true worship. It is hindered first by *wrong practices*. The woman illustrates this principle. Until her life is put right and its failures addressed, true worship cannot happen for her. This was Israel's error right through the Old Testament period, the assumption that if the externals of worship were in place, God would be satisfied. He was not, and is not today: *cf.* 'Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them ... Away with the noise of your

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songs!... But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!’ (Am. 5:22–24). This is not to imply that worship is possible only for perfect people, but God does seek a sincere and humble dependence upon him and a genuine commitment to live in obedience to him. ‘The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise’ (Ps. 51:17).

Secondly, worship is hindered by *wrong priorities*. In essence this was the error of the Jews and Samaritans who were locked in conflict over where worship should take place, largely unaware that the long-awaited Messiah, who was sent to renew their entire relationship with God, was at that very time in their midst. It is not difficult to conclude that the church today stands in danger of a similar imbalance. Issues are endlessly debated, such as the type of music to be used in worship. Should hands be raised or kept down? Should one particular form of words be used, or should there be complete spontaneity? And should worship be led by one leader or should many participate? These look suspiciously like the issue raised by the woman in this passage. They are concerned with form rather than content. In fact it is beyond question that true and sincere worship can be and is offered using *each* of the alternatives mentioned above. It is also true that insincere and unworthy worship is offered using *each* of these same alternatives. Decisions about form are often in essence matters of taste and temperament and should be seen as such. One of the implications of the fact that God is spirit is that no form can ever be made the absolute one. No worship form can, or ever will, meet every need. If it did it would detract from the glory that is God’s alone. The true priority is the content of worship, a worship from the heart which truly exalts God.

A third barrier is *wrong perceptions*, particularly about who God is and about our relationship to him. Since God is spirit we can worship him truly only as we bring our worship to the test of his self-revelation in his Word. Worship should therefore be Bible-centred, and at the same time Christ-centred, for he is the heart of the biblical writings, the truth embodied (14:6), and the one through whom the Spirit is given (7:37–39). One clear implication is that where worship is not explicitly through Jesus Christ, it falls under our Lord’s description of worship of *what you do not know*. If that is said of Samaritan worship which was based, at least in part, on the Old Testament, how much more must it be said of the worship in non-Christian traditions. Only in and through Jesus Christ, the Son who alone is ‘at the Father’s side’, can the Father be truly known and worshipped.

There is finally in these verses a *supreme incentive* to worship. *They are the kind of worshippers ... the Father seeks* (23), and nothing so encourages our approach to him than to realize this. Our worship, incredible as it may appear in our eyes, matters immensely to him. He gave his only Son to make it possible. To you ... he has said, “Seek my face!” (Ps: 27:8 mg.). If we truly believe that, then we shall echo back from full and exultant hearts, ‘Your face, Lord, I will seek.’

We taste thee, O thou living bread,
And long to feast upon thee still;
We drink of thee, the fountain-head,
And thirst our souls from thee to fill.

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*Bernard of Clairvaux*⁴

Literary Techniques

The literary techniques used by the Fourth Evangelist include wordplay (esp. double entendre), the motif of misunderstanding, irony, paradox, and balance (i.e., parallelism, inclusion, and chiasm).

Wordplay A double entendre, or double meaning, can be seen in the author's use of *pneuma* to denote both "wind" and "spirit" (3:8), *koimaomai* for both "sleep" and "death" (11:11–13), *katalambanō* in both the cognitive sense of "receive, understand" and the physical sense of "seize, overcome" (1:5), and *anōthen* as "from above" and "again" (3:3). Other words with a double meaning are *hypsōō*, meaning either "lifted up, raised up" (as on the cross) or "exalted, glorified" (as in ascended to heaven, 3:14); *zōn* as "living" or "flowing" water (4:10–11); and *anabainō*, "going up," in either a literal ("to Jerusalem") or figurative ("to the Father") sense (7:8).

The Misunderstanding Motif The motif of misunderstanding (e.g., 3:4, 9; 4:11–12, 15, 19–20; 6:41–43, 52; 7:35–36; 11:11–12, 24), an important structural element of the Johannine dialogues, joins with irony to provide the gospel with a dramatic plotline. Examples are usually preceded by some profound statement of Jesus (3:3, 8; 4:10, 14; 6:35–40, 51; 7:34; 11:11, 23) and provide the occasion for further exposition of the same or a similar theme (3:5–7, 11–12; 4:13–14, 21–26; 6:44–51, 53–58; 7:37–39; 11:25–26). In these discourses the characters function as foils in contrast to Jesus, who occupies the central spotlight. These repeated misunderstandings, which are reminiscent of the messianic secret found throughout Mark's gospel, are recognizable by the audience of the gospel, since they know more than the characters in the story (e.g., 20:30–31; 21:24–25).

Irony Irony, a figure of contradiction found elsewhere in the NT (e.g., Mark 1:22; 6:3–4; 11:28; 14:30), occurs frequently in the Fourth Gospel. There is irony especially in sarcastic remarks or incredulous statements that are often true, in a sense not realized by the speakers (e.g., "Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob?" 4:12; see also 7:35, 46, 52; 8:22). There is even irony in statements of double meaning that denote one level of understanding for the speaker and another for the reader. For example, members of the Jewish council fear that "everyone will believe in him" (11:48), but this fear is exactly the missionary hope of John's community. Pilate mockingly says to the Jews, "Here is your King!" (19:14–15), although for John's readers, Jesus indeed is the true king of the Jews.

Paradox Paradox—an apparently contradictory situation that reveals some profound truth—is related to irony. The summary statement "he came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (1:11) is the tragic paradox of a prophet without honor in his own country. Another is the question "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (1:46). For John and his readers, Jesus, who came from the obscure town of Nazareth, is the only Son of God (see also 9:29; 19:15).

Balance The author of John also employs three principles of literary balance: regular parallelism, inclusion, and chiasm. As in Hebrew poetry, the author uses several forms of regular parallelism. Synonymous parallelism is found, in which the second line repeats the idea of the first (speak/know, bear witness/seen, 3:11; see also 6:35, 55; 13:16). Antithetical parallelism also occurs, where the second line offers a contrast to the first (believes/not condemned, not believe/condemned, 3:18a; hates the light/comes to the light, 3:20–21; see also 8:35; 9:39). Finally, there is synthetic (or progressive) parallelism, where the second line amplifies and explains the first (8:44), and climactic parallelism, where successive lines are repeated and developed to form a climax (6:37; 8:32): "they who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them" (14:21).

The techniques of inclusion and chiasm involve enveloping or bracketing enclosed material. The framing device of inclusion is found in statements about the "signs" Jesus performed (2:11 with 4:46, 54), where John baptized (1:28 with 10:40), the explicit and implicit references to Jesus as the Passover lamb (1:29, 36 with 19:36 / Exod 12:46), and Jesus' insistence that he "can do nothing" on his own (5:19, 30). Chiasm, or introverted parallelism (A B C B' A' thematic pattern), can be detected in 6:36–40 and 18:28–19:16.⁵

The Woman of Samaria

HER CHARACTER:

Looked down upon by the Jews because she was a Samaritan and disdained because of her many romantic

⁴ Milne, B. (1993). [*The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide*](#) (pp. 74–90). InterVarsity Press.

⁵ Puskas, C. B., & Crump, D. (2008). [*An Introduction to the Gospels and Acts*](#) (pp. 165–167). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

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liaisons, she would not have been most people's first choice to advance the gospel in a region where it had not yet been heard.

HER SORROW:

To have lived in a way that relegated her to the margins of her society.

HER JOY:

That Jesus broke through barriers of culture, race, and religion in order to reveal himself to her.

KEY SCRIPTURE:

John 4:1 – 42

Monday

HER STORY

Every day, the woman carried her water jug to Jacob's well just outside Sychar, a town midway between Jerusalem and Nazareth. Even though it was the hottest time of the day, she preferred it to the evening hours, when the other women gathered. How tired she was of their wagging tongues. Better the scorching heat than their sharp remarks.

She was surprised, however, to see that today someone had already arrived at the well — a Jew from Galilee by the looks of him. At least she had nothing to fear from his tongue, for Jews did their best to avoid Samaritans, despising them as half-breeds who worshiped not in the temple at Jerusalem but at their shrine on Mount Gerizim. For once she was glad to be ignored, grateful, too, that men did not address women in public.

But as she approached the well, the man startled her, breaking the rules she had counted on to protect her. "Will you give me a drink?" he asked.

What kind of a Jew was this? she wondered. *Certainly not a Pharisee, or he would have taken the long way around Samaria to get to Galilee.* With a toss of her head, she replied, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"

But he wouldn't be put off. "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."

"Sir," she replied, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" *That should take him down a notch or two.*

But the man kept pressing. "Go," he told her, "call your husband and come back."

This last request took the wind out of her. Her quick tongue was barely able to reply, "I have no husband."

"You are right when you say you have no husband," Jesus said. "The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

His words cut her. Shaking off the hurt, she tried changing the subject, diverting him by stirring up the old controversy between Jews and Samaritans. "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."

The woman said, "I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

Leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

Meanwhile, his disciples, who had gone into the town to look for food, returned and urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

But Jesus replied, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

Dodge, counterdodge — nothing the woman said would keep Jesus at bay. He kept pressing beneath the surface, inviting her to a deeper understanding, hemming her in by revealing his knowledge of the most intimate details of her life. Overwhelmed, she finally admitted the truth. And when she did, Jesus startled her with a revelation about himself: He admitted, for the first time, that he was the Messiah. Though she hadn't known it, she had been conversing with her Savior.

Jesus had arrived at the well thirsty, hungry, and tired from the journey north to Galilee. But by the time his disciples returned from their shopping trip in Sychar, he seemed refreshed and restored by his encounter with the woman.

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She, in turn, was so deeply affected by him that she exclaimed to whoever would listen: “He told me everything I ever did.” At the Samaritans’ urging, Jesus stayed on for two days and many came to believe, saying to the woman: “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

Tuesday

HER LIFE AND TIMES

WATER

Cool, clear water. A commodity most of us today take for granted. We turn on a faucet, and fresh, clean water is readily available. In Palestine, however, water is scarce and highly valued.

The long, mostly rainless summers cause most of the rivers in Palestine to dry up completely. Even the Jordan River becomes shallow, narrow, and muddy in the summer months. The early peoples of Palestine depended on rain during the spring and fall months for their water supply. Though scarce at other times during the year, the rain during these seasons kept the springs and wells flowing and the cisterns full.

The Jews became adept at gathering every bit of rainwater, storing it up for future use during the dry seasons. Cisterns, covered pools dug out of rock specifically for storing rainwater, were numerous. In Jerusalem, the temple area alone had thirty-seven cisterns, one of them large enough to hold over two million gallons of water. Gutters, pipes, and waterways directed the rainwater from the surface to the underground cisterns, which would provide a constant supply of water, even during dry spells.

Heavy dew provided a good share of the moisture required by crops growing in the summer months. The warm, cloudless nights of Palestinian summers provide prime conditions for dew to form. Where ample water was readily available, farmers irrigated crops and vineyards to maximize the produce received from a field.

Drinking water was stored and carried in goatskins. Many towns and cities had drinking water for sale in their markets and on the streets. Only a small amount of water was used for washing, simply because it was so scarce. However, good hospitality required that a guest in someone’s home receive a basin of water to wash at least his or her feet and hands after walking on the dusty roads (Genesis 18:4; John 13:5).

Getting daily water from the neighborhood well or cistern was the duty of the younger women of a household. They would usually go to the well in the evening, when the air was cooler. It’s interesting to note that the Samaritan woman went to the well at noon (“the sixth hour”), probably in order to avoid the other women, who may have looked down on her.

Water is used in symbolic ways throughout Scripture. David compared his troubles to “deep waters” (Psalm 69:1 – 2, 14; 124:5). The book of Proverbs compares people’s words to deep waters and wise words to a “bubbling brook” of water (Proverbs 18:4). Good news is like fresh water (Proverbs 25:25). Several passages refer to our sins being washed away (Psalm 51:7; Ephesians 5:26; Hebrews 10:22). Jesus told the Samaritan woman that he had water that would take away her thirst forever. The water he was speaking of was not, of course, two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, but spiritual water — a water that will fill us so full of himself that all our needs will be met, all our wants satisfied, and all our thirsts fulfilled.

Wednesday

HER LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

Read John 4:4 – 42.

1. Trace the Samaritan woman’s emotional responses as her encounter with Jesus progressed. What do you think she was feeling in verses 7 – 9? Verses 10 – 12? Verses 13 – 15? Verse 16? Verses 17 – 20? Verses 21 – 26?
2. Looking at her life, what do you think this woman was really thirsty for?
3. What have you used to try to satisfy your spiritual thirst apart from Christ? Family? Career? Shopping? Entertainment?
4. Verses 25 – 26 are the first time Jesus acknowledged exactly who he is. Why do you think he would choose to tell this woman, an outcast of society in a town of Samaria, instead of the leaders of Jewish religion and culture or even his own disciples? What sort of reaction do you have to his choice?
5. What do you think convinced the Samaritan woman that Jesus was who he said he was?
6. If Jesus really is the Savior who knows everything you ever did, what can the Samaritan woman teach you about how to respond to him today?

Thursday

HER PROMISE

Are you thirsty? Is there a longing in you that you just can’t seem to meet? Do you hunger for something to fill some void, some emptiness you can’t even explain? Look everywhere, try everything — you’ll find nothing in this world that will satisfy. Only Jesus can provide the living water that will fill you to overflowing, that will satisfy your longing, that will soothe your thirst so completely you’ll never be thirsty again.

Promises in Scripture

*Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.*

— PSALM 90:14

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Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

— MATTHEW 5:6

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

— LUKE 6:21

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

— JOHN 4:13

Friday

HER LEGACY OF PRAYER

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

— JOHN 4:28 – 30

REFLECT ON:	John 4:4 – 42.
PRAISE GOD:	Because in his kingdom, the last shall be first.
OFFER THANKS:	For the way he has uncovered your need for him.
CONFESS:	Any tendency to act as though God cannot use your neediness but only your strength.
ASK GOD:	To give you the humility to face the depth of your need for grace.

Lift Your Heart

It is always difficult to admit our sins, particularly if we think God will love us only if we behave well. Though we might never articulate such a thought, it shapes our theology more than we like to admit. This week, make a list of everything God knows about you that you wish he didn't. Thank him for loving you despite your sins. Then tear up the list, remembering the words of Psalm 103:11 – 12:

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

*Lord, you know everything about me, even the things I'm hiding from myself. Give me the grace to admit my sin, believing that though you see me, you still love me. Help me to let go of anything that keeps me from experiencing the living water of your Holy Spirit welling up inside me.*⁶

4.0 What's Wrong with This Picture?

From the perspective of stereotypical female behavior for this cultural world we initially ask "What's wrong with this picture?"

4.1 Time and Place (4:6–7)

Jesus encountered the woman "at the sixth hour," which was roughly midday. This seemingly innocuous detail, however, indicates that the woman came to the well at an unusual hour—for females, that is. Women at wells were a common phenomenon, since water was needed for cooking, but they came only at certain hours, namely, morning or evening (Gen 24:11; see Gen 29:7). Midday is a culturally "wrong" time for females to be at a well for domestic purposes. The woman, moreover, appears not to be in the company of other women, as would have been the custom (see 1 Sam 9:11).

What's wrong with this picture? 1) She comes alone at an unusual hour 2) to a place, which, when many women are gathered, is gender appropriate, but at midday and alone would suggest deviance on her part. The anomalous time, her isolation, and the public nature of the well at midday suggest that she has been shunned by the women of the village for some behavior (4:16–18), and so she acts alone when other women are dutifully at work elsewhere.

4.2 Speech with a Strange Man in Public (4:7–26)

The characters themselves tell us how strange this encounter appears. The woman remarks to Jesus: "How is it that you, a Judean, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?" (4:9). The narrator dilates on this issue with the aside, "For Judeans have no dealings

⁶ Spangler, A., & Syswerda, J. E. (2015). [*Women of the bible: a one-year devotional study*](#). Zondervan.

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with Samaritans” (4:9). But more is at stake than ethnic differences. When the disciples return from the village and see Jesus conversing with this female, they react with astonishment: “They marveled that he was talking to a woman” (4:27a). Their shock lies in the fact that a male and a female were conversing alone in public. The narrator then voices the questions that should have been asked, but were not, by the characters: “but none said, ‘What do you (Jesus) wish with her? or ‘Why are you talking with her?’ ” (4:27b). The questions are there nonetheless, because the encounter of Jesus and the woman at face value suggests improper behavior.

What were Jesus and the woman talking about? Although it is not the whole of their dialogue, they spoke considerably about the woman’s lack of sexual exclusivity, i.e., her shamelessness. When Jesus told her to go and call her husband, she responded that she had no husband (4:17a), when in fact she had had five husbands already. So we learn that she is no maiden, but a sexually seasoned woman. Her current male companion is *not* her husband and so has no responsibility to guard her shame or to defend her sexual exclusiveness, which is the only basis for her honor in the village. Although she might have been widowed five times (see Mark 12:20–23), her current non-marital relationship with a sixth male suggests either adultery or concubinage. In any case, she clearly lacks the exclusivity upon which her reputation and honor depend in a gender-divided world. Moreover, when the woman recounts her conversation with Jesus back in the village, she focuses on one point only, his remark about her sexual history: “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done” (4:29). The villagers were impressed with her testimony that “He told me everything I have ever done” (4:39), which can only refer to Jesus’ remarks in 4:17–18 about the six men in her life. The author insists on keeping the lack of sexual exclusivity before his audience. What, then, is wrong with this picture? It is bad enough that a female is conversing with an unrelated male in a public place at an unusual hour. Worse, the reader is told repeatedly the most significant item in her conversation with Jesus is his remark on her shameless sexual behavior.

4.3 Speech with Other Men in Public Space (4:28–30)

Although Jesus commands her to go and call her husband (4:16), she goes into the village marketplace where all the men are gathered. She does not go to her own house, nor does she bring her water jar home (4:28). House-to-house canvassing seems highly unlikely, since she seems to the women in the village to be a sexual pariah. The narrative does not say “marketplace,” but from our knowledge of that culture, it would be culturally accurate in imagining males gathered together in an open-air space, such as a marketplace (see Philo and Hierocles, cited above). She does not return to private space at all, but goes into public space, to the one place where males could be expected to congregate. From our knowledge of the gender division of space, females should not be present in this public space when males are there. Rather they should be with the other females of the household attending to household matters in appropriate private space.

Moreover, this woman speaks to these males and tells them of her conversation with another man, a Judean stranger. And as we noted above, she tells the village males that this new male knew about her sexual shamelessness, “all that I ever did” (4:29, 39). What, then, is wrong with this picture? Absolutely everything. The details of this narrative are at odds with the commonly expected behavior of shame-guarding females in the ancient world of honor and shame. And as vv. 9 and 27 indicate, even the characters in the narrative are aware of these breaches of gender rules. So the readers and hearers are carefully reminded of the impropriety of the conversation. The story loses its power and punch if these critical details are ignored and dismissed.

4.4 Other Women at Wells: A Comparison (Conventions Confirmed)

A comparison of John 4 with other narrative scenes at wells confirms that we should attend to cultural customs regarding females in this context. Hall’s remarks on “low context” are appropriate here, for much is presumed concerning women at wells. The Old Testament narrates three scenes of males and females meeting at wells (Gen 24:10–49; 29:4–14; Exod 2:15–22), and the *Protoevangelium of James* (11:1) records another. In all of these, the narrators present prospective brides either to their husbands or their agents. And since the key element of a worthy wife is virginity or sexual exclusivity, the narratives all make a point that the social intercourse at the well is strictly in accord with cultural customs. The females are shy, obedient, and defensive of their virtue; they speak respectfully to the males and obey when commanded; they seek the shelter of the “private” world as soon as possible. In short, the narratives record that everything is “right with this picture.” Yet from other sources we know that females risked being molested at wells. These data confirm that scenes of females at wells normally contained a sexual component which required viewers to attend to what was “wrong” or “right” about the picture.

5.0 The Rhetorical Shape of the Narrative

Feminist scholars pay close attention to rhetorical criticism, by which they mean the ideological context of authors and their intent. What, then, is the rhetorical stance of the author of John 4 in regard to “what’s wrong with this picture”? The narrator recounts the dialogue part of the story (4:7–26) in terms of a recurring pattern characteristic of this Gospel, namely, “statement ... misunderstanding ... clarification.” Jesus makes a statement, which is misunderstood, but that leads him to speak again in clarification. This dialogue may function either as an invitation, so that addressees are led to insight and so to a change of status as “insiders” (4:6–15; 11:20–27), or as a distancing mechanism, so that addressees are proven to be ignorant and blind and so are confirmed as “outsiders” (3:1–21) who experience no status transformation. Some significant examples are:

Statement	Misunderstanding	Clarification
3:3	3:4	3:5
6:41	6:42	6:43–48

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8:21	8:22	8:23–30
11:11	11:12	11:13–15
12:27–28	12:29	12:30
14:4	14:5	14:6

5.1 John 4:7–15

The pattern functions here as an invitational dialogue describing how the Samaritan woman is progressively enlightened and experiences a change of status from radical “outsider” to “insider.” The pattern here has a cyclical movement, in that Jesus’ “clarification” of the woman’s “misunderstanding” serves as his new “statement” for her further “misunderstanding” and so for his added “clarification”:

Statement	Misunderstanding	Clarification
4:7	4:9	4:10
4:10	4:11–12	4:13–14
4:13	4:14	4:13
4:32	4:33	4:34

Jesus states: “Give me to drink” (4:7). She responds with surprise that a Judean male would ask a Samaritan female for a drink. On one level she is correct, for this is highly unusual; on another level she misunderstands Jesus. He confirms that she misunderstands, remarking “*If only you knew ...*” (4:10). If she were “in the know,” the issue of who gives whom a drink would be irrelevant, and she would ask him and he would give her water: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (4:10). A male giving a drink to a female?! Thus the dialogue already encodes gender expectations, but treats them in terms of “misunderstandings” which need “clarification.”

Jesus’ clarification in 4:10 of her misunderstanding becomes a new statement which provokes another cycle of this pattern. She misunderstands him when she comments about buckets and deep wells. Jesus clarifies that “those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty” (4:14). This clarification serves as a new statement, which is again misunderstood. The woman asks Jesus for his water, rejoicing that she will “never have to keep coming here to draw water” (4:15) from this well. Just how much have her misunderstandings been clarified? Yet, her “misunderstandings” are portrayed as progress of some sort, not as confirmation of obtuseness, as was the case with Nicodemus. In terms of rhetorical patterns, she moves from the position of *asking questions* (4:9, 11, 12), to that of *speaking imperatives* (“give me,” 4:15). Indeed she even mouths the original words of Jesus:

Jesus: “Give me to drink”

Woman: “Give me this water”

Jesus remarked earlier, “if you only knew, *you would ask ...*”; finally she *asks* him for his water. But how impressive is this? Like Nicodemus, she is understanding Jesus at an earthly, material level because she wants well water “so that I may not thirst, nor have to come here for water” (4:15). There is nothing of the spiritual about her self-serving request. Her words may repeat Jesus’ words, but she is still very far from his communication. She is, however, a work in progress; Jesus speaks to her selected disclosure of important materials; her character is in the process of change. Unlike Nicodemus, she keeps in conversation with Jesus, even if she does not go very much below the surface of Jesus’ words. Finally, by asking Jesus for his water, she is on track to become an “insider,” that is, one who shares Jesus’ food and drink.

Is this a “public” or a “private” scene? Ostensibly it begins in public and is played according to public rules. The woman’s “saucy” speech has all the trappings of a challenge-riposte exchange; she and Jesus meet at a public place in male time. But the rhetorical pattern suggests that a transformation of some sort is taking place, not just of the status of the woman, who is in process of becoming an insider, but also of the nature of the space that they occupy. Inasmuch as Jesus is speaking significant words to her, he is welcoming her into his “private” world, the sphere of fictive-kinship. There males share food and beverage with females (“give me to drink”) and exchange information (“are you greater than ...?”); there honor challenges as well as “saucy” speech are absent. The change in the rhetorical patterns of the woman’s speech and her asking Jesus for a drink are indications that the space in which she and Jesus have intercourse is ceasing to be “public” and becoming “private.” She is being transformed into an “insider,” one whom Jesus receives into his fictive-kinship “private” world.

5.2 John 4:16–26

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Jesus again makes a statement, in this case, a command that the woman “Go, call your husband and come here” (4:16). Something new happens, for she neither questions Jesus nor misunderstands him. The modification of the form indicates that the period of obtuse misunderstanding is over (4:7–15). When she states openly “I have no husband,” Jesus praises her twice for speaking the truth: “You are right in saying ‘I have no husband’ ...” (4:17) and “What you have said is true” (4:18). From now on, the woman speaks with some claim to insight: “I see ...” (4:19) and “I know ...” (4:25). Truthfulness and praise characterize this “private” world. The pattern, however, does not indicate a kinship relationship because her speech takes on the character of challenging, even sarcastic, speech. As in all challenge-riposte exchanges, Jesus responds, trumping her claim.

Tone of voice seems impossible to determine in an ancient text. Her next remark, however, is by no means an acknowledgment of Jesus as prophet but a challenge to “Mr. Know-It-All.” With Jesus’ exposure of her sexual history, she challenges Jesus with a vexing question for which there is no answer. “Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem” (4:20). Despite her sarcastic use of the role of “prophet,” prophets in fact are in the know, both about the hidden evils of the human heart and about proper worship of God. Jesus takes up the challenge and gives her special knowledge that worship in the future will not be “public” worship at civic shrines, as in Judea and Samaria, but “private” worship, namely, worship in households which are traditional “at-home” space for females. It is not accidental that the only mentions of “houses” and “households” in the Fourth Gospel include prominent women such as Martha and Mary (11:20, 31; 12:2–3). But she is by no means finished with her challenges to Jesus: “Messiah will announce all things to us” (4:25). This is surely a claim that Samaritans are to be honored by Messiah and especially by his knowledge. Jesus challenges her claim with a most unusual revelation of his identity: “I who speak to you am he” (4:26). Although the woman is no longer portrayed as misunderstanding Jesus (4:9–15), she still does not possess knowledge that would make her an insider or a disciple. Indeed, in 4:17–25 she “sees” and “knows,” but this functions as a challenge to Jesus, not as an acknowledgment of his role and status. Nevertheless she is told remarkable information, which the narrative indicates that she understood, unlike the water in 4:15.

But is she an insider? Does she ever acclaim or acknowledge Jesus? Indeed she asks the people of the town “can this be the Christ?” (4:29) not on the basis of the information in 4:9–24, but on the basis of Jesus’ knowledge of her sexual history (4:16–17). She voices a question, not a declarative statement as did John, Andrew, and Philip (1:36–50). Finally, her question about Jesus proves too weak for the Samaritans, who “have heard for ourselves and know indeed that this is the Savior of the world” (4:42). Nothing about the woman’s speech in John 4 should be credited as authentic, sure knowledge; if she is not utterly misunderstanding Jesus (4:9–15) she is sarcastically challenging Jesus (4:16–26).

There are gender considerations here. First, the topic is about males, her current male companion (*not* her husband) and her five previous husbands. She talks of prophets, traditional male prophets because the topic discussed is the correct place of worship (4:19–20). The only extant records of discussion of that topic come from male prophets. She comments about “Messiah,” who is male. It might also be the case that political topics such as the correct place of worship and the coming Messiah are male subjects of conversation (see Plutarch, *Lycurgus and Numa* 3.5, cited above), since they pertain to the “public” world of males. Yet this woman engages in them unreservedly. Thus her conversation is *always about men*: this Judean man (Jesus), our father Jacob, husbands, prophets, and Messiah. If this were a “public” forum, these remarks would be improper because they violate the cultural expectations of females in the male sphere. But since this is becoming the “private” world of Jesus’ discipleship circle, astute cultural readers will not perceive them as inappropriate.

Although the woman is no longer portrayed as misunderstanding Jesus (4:9–15), she still does not possess knowledge that would indicate that she is an insider or a disciple. In 4:17–25 she claims knowledge, i.e., she “sees” and “knows”; but this knowledge functions as an aggressive challenge to Jesus. Her challenges, moreover, are trumped, for Jesus does know the mysterious place of worship and declares that he is the knowledgeable Messiah she boasted about.

The rhetorical exchange in 4:16–26 is proper to the “private” world. Information is freely exchanged. The dialogue here is not yet one of mutuality and self-revelation, which are proper to kinship networks, for the woman retains an aggressive stance. But she will immediately begin telling the local people about this person Jesus. Perhaps unwittingly, she becomes a spokesman for Jesus and emphasizes the “private” world she enjoyed with him; she has nearly finished her entrance into the circle of Jesus. In the process, she has found a new home and new honor; people take her seriously. She enjoys a measure of respect.

5.3 Clues in the Rhetoric

Our investigation of the rhetoric of the dialogue between Jesus and the woman yields many thematic points. 1) The narrative begins by calling attention to a sharing of vessels that contravenes cultural expectations about ritual purity, thus indicating the breaking of a boundary. 2) The narrative explicitly attends to cultural expectations about ethnic boundaries (4:9), which are likewise broken. 3) This Samaritan female, moreover, is perceived by other characters in the narrative as violating the gender expectations of that culture (4:27), thus breaking a gender boundary. 4) At one point the narrative indicates a certain role reversal; the male figure who asks this female for a drink (4:7) becomes the serving figure who offers water to the woman (4:15). More breaking of gender boundaries. 5) Although Jesus commanded her “Go, call your husband” (4:16), she did not obey him. Cultural expectation of ideal females would celebrate their obedience to males, not such a strange performance as hers. Indeed the woman went and spoke, but her action is hardly what Jesus commanded.

Jesus’ Command (4:16)

The Woman’s Actions (4:28–30)

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Female. If the cultural background of John 4 has any bearing on our understanding of the social dynamics of the story, we might ask a further question concerning the representative nature of the Samaritan woman. She speaks about Jesus to others, presumably males, and leads them to him. In this does she embody a typical role recognized by the Johannine group? If so, is this a role uncharacteristically given to a female in this culture? We can compare her with two other Johannine characters, Mary Magdalene and the first disciples of Jesus, to see if she is “representative” of anything further.

In making comparisons, we are guided by sociological theory of “role” as “a set of expectations for interaction” between a person who holds one position in a group and another person who holds a reciprocal position. A “role” is commonly defined as “the socially recognized position of a person which entails rights and duties.” Roles might be formal (i.e., king, priest, teacher, mother) or informal. Paul, for example, claimed the formal role of “apostle” (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8–11), which entailed certain “rights” (1 Cor 9:4–12) and “duties” (9:16–17). Can the Samaritan woman be said to have a socially accepted “set of expectations”? Does she have “rights”? “Duties”? Is she recognized by the other characters as having these? If she has a “role,” is it one in the “public” or “private” world?

Formal spreading of the word. Form-critical studies show that appearances of the Risen Jesus function as explicit commissionings of certain male disciples as leaders within the group as well as spokesmen to the “public” world. This is also the case with John 20:25 and 21:15–18. Compared with these narratives, John 4 should not be read as a formal commissioning. Although the author knows the rhetorical form of a commissioning, he has not cast the narrative of the Samaritan woman in it.

Yet this Gospel contains another appearance of the Risen Jesus, this time to Mary Magdalene. In her case (20:11–17) we seem to be dealing with a formal role, but not necessarily one in the “public” sphere. When we compare Mary with the Samaritan woman, we learn the following:

1. In both cases Jesus has intercourse with solitary females outside a city in public space, apart from their private space, namely, their houses (see also 11:20, 28–30).
2. In both the women struggle with incomprehension or misunderstanding: Mary thinks Jesus is a gardener; the Samaritan woman just cannot grasp Jesus’ initial remarks to her (see 11:23–26).
3. To both Jesus reveals his identity (see 11:25).
4. To both he issues a command to go and speak (see 11:28):

—4:16 Go (*hypage*) call your husband

—20:17 Go (*poreuou*) say to my brothers

He gives Mary specific, significant lines to speak, “Say, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’ ” (20:17). In terms of the high christology of this Gospel, she conveys a remarkable piece of information to the group. But Jesus does not tell the Samaritan woman what to say when he says “Call your husband.” Nothing profound here at all, no specific message. Nor can it be said that she is an insider in 4:16–17. Moreover, when she speaks, she emphasizes words of Jesus that he did *not* authorize her to speak: “He told me all that I ever did” (4:29, 39), which we know to be her sexual shamelessness.

5. Mary made clear pronouncements (“He told me ‘thus-and-such’ ”), which differs formally from the Samaritan woman’s tentative question (“Can this be the Christ?”).
6. Mary obeyed Jesus’ command; she “went and said to the disciples ... ‘He said thus-and-such to me’ ” (20:18). The case is less clear with the Samaritan woman, who went and spoke, not to her husband, but to the men of the village, and wondered “Can this be the Christ?” (4:29). Jesus had commanded her, “Go, call your husband, and come here”; but she went to the village square and spoke to others. The rhetorical form of the commissioning of Mary urges readers to recognize her as having a formal role within the fictive-kinship group. Mary’s “commission-fulfillment” contrasts with the Samaritan woman’s “command-quasi-obedience.” Not every command entails a formal commissioning to a role.
7. Both are sent to the “private” world to speak, Mary to Jesus’ “brethren” and the Samaritan woman to “your husband.” Neither is formally commissioned to speak to the “public” world. In terms of gender-specific behavior, Mary’s actions comply with what we have come to know as the cultural expectations of shame-guarding females in the “private” sphere. It is permissible for a female to speak with the males of her household or kinship group (1 Tim 2:12; 1 Cor 14:33–36). Mary does not speak in public to strange men but in private to members of Jesus’ fictive-kinship group (“my brothers”). She is not sent to “public” space, i.e., to other countries or villages to speak to unknown men. In comparison, the Samaritan woman likewise operates in the “private” world. As I have argued, she does not go as commanded to her house or kin, but to the village square; she speaks to whoever is there, which in that culture would mean the males of the village. Her relationship to at least six men of the village might position her as a person with contacts to many households and thus aid in networking. As a person who has lost her sexual exclusivity, she is not an anomaly in this “public” world. Although she appears in the marketplace or “public” space, we are not to imagine that she remains there. After all, Jesus has told her that true worship would occur, *not* in “public” space (“this mountain or Jerusalem”), but in “private” space, namely, households where kinship groups gather. The direction, then, of the woman’s speech is not to create a “public” forum where she would have a “public” role. Rather, she moves from “private” space (her household) to “public” space (the marketplace), but then back to “private” space (the circle of Jesus’ disciples).
8. The story about Mary is cast in terms of a formal commissioning narrative, and so she might be considered a “representative character.” But the same cannot be said of the Samaritan woman, who is not formally commissioned by Jesus to say specific

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words to a specific group of people. Nor is she recognized by the townsfolk as having a role with duties and rights. If she has a “duty,” it is to obey Jesus’ command to “call your husband.” She has no duty to say specific words to other people. Thus it cannot be maintained that she was *sent*, much less into the “public” world.

Informal spreading of the word. Yet does she have an “informal” role? In the rhetoric of the narrative, her conversation with the villagers is told with approval (4:31–38). Is this indicative of an “informal” role? If so, is it a role which belonged only to males? Is it a role in the “public” or “private” sphere? Is her “rushing to bring the news home” a convention of typical well scenes, as Alter describes them?³⁶

In two rhetorically significant places in this Gospel, readers are told of disciples spreading the news about Jesus in an informal manner. Both at the story’s beginning and ending, those who have come to know Jesus tell others about him and even lead them to him for purposes of joining his circle. At the beginning John the Baptizer tells two of his disciples about Jesus (1:35–36), who then “follow” him to learn “private” information: “Where do you stay?” He tells them “Come and see” (1:39), and so they enter his “private” world. Subsequently they find others, tell them about Jesus, and invite them to “come and see.” John tells Andrew, who tells Simon; Philip tells Nathanael. Thus, a clear pattern emerges, which is repeated again and again in the Fourth Gospel: 1) Martha tells Mary that Jesus is present (11:28); 2) Philip tells Andrew about the Greeks seeking Jesus, and both tell Jesus (12:21–22); 3) the ten disciples, to whom the Risen Jesus manifests himself, tell the absent Thomas: “We have seen the Lord” (20:25). Jesus never authorizes any of these people to spread news about himself, nor is any formal role indicated by this pattern.

In a world without media, news is spread informally in a “gossip network,” a technical term used by anthropologists to describe the spread of information in a media-less world. Spreading news does not seem to entail any *formal* role; there emerges no recognized system of rights and duties, which are characteristic of “roles.” But let us note how in the passages we are investigating certain gender expectations continue to prevail: men speak to men (1:35–46; 12:20–22; 20:25) and women to women (11:28). The speakers are either kin (Andrew and Simon are brothers, Martha and Mary are sisters) or members of the same village (“Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter,” 1:44) or fictive kin (the ten and Thomas, whom Jesus calls “my brothers” in 20:17). This suggests that the informal network we are observing reflects village social dynamics, as well as customary gender expectations, and occurs fully within the conventions for kinship-related persons. Again, the dominant institution is the “private” world of the household, where valuable information is shared, not the “public” world, where unrelated males contest with each other for prestige and honor.

These observations pertain to John 4 as well, but with some variation. The woman spreads the “gossip” about Jesus. She went to but one place, her village. Once she has spread the news, her place in the network vanishes. At first the Samaritans believe “because of the word of the woman” (4:39), but as the circle of disciples grows they believe “because of his word” (4:41). After Jesus stays with them, moreover, they remark to her: “It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world” (4:42). Like the male figures illustrative of this pattern, she too ceases to play a part once the “gossip” about the Messiah is delivered.

We should look more closely at 4:39–42. I have maintained that Jesus and his disciples gathered others into fictive-kinship relationships. We should, then, consider 4:39–42 in terms of a new circle of Jesus’ disciples, even a fictive-kinship group. “Many Samaritans,” we are told, “believed in him” (4:39), and so joined the woman in the immediate circle around Jesus. When the text says “they asked him to stay with them” (4:40), we should understand “stay” as a characteristic Johannine term indicating close affiliation with and loyalty to Jesus, namely, membership in his circle (1:28–29; 5:28; 8:31; 12:46; 15:4–7). Then “many more believed” and joined the group (4:41). This gathering, then, is not a “public” group in a “public” forum; it is a fictive-kinship group and so must be considered “private.”

Thus the woman is really engaged in “private” speech to newly related males in the emerging kinship group (4:39). If the appropriate scenario is one of kinship, then the woman brings her non-related male associates into a new social relationship which is not “public” at all but the “private” world of the fictive-kinship group. In that context, nothing is “wrong with this picture.”

Conclusions

Of what might the Samaritan woman be a “representative”? Looking at 4:6–26, we argue that the narrator has concentrated in this one figure many of the characteristics of the marginal persons with whom Jesus regularly deals in the Synoptic Gospels. She is an amalgam of cultural deviance. In terms of stereotypes, she is a *non-Judean*, who is ritually *unclean*; she is a “*sinner*,” a publicly recognized “*shameless*” person, even someone with whom Jesus has *commensality*. As a *shameless* woman, she embodies most of the social liabilities which would marginalize her in her society. At a minimum, she represents the gospel axiom that “least is greatest” or “last is first.” Ultimately, she represents the inclusivity of the Christian group in a most radical way. The stereotype of gender expectations serves to portray her precisely as the quintessential deviant, the last and least person who would be expected to find favor with God. Her status transformation in 4:6–26 is basically that of a person moving from “*not in the know*” and from challenging attacks on Jesus’ knowledge to bringing the news about Jesus to her village. She began as an outsider, but in the story becomes an insider.

Does it matter if we note “what’s wrong with this picture”? Throughout the story, she violates the cultural expectations of her society. But this intentionally and continually casts her in a deviant role as the most unlikely person on the cultural horizon to be welcomed into Jesus’ kinship network. The initial violations of gender expectations (4:6–17) as well as the later ones (4:27–30) consistently stereotype the Samaritan woman as deviant, but this deviance does not matter to the narrator, which is the rhetorical point of the story. The Gospel goes to unlikely people; it might even be spread in the gossip network by unlikely persons

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(see Acts 4:13; John 4:36–38). As we note “what’s wrong with this picture?” the Samaritan woman becomes that much stranger and that much more unlikely a candidate for inclusion. Then how much more extraordinary she is as an example of God’s inclusivity and Jesus’ reform of social conventions!

“What’s wrong with this picture?” Gender stereotypes, then, initially work in the narrative to label the Samaritan woman as the ultimate outsider: non-Judean, unclean, sinner, shameless. The author, then, has created a stereotype of the ultimate *outsider* and the quintessential *deviant*, only to have the stereotype broken, but basically in the direction of the inclusivity of *outsiders* and *deviants*.

Looking at 4:27–30 and 39–42, however, we are told more about this woman. Here she functions as a mediating figure in spreading the news about Jesus to the Samaritans. Although Mary Magdalene may accurately be said to have a formal role as the bearer of a sacred formula to specifically designated persons, we have seen that her role still conforms to the gender expectations of that culture and occurs within the “private” world of the kinship group. The Samaritan woman may occupy a structural place in a “gossip network,” but this entails no formal role. Even if on one occasion she speaks to non-kinship-related males, we should not conclude that this is a new pattern, for it is not confirmed by the gender dynamics between characters in the “gossip network,” i.e., Martha and Mary (11:28) or the Ten and Thomas (20:24–25).

Do gender considerations play a part in how we understand the Samaritan woman vis-à-vis her townsfolk? As we have seen, gender considerations must be nuanced in terms of “public” and “private” worlds. What is appropriate in one sphere is not in the other. At the beginning of the story, the woman is clearly in the “public” sphere and relates to Jesus in a fashion that tells us much is “wrong with this picture.” But as Jesus leads her into his “private” world, her behavior becomes less challenging and more typical of the “private” world. Thus less and less is perceived as “wrong with this picture.” Not only is the individual transformation of the woman narrated, but the nature of the social relationships between her and Jesus is also changed. As the woman is welcomed into Jesus’ “private” world, she sheds her “public” sauciness and brings good news about Jesus to her village. She then begins to model behavior appropriate to the “private” world of Jesus’ fictive-kinship circle, and so she represents much that is “right with this picture.” But “wrong” and “right” are contingent on whether the space is “public” or “private.” Thus gender considerations remain important throughout.⁷

SUMMARY: THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

It is not possible to summarize adequately the inexhaustible richness of this scene but the following ideas are at least available to the reader:

1. *Christology*. Jesus appears as a thirsty man, a rabbi, a prophet, the Messiah, the “I AM” and the Savior of the world.
2. *Women*. The new movement, centered on Jesus, elevates the position of all women. Jesus talks directly to the Samaritan woman and chooses her as an appropriate audience for profound expositions of the nature of God and the nature of true worship. She becomes an evangelist to her own community and foreshadows the women who witness to the men regarding the resurrection.
3. *Incarnation and mission*. Jesus “empties himself” to the extent that he needs the help of an immoral foreign woman. In requesting her assistance he models incarnational mission for all his followers.
4. *Revelation*. As in the case of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the focus of revelation is a person, not a book.
5. *The gender barrier*. The social “separation wall” between men and women is destroyed.
6. *Worship and the temple*. True worship, “in spirit and in truth,” needs no particular geography. Neither Jerusalem nor Mt. Gerizim are relevant to it. Jesus de-Zionizes the tradition and declares the temple in Jerusalem to be obsolete.
7. *Theology*. The nature of God as Spirit is revealed to the community through this woman.
8. *A focus of mission*. Jesus accepts, cares for, takes seriously, challenges, recruits and inspires a simple Samaritan woman with a life-changing message centered in himself. A rich harvest results from this unique “sowing.”
9. *The community around Jesus*. A Samaritan woman and her community are sought out and welcomed by Jesus. In the process, ancient racial, theological and historical barriers are breached. His message and his community are for all.
10. *The water of life*. Those who accept this water are called to share it with others.
11. *Religion and escape from God*. The woman tries to use “religion” as a means of escape from Jesus’ pressing concern about her self-destructive lifestyle.
12. *Prophet and priest*. The voice of the prophet is incomplete without the complementary priestly ministry of true worship.
13. *Salvation*. God’s acts in history to save “through the Jews” are a scandal of particularity that proves to be a blessing for the Samaritan woman.
14. *Christian self-understanding*. Four important aspects of Christian self-understanding appear in this story. These are (1) the confession of Jesus as the Savior of the world, (2) the obsolescence of the temple, (3) the incorporation of non-Jews into the people of God, and (4) the deabsolutizing of the law.

⁷ Neyrey, J. H. (2009). *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective* (pp. 155–171). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

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15. *Food and drink.* Two kinds of drink (one passing and the other permanently sustaining) and two types of food (physical sustenance and spiritual fulfillment) are prominently featured in the story.⁸

Lesson 2—Responsibility to our Generation

If you will “confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). Many have come to that beginning point of salvation, but some who have *believed* have not begun to *follow* him as Lord, nor to know the delight and duty of *discipleship*.

A disciple is a believer who has become an ongoing follower of the Lord Jesus and of His methods and means of disciple-making. Notice the progression: believer, follower, disciple. Can you locate yourself in one of these three categories?

When you acknowledge where you are, ask for God’s help in becoming all that He has in mind for you as a devoted disciple.

KINGDOM EXTRA

There are just two groups of people in this world: those who have heard the gospel and those who have not. If those who have heard (and believed) refuse to tell those who have not heard, God will render to each according “to his deeds.” Sobering! While people often debate about those who have died without hearing the gospel, Proverbs 24:11 and 12 reveals the soul-stirring importance of seeking those who are alive and have not heard! We cannot go back to the last generation, nor can we reach the next generation, but we can serve this one. The only generation God expects us to be vitally concerned about is our own!

What did the early disciples do to learn and demonstrate the “Master’s methods” in disciple-making? They chose the **right goals** (to seek disciples and not just decisions), the **right methods** (plow, plant, and harvest), and the **right lifestyles** (Spirit-gifted lives reaching out to edify and evangelize). For us as modern disciples to show responsible ministry toward our generation we must model the goals, methods, and lifestyles of the early disciples.

RIGHT GOALS

After worship, the Bible shows that two other primary goals of the church are to edify other believers and to evangelize.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. (Eph. 4:11–12)

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:18–20)

As we move further on in this study guide, we will see how edification and evangelization rub off on one another.

PROBING THE DEPTHS

In Luke 13:6–9 Jesus told a parable about a barren fig tree. The immediate application was to the nation of Israel, which had failed to produce spiritual fruit. However, we too can learn a lesson about goals and church programs from this parable.

It seems the fig tree had been planted, nurtured, and expected to produce fruit. Certain church programs, too, may have developed over many years, but close analysis reveals that after much work there is still little or no fruit. In many such cases, Jesus’ principle is to “cut it down” (v. 7). It is using up time and resources which could be invested with another program.

Yet the hired help urged the owner of the vineyard to wait, in order to “dig around it and fertilize it” for another year. Presumably he had been doing this all along, and his goal was to keep on doing whatever he had been doing. He was “program centered” rather than “goal centered.” The owner of the vineyard, however, was concerned with the fruit, the harvest. He had to make the decision whether to continue the program or to “cut it down” and replace it with something which showed more potential.

In thinking of evangelism to “our generation,” what programs in your church are bearing fruit and which ones are just “taking up space”?

Before you “cut it down,” do you need to examine if it has had the proper nurture that it needed to succeed?

Are your evangelistic goals measurable and reasonable?

RIGHT METHODS

⁸ Bailey, K. E. (2008). *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (pp. 215–216). IVP Academic.

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Plow. Some evangelistic efforts do not succeed because care has not been given to prepare the soil for the precious “seed” of the Word. Plowing breaks up the hard surface and helps expose rocks and obstacles which need to be removed before the seed is planted.

Plowing is hard work. It frequently has to be done early, before the heat of the sun is out for the day. It is not glamorous and doesn’t have much to show for itself.

What aspects of evangelism could be likened to plowing?

What aspects of your church’s ministry could be considered evangelistic preparation?

Plant. Jesus told of a “sower [who] went out to sow his seed.” The means of planting at that time was to dip one’s hand in a sack of seed and then “broadcast” it in a spreading motion. The seed fell wherever it landed and some grew and some did not. (See the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8.)

The Bible does not give us modern techniques for planting the gospel seed. Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.” We are free to use whatever modern means will glorify God and not detract from the message of the Cross.

List how many means of communication you can think of which might be useful in “planting the gospel seed.”

Why are some methods of planting more useful with certain age groups or certain cultures?

What means have you seen which detracted from the message or diluted its truth?

Harvest. God alone can guarantee a harvest. He alone can cause the seed we’ve planted to grow and then to ripen. “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6).

But He does not harvest the crop. He requires laborers to discern which fields are now ripe for harvesting, and then to go and “bear much fruit” (John 15:8).

BEHIND THE SCENES

In Jesus’ day there were three “fields”: Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans. Early on, only the Jews were the “field” (see Matt. 10:5, 6). Later, both the Gentiles and the Samaritans ripened and bore much fruit for the Kingdom.

RIGHT LIFESTYLES

For many, the most responsible action we can take toward our generation is what some have called “friendship evangelism.” This form of outreach takes us to people who perhaps would not be reached in any other way. It requires a sacrifice on our part, a giving, but isn’t that what the gospel is all about?

In our Lord’s ministry we find an example of “friendship evangelism” in John 4. Why would the Pharisees be concerned with Jesus’ ministry at this point in time? (John 4:1, 2)

Why would Jesus need to go through Samaria? (v. 4)

BEHIND THE SCENES

In the time of Jesus, Palestine west of the Jordan River was divided into the three provinces of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Because of their intermarriage with foreigners, the people of Samaria were shunned by orthodox Jews. Situated between Galilee and Judea, Samaria was the natural route for traveling between those two provinces. But the pure-blooded Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans (John 4:9). They would travel east, cross the Jordan River, and detour around Samaria.

What time of day did this incident take place, by Jewish reckoning? (John 4:6)

How would that help to explain where the disciples were? (v. 8)

How does the moral condition of the Samaritan woman explain why she might be coming to the well in the heat of the day? (v. 18)

This story reveals several lessons for responsible evangelism to our generation.

WE MUST CONTACT OTHERS SOCIALLY

Make no mistake. Separation from the things of the world is not optional for the Christian. It is mandatory. “Come out from among them and be separate from them, says the Lord” (2 Cor. 6:17).

From what are we specifically told to abstain?

1 Thess. 5:22

1 Pet. 2:11

What is the implied answer to Paul’s question on fellowship in Second Corinthians 6:14?

In thinking about our efforts in evangelism, many will come to the painful realization that we have a limited opportunity to witness because we have few non-Christian friends. Certainly, God’s intention is that we be insulated from the attitudes and activities of this world, but not isolated from them. However, for some, our commitment to service within the church has cut off our contact and fellowship with those outside the church. Our pool of non-Christian friends has dried up.

Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:15, “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.” Our lost friends are the ones who need our friendship and God’s forgiveness.

In Luke 5:30–32, why did the Pharisees complain against Jesus’ disciples?

Write out Jesus’ response to them (vv. 31–32):

Describe the physical appearance of the woman Jesus met at the well in John 4.

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Describe the emotional state of this woman (rejected by five husbands and living with a sixth without the commitment of marriage).

What did Jesus offer as a solution to her problem?

Does His solution have any relevance to the needy people in our world? If so, how does it become operational in our experiences?

WE MUST GO WHERE NON-CHRISTIANS ARE

The Cross must be raised in the marketplace as well as on the steeples of the churches. We cannot hope to get our entire communities into our churches to hear evangelistic sermons (as valid and proven as this method of evangelism is). But we can hope to get our churches (born again believers; devoted disciples) out into every area of our communities.

How did the mob in Thessalonica describe the evangelistic effectiveness of the early disciples? (Acts 17:6)

The disciples did not have evangelistic success by only inviting people to church with them. They did it by reaching out to people in non-Christian settings. Read the following scriptures and identify some of the various places Paul presented the gospel.

Acts 16:11–13

Acts 16:14–15

Acts 16:16–34

Acts 20:20

Peter and John said they couldn't restrain their desire to witness for the Lord Jesus: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard!" (Acts 4:20).

KINGDOM EXTRA

In the Bible we find four points of "friendship," or "lifestyle," evangelism.

1. *The Holy Spirit will prepare the harvest field for you.*
2. *The Holy Spirit will lead you.* Psalm 37:23 says, "The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord." And Paul taught that "it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).
3. *The Holy Spirit will empower and guide you.* An open door is often a spiritual, emotional, physical, or material need which you discern in someone.
4. *The Holy Spirit remains active in lives after your initial contact* (John 4:39–42).

Jesus went to a public gathering place and proceeded to establish an opportunity for presenting truth which transformed an entire town!

ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION BRIDGES

Jesus did not begin by telling the Samaritan woman she was a sinner and He alone could save her. Sometimes we let the pressure to witness build and then explode like a time bomb of scripture verses. He began with something she was obviously interested in and built a bridge for further communication. We have to win the right to be heard.

This is where friendship evangelism excels. We are not concerned just with presenting them with doctrine but in ministering to them as people, people with needs, feelings, and doubts. If they don't like us, it isn't very likely they will be interested in our message.

FAITH ALIVE

Romans 10:13 and 14 says, "For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

If you would experience the delight of life-style evangelism:

- Be available
- Be aware
- Be attentive

AROUSE CURIOSITY

We can arouse curiosity by what we do. The Samaritan woman was surprised that a Jew would talk to her. She was a woman in a patriarchal culture. He was a holy man, a Rabbi. Furthermore, the "Jews [had] no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9). Yet Jesus befriended her.

As Christians we are to be possessed by a deeper purpose in life. *Our attitudes* toward people are to be loving, considerate, kind, and long-suffering. *Our reactions* to circumstances are most telling when we demonstrate complete trust in the will of God. *Our actions* in the course of our daily duties may be the turning point in our contact with that non-Christian friend. An act of kindness, unselfish love, may be the key to someone's soul. We can draw people to Jesus by living on the outside the changed life that we have on the inside.

We can also arouse curiosity by what we say. The Lord tactfully and lovingly coaxed the Samaritan woman into asking a question. He baited the hook. To be effective "fishers of men" we must first learn to be skillful baiters of hooks.

FAITH ALIVE

Some have found simple questions to be helpful. Something like:

"Do you ever give much thought to spiritual things?"

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“Have you every thought of becoming a Christian?”

“If someone were to ask you, ‘What is a real Christian?’ what would you tell them?”

Learn to be alert to everyday experiences. Throw out a leading comment, and plan ahead for common remarks in everyday conversation. For example, someone may ask, “Why are you so happy?” Then you can share your spiritual experiences. Or you might respond to their frustrations by saying, “You know, I used to feel that way.” Or, “You know, I would feel that way if it were not for....”

Another way to arouse curiosity and draw people into a conversation of spiritual issues is to be alert to current events. Crime, economics, sickness, medical cures, and many other topics all have the potential of attracting spiritual interest.

DON'T GO TOO FAR

Despite the Samaritan woman's obvious interest and curiosity, Jesus didn't give her the whole story at once. The Holy Spirit must prepare the heart. We cannot create interest; only God can. If the person doesn't become interested immediately, we can leave the subject and come back at a later time to pick it up. Don't frighten the person off by coming on too strongly. A bird is scared from its perch by too rapid a movement.

DON'T CONDEMN

Our Lord allowed this woman's sin to condemn her by itself. We are to witness of His love and grace. It is the role of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin and to convince of righteousness. How many have been turned off by self-righteous condemning people?

FAITH ALIVE

A drunken and profane man sat beside an evangelist on a train and offered him a drink. The wise evangelist responded, “No thank you, but I can see that you are a gracious man.”

How would you have handled the situation? “No thank you, I don't drink, I'm a Christian.” If this were your response, you have condemned the person. You have implied that you are more holy than he is, when all of us are “sinners saved by grace.” You have also confused the gospel. The essence of Christianity is not whether you drink or don't drink. Temperance is a fruit of the spirit, not the root of it.

Win friends and influence them for Christ. Look for opportunities to live graciously in a non-Christian society. Don't let your good be spoken of as evil (Rom. 14:16). Look for opportunities to compliment rather than condemn.

STICK WITH THE MAIN ISSUE

Our Lord could have challenged her theology or her patriotism, but he did not allow her to sidetrack Him. He stuck with the main issue: her need for a personal relationship with God the Father (John 4:21).

What side issue did she seek to introduce into the discussion? (John 4:20)

What is more important, where one worships, or the attitude of the heart and mind?

PROBING THE DEPTHS

Within the context of the diverse, larger body of Christ, various viewpoints on doctrine, denominational emphases, and ministry styles bring confusion to the contemporary mission of the church. Because of this broad diversity, the Adversary cleverly and treacherously seeks to entrap us in an arrogant mind-set, which will misdirect the church from its central mission.

Use your commentaries, concordances, and other resources to help you probe the following questions:

How did Jesus discern divine direction? (Matt. 4:8–10)

How did Jesus alert the disciples to Satanic deception in the end-times? (Matt. 24:4, 5, 11–14)

How did Paul teach the church at Corinth about ministry misdirection? (2 Cor. 11:12–15)

How did Paul warn the church of being off course into futility and perverted logic in Romans 1:21 and 22?

How did Paul guide young believers in First Corinthians 15:33 and 34?

BRING PEOPLE TO CONFRONTATION WITH CHRIST

It is not enough to talk *about* Jesus or spiritual things. A listener must make a *personal decision* about Christ. Salvation is a gift. One either accepts it (on His conditions) or rejects it.

Sometimes we are hesitant to be so direct. We may be afraid because we fear it may bring our friendship to an end. Yet we see signs that say, “Friends don't let their friends drive drunk.” In a similar sense, “Real friends don't want their friends to miss heaven and end up in hell.”

PROBING THE DEPTHS

Proverbs 24:11–12, when presented with evangelistic fervor, points out one of the most awesome obligations for which we are to be accountable:

Deliver those who are drawn toward death, And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, “Surely we did not know this,” does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?

What is our responsibility?

How does verse 12 fix our accountability?

We can see in these scriptures our responsibility to “rescue the ignorant headed for destruction. God will not accept our excuses.”

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FAITH ALIVE

Perhaps these three points summarize responsible witnessing:

1. We shouldn't pressure a person to receive Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can bring a person to this commitment.
2. Let a person know in advance that your friendship does not depend upon his or her response to Christ.
3. But *do* invite the person to receive Him personally. "Does this make sense to you, Charlie? Would you like to receive Christ now?"

REAP THE RESULTS

These principles of evangelism worked for Jesus (John 4:39–42)! They will work for you too. But like all rules for success, they will not work unless you do. If you will cultivate the ground and plant the seed, you can expect to reap the resulting harvest for Christ. Evangelism is not optional. We are commanded to serve the Lord by reconciling sinful man with a holy and loving God. What are we doing about it?

Getting our own lives into alignment with our Lord, His character and purpose, is vital. Enthroning Jesus as Lord in our own lives is what finally determines which activities will get the energy bursts needed for us to reap evangelistic results.

In helping us to prioritize our lives and our lives' activities, how do you see Jesus' statement, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Luke 9:23)?

FAITH ALIVE

Below, write how you see yourself responding to the above verse in relation to ministry to our generation in the light of Proverbs 24:11 and 12.⁹

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

Scripture references: *John 4:6–42* See also pages 159–60.

Date:

----- ❖ -----
About A.D. 30

Name:

unknown

Main

contribution:

She believes in Jesus as the Messiah and introduced Him to her fellow villagers.

----- ❖ -----

THE WOMAN'S ROLE IN SCRIPTURE

The woman Jesus met by Jacob's well was a Samaritan. As noted on page 159, this alone condemned her in Jewish eyes and meant that no religious Jew would have any contact with her. It is no wonder then that the woman was amazed when Jesus spoke to her when she came to the well (see John 4:9).

In the conversation, Jesus' intimate knowledge of her life convinced the woman Jesus was a prophet. When Christ identified Himself as the promised Messiah the woman believed. She hurried back to her village and told everyone about Jesus, and the people came out to see Him for themselves. The Bible tells us that "many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, 'He told me all that I ever did' " (4:39). After listening to Jesus many more believed, telling the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world' " (4:42).

EXPLORING THE SAMARITAN WOMAN'S RELATIONSHIPS

Her relationship with her "husbands" (4:16–18). As the two talked, it became clear the woman was living an immoral life. As Jesus told her, "You have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband' " (4:18). Like many today this woman was so hungry for love and a relationship that she welcomed anyone who would have her—even though there was no commitment involved.

Her relationship with the villagers (4:5–7). The text tells us that the woman came to the well "about the sixth hour," or 9:00 A.M. She also came alone. This tells us much about the relationship this woman had with other villagers. Normally, early in the morning the women of a village went to the local well together. They carried their water jars balanced on their heads. The early morning walk to and from the well to get the day's water was prime time for visiting. The Samaritan woman's appearance alone at this late hour signified she was an outcast.

⁹ Hayford, J. W., Curtis, G., Anderson, R. W., Beeson, R., Howse, G., Marshall, B., & Starr, P. (1995). *Answering the Call to Evangelism: Spreading the Good News to Everyone* (pp. 26–39). Thomas Nelson.

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Samaria lay across the shortest route from Galilee to Judea. Many pious Jews took the long way around to avoid the despised Samaritans.

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Her relationship with Jesus (4:6–26). John carefully records the conversation and traces the process by which Jesus brought her to faith.

Jesus asked for a drink (4:6, 7). Jesus was thirsty, so the request was natural. At the same time it was a wise way to strike up a conversation. In asking for help, Jesus diffused any impression that He had a superior attitude and looked down on the woman.

The woman asked a question (4:9, 10). Given the antagonism that existed between Jews and Samaritans the question could have been predicted. The woman was surprised that Jesus would speak to her, much less display a willingness to drink from a cup handed to him by a Samaritan.

Jesus redirected her attention to the “gift of God” (4:10). The real answer to the woman’s question lay in the identity of the One who spoke to her. Jesus was the One who came bringing “living water.” “Living water” meant running water, such as that which comes from a flowing stream. Only “living water” could be used in the baths taken in Judaism to purify a person who was unclean. Christ had come with that gift of God that would purify believers from all sin.

Jesus explained His offer (4:13, 14). When the woman expressed confusion (4:11, 12) Jesus continued to speak symbolically. The person to whom Jesus gave His living water would never thirst, but have everlasting life. The water was a symbol of the Holy Spirit who would vitalize and give life to those whom Jesus had come to save.

The woman asked for “this water” (4:15). The woman still did not grasp what Jesus was saying. She continued to take His metaphor literally.

Jesus asked her to “call your husband” (4:16). Jesus had initially asked for water because He was thirsty and needed a drink. He now set out to make the woman aware of her need. When she said she had no husband, Jesus revealed that He was fully aware of her situation and her moral state. The woman was exposed as a sinner who was in desperate need of the eternal life Jesus offered.

The woman changed the subject (4:19–24). When the woman realized that Jesus was fully aware of her immorality, she changed the subject by asking a theological question. When feeling convicted, many people tend to follow the path chosen by the woman. She acknowledged Jesus as a prophet—and raised a theological question that was a bone of contention between Jews and Samaritans. If Jesus had been an ordinary rabbi, He might have been distracted by this question. Most Bible scholars like nothing more than to display their knowledge!

No one knows what Jesus wrote, yet the woman’s accusers slunk away one by one.

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Jesus dismissed her question as irrelevant. The time has come to worship God in spirit and in truth, and God is seeking such people to worship Him in that manner. The issue isn’t theology; it’s a personal relationship with God.

The woman still hesitated (4:25). We can read the woman’s next remark as another attempt to put off a decision. “ ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When He comes, He will tell us all things.’ ” That is, “I think I’d just as soon wait for the Messiah to come for explanations!”

Jesus identified Himself as the Messiah (4:26). Jesus now announced: “ ‘I who speak to you am He,’ ” and the woman believed. Christ had led her to see both herself and Him more clearly. She had been exposed as a sinner and had recognized Jesus as a prophet—one of God’s spokesmen. She had been gradually, wisely, led to that point where she truly did believe.

Her new relationship with the villagers (4:39–42). Something happened in this woman who had discovered and believed in Christ as the Messiah. She had been ashamed and uncertain, and she had isolated herself from her neighbors. Now she hurried back to tell them about Jesus who had “ ‘told me all that I ever did.’ ” They listened to her, saw the change in her, and some believed because of her testimony. Most of the villagers went out to see and hear Jesus for themselves. When Christ enters a life, the change He makes opens doors that once were closed.

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN: A CLOSE-UP

The Samaritan woman was immoral and her choices had cost her. The Samaritans, like the Jews, were a moral people who sought to honor God and keep the Old Testament Law. In such a community she found herself isolated from normal friendships; she was a lonely woman. When she met Jesus and He engaged her in conversation, she was less than open with Him. She perhaps purposely misunderstood what He was saying. When Jesus revealed that He knew her deepest secrets, she quickly tried to distract Him with a theological question. Later she intimated that she’d wait for the Messiah to appear before making any decisions. When Jesus identified Himself as the Savior of the world, all her defenses crumbled. She knew she was a sinner in need of salvation. The amazing news that God was actively seeking worshipers moved her deeply.

When the change wrought by faith came, it was complete. The woman whose guilt had led her to avoid others sought them out. The woman who had tried to hide her sins was open about them: “ ‘He told me all things that I ever did!’ ” (v. 29). Cleansed

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and transformed, she focused on Christ rather than on herself. The Samaritan woman became a vibrant and successful witness for Jesus Christ.

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN: AN EXAMPLE FOR TODAY

- Sometimes we would rather argue the fine points of theology or doctrine than surrender ourselves to Christ. Our inner thirsts and hungers will only be quenched when we allow Christ to fill us with His living water.
- The modern world detests sexual taboos and scoffs at them, calling them Victorian. People are bombarded with the message that anything goes between consenting adults, and increasingly “adults” is being translated as “past puberty”! Yet sin still creates an awareness of guilt, however we struggle to ignore it. There is no joy or satisfaction to be found in the practice of sin.
- The woman at the well discovered something in accepting Christ that she had long yearned for. Jesus gave her the unconditional acceptance and love that we all ache for. What the woman may have sought in promiscuous sex she found through faith in Jesus. And so can we today.¹⁰

4:4 The need **to go through Samaria** was not merely a geographical consideration, but a divine compulsion.

4:5 The exact location of **Sychar** is uncertain, but it likely was in the vicinity of Shechem. See Gen. 33:18, 19; Josh. 24:32.

4:6 By Jewish reckoning, **the sixth hour** was 12:00 noon; by Roman reckoning, it was 6:00 A.M. or 6:00 P.M.

4:9 John inserts an explanatory note about the hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans.

4:13 In him a fountain indicates “living water” (v. 10) as a great illustration of regeneration **into everlasting life**. Compare with 7:37-39.

4:20 This mountain refers to Mt. Gerizim, on which the Samaritans built a temple as a rival place of worship, since they were not welcome in the Jerusalem temple (see v. 21).

4:21 See section 2 of Truth-In-Action at the end of John.

4:21 What matters is not where one worships, but the attitude of heart and mind. True worship is not mere form and ceremony, but spiritual reality, which is in harmony with the nature of **God**, who **is Spirit**. Worship must also be **in truth**, that is, transparent, sincere, and according to biblical mandates.

WORD WEALTH

4:24 **truth**, *aletheia* (al-ay-thi-ah); Strong’s #225: Derived from negative, *a*, and *lanthano*, “to be hidden,” “to escape notice.” (Compare “latent,” “lethargy,” “lethal.”) *Aletheia* is the opposite of fictitious, feigned, or false. It denotes veracity, reality, sincerity, accuracy, integrity, truthfulness, dependability, and propriety.

4:27 The Jews considered it improper for a rabbi to speak to a woman in public.

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

4:34 **A Prayerful Quest for God Is the Pathway to Satisfaction**, PRAYER. When Jesus refused the food offered by His disciples and declared, “I have food to eat of which you do not know” (v. 32), He was not implying that physical hunger and thirst were sinful (He later made eating and drinking sacramental signs). But His spirit’s hunger had priority over physical appetites. He found satisfying food in deep communion with God and in doing His Father’s will. Applause and material acquisitions can feed vanity and nourish ambition, but they cannot sustain the spirit. A prayerful quest for God will lead to our finding our food, our spiritual strength and satisfaction in doing God’s will. And, like Jesus, we shall discover God’s will through daily communion with Him; and we shall receive a fresh, daily anointing to achieve it.¹¹

42. **Said** (ἔλεγον). The imperfect tense: said to the woman as they successively met her.

Saying (λαλιάν). Another word is designedly substituted for λόγον, *word* (vv. 39, 41). In ver. 39 λόγος, *word*, is used of the woman, from the Evangelist’s standpoint, as being a testimony to Christ. Here the Samaritans distinguish between the more authoritative and dignified *word* of Jesus, and the *talk* of the woman. Rev., *speaking*. Compare the kindred verb λαλέω, in vv. 26, 27; also 8:43; Matt. 26:73.

The Christ. The best texts omit.

¹⁰ Richards, S. P., & Richards, L. (1999). *Every woman in the Bible* (pp. 177–180). T. Nelson Publishers.

¹¹ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Jn 4:4–27). Thomas Nelson.

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The Saviour (ὁ σωτήρ). John uses the word only here and 1 John 4:14. See on *Jesus*, Matt. 1:21. It is significant that this conception of Christ should have been first expressed by Samaritan.

44. **For—in His own country** (γὰρ—ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ πατρίδι). *For* assigns the reason why Jesus went in to Galilee. By *His own country*, Judæa seems to be meant, though almost the same phrase, *His country*, * is used by the three Synoptists of *Nazareth* in Galilee. John's Gospel, however, deals with the Judæan rather than with the Galilean ministry of Jesus, and the phrase, *His own country*, is appropriate to Judæa as "the true home and fatherland of the prophets, the land which contained the city of Messiah's birth, the city associated with Him alike in ancient prophecy and in popular expectation." Hence, at Jerusalem, the people said, "Hath not the Scriptures said that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was" (7:42)? In vv. 1–3 it is stated that Jesus left Judæa because of a controversy excited by the Pharisees, whom John always marks as the leaders of the opposition to Jesus. Further, we are told that at Jerusalem, though many believed on His name, yet Jesus did not trust them (2:23, 24). According to this explanation, γὰρ, *for*, is used in its natural and most obvious sense as assigning the reason for Christ's departure into Galilee. The proverb is naturally suggested by the reference to Galilee, where Jesus had used it at Nazareth (see Matt. 13:57). The ὅτε οὖν, *when then* (*then* indicating logical sequence and not time) of ver. 45 follows naturally upon the citation of the proverb, signifying a correspondence between the character of His reception in Galilee and the motive of His going thither. Finally, if we understand by *His own country*, Nazareth, we are compelled to explain γὰρ, *for*, from ver. 46; Jesus went to Cana (north of Nazareth) without passing through His native place, for the reason mentioned. This seems forced and arbitrary.**

45. **Received** (ἔδέξαντο). See on 3:32.

46. **Jesus**. The best texts omit.

Cana (τὴν Κανᾶ). Note the article *the* Cana, and see on 2:1. The article defines the Cana previously referred to.¹²

Nicodemus in the Gospel of John

John is the only Gospel that mentions Nicodemus. Tenney identifies Nicodemus as "a secret disciple whose faith grew slowly" (Tenney, *EBC*, 186). Nicodemus' relationship with Jesus develops over three episodes:

- John 3:1–21: Nicodemus comes to Jesus during the night and learns about the necessity of new birth. He honors Jesus by calling him "Rabbi" and acknowledges that Jesus comes from God (John 3:2). Although some scholars suggest that Nicodemus visits Jesus at night (John 3:2) to avoid being seen with him, Borchert says that the imagery of darkness represents Nicodemus' unbelief or doubt (Borchert, *NAC*, 170). Nicodemus struggles to understand Jesus' explanation that he must be born again to enter the kingdom of God: "Birth for him apparently was limited to physical birth" (Borchert, *NAC*, 173).
- John 7:50–52: Nicodemus somewhat defends Jesus before the Pharisees at the Festival of Booths. When other Pharisees speak against Jesus and seek His arrest, Nicodemus argues that Jesus should receive a fair trial according to Jewish law. The text does not clarify his motives. Borchert suggests that, as a fair-minded member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus is urging just treatment for the accused (Borchert, *NAC*, 294). Tenney, while acknowledging that Nicodemus' question "was not an open declaration that he had faith in Jesus," allows more room for the possibility that Nicodemus sympathizes with Jesus: "Nicodemus may have felt that if he championed Jesus' cause unequivocally, he would lose his case; but if he raised a legitimate legal objection, he might prevent drastic action" (Tenney, *EBC*, 88).
- John 19:39–42: Nicodemus brings about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes to prepare Jesus' body for burial. The account identifies Joseph of Arimathea as a disciple of Jesus (John 19:38), but it offers no clear statement of Nicodemus' faith. However, the surprising amount of spice indicates that Nicodemus ultimately recognizes Jesus as king. Borchert says, "it was enough spice to bury a king royally. The Johannine Death Story thus makes clear that Jesus was a King" (Borchert, *NAC*, 281). Tenney says the extravagant quantity of spice shows not only Nicodemus' great wealth but also his appreciation of Jesus (Tenney, *EBC*, 186).

Nicodemus in Extrabiblical Sources

Talmud

Some have tried to identify Nicodemus of the Bible with Nicodemus ben Gorion of the Talmud. Nicodemus ben Gorion was a wealthy first-century member of the Sanhedrin who lost his status and fortune later in life. Some believe his losses were tied to his possible conversion to Christianity (Bauckham, "Nicodemus and the Gurion Family").

Gospel of Nicodemus

¹² Vincent, M. R. (1887). *Word studies in the New Testament* (Vol. 2, pp. 127–129). Charles Scribner's Sons.

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This fourth-century document includes a passion narrative beginning with Pilate and concluding with Christ's plunge into the depths of the earth. The first part of the passion narrative draws deeply from the canonical Gospels, but much of the remaining material amounts to little more than legends. No credible evidence exists for linking the biblical Nicodemus with this document (Izidorczyk, *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus*).

Selected Resources for Further Study

Bassler, Jouette. "Mixed Signals: Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 no. 4 (1989): 634–46.
Bauckham, Richard. "Nicodemus and the Gurion Family." *Journal of Theological Studies* 47 (1996): 1–37.
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Hakola, Raimo. "The Burden of Ambiguity: Nicodemus and the Social Identity of the Johannine Christians." *New Testament Studies* 5, no. 4 (2009): 438–55.
Izidorczyk, Zbigniew S. *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*. Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997.
Jansen, Gerald. "How Can a Man Be Born When He Is Old? Jacob-Israel in Genesis and the Gospel of John." *Encounter* 65, no. 4 (2004): 323–43.
Tenney, Merrill. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981.

KELLY ADAIR SEELY¹³

- I. Growing in our love for God
 1. First Love
 2. Desire to be in His Presence
 3. Worship and Adoration
 4. Desire to please Him (Get to)
 5. Love what He loves & hate what He hates
- II. Growing in our service to God
 1. What it's not: Asceticism; Holiness (Holiness = effect not a cause)
 2. What it is: Lordship
 1. Surrender 2. Usable 3. Active
- III. Growing in our commitment to the Body
 1. Birth of the Church Unity = One heart & soul
 2. Growing Church Family Code
 3. Need for Commitment
 1. The Body ≠ schism
 - Romans 12: 1-2; 3-8
 - 1 Corinthians 12:12-26
 2. Strength (Personal) (Church)
 - Proverbs 27:17
 - Philippians 1: 27-28; 2:1-2
 3. Causes Growth

¹³ Seely, K. A. (2016). [Nicodemus](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

Being Church
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1. Personal
 2. Church – Salvation/Disciples • Ministries
 3. Kingdom
 4. Need for Community “Church”
-

3.

1. 2.

Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25 Culture – Membership Material Membership Purpose:

1. Solidarity of Purpose
2. Solidarity of Precepts
3. Solidarity of Philosophy
4. Solidarity of Preparation

Core Values:

1. Value Uniqueness – Fosters Acceptance
2. Value Being Real – Fosters Safety
3. Value Being Relevant – Fosters Personal Growth
4. Value Creativity – Fosters New Outreach
5. Value Each and Every Person – Fosters Personal Ownership ~ Service

Choosing a Church

- a. Biblical
- b. Pastor called by God
- c. Culture