

session 3 study guide

a lifestyle of love

message

Are there people in your life whom you don't associate with? Maybe certain cliques at school that you avoid? Certain groups you try to steer clear of?

In Jesus' day, there were many groups that steered clear of each other, the most famous of which were the Jews and the Samaritans. These two groups' disgust of each other was deep-rooted and based on both religious and political differences. The religious beliefs of the Samaritans were very similar to those of the Jews, but with a handful of key differences—and it was these differences that led to each group's distrust and dislike of the other. The Jews' and Samaritans' feelings went so deep that many Jews believed they could become contaminated if they passed through Samaritan territory, and went to great lengths to travel outside of those lands.

This is why the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman told in John 4:39-42 is so shocking. Not only does Jesus travel through Samaria, but He also stops to talk to a Samaritan woman. It was almost unthinkable for a Jew to speak with a Samaritan, and definitely unheard of for a Jewish rabbi to speak to a woman—much less a *Samaritan* woman. Yet in this story, we find Jesus not only speaking to her but also asking to share a drink of water and caring for her spiritual relationship with God.

As you read the following passage, keep these questions in mind: (1) If you were the Samaritan woman and Jesus suddenly approached and began talking with you, what thoughts would be going through your mind? (2) What was the impact of Jesus' simple yet extraordinary conversation with the Samaritan woman?

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "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," the woman said, "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 the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

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

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 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."

"Sir," the woman said, "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. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

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

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

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said 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" (John 4:4-26,39-42).

dig

1. John 4:4 states, “Now he [Jesus] had to go through Samaria.” We previously mentioned how Jews frequently went out of their way to avoid going through Samaria, sometimes taking lengthy and difficult detours. Yet the text says that Jesus *had* to go through the land. Why?

2. From the text, what do you learn about the Samaritan woman?

3. John 4:6 states that the woman came to the well at the sixth hour—the hottest part of the day. Everyone else was home resting during this time. Based on what is known about her, why might the woman have chosen this time to come to the well?

4. What do you think Jesus means by “living water”?

5. What does the Samaritan woman think the living water is?

6. What do you suppose Jesus is trying to accomplish from the conversation about the woman’s husbands (see vv. 16-26)? What is the point of this conversation?

7. Look again at verses 25-26. What bold—but true—statement does Jesus make here?

8. Later verses in John 4 talk about how the Samaritan woman went back to the town and told the people about her encounter with Jesus. If it had been you at the well, how would you have responded?

9. Many Samaritans from that town came to believe in Jesus. What two other reasons are given for why others were led to Jesus (see vv. 39-42)?

apply

By observing how Jesus relates to this woman, we can see several important principles for sharing our faith with others.¹

meet people on their territory

The Samaritan woman wasn't going to come out to see Jesus, so He came to see her. We can't expect people to waltz into our churches and youth groups. Think of those people in your life who don't know Jesus. In what locations could you meet those people that would still be in their comfort zone? List them here.

find a common interest

Jesus immediately finds a common interest to share with the stranger: water! Despite their many differences, it is a topic to which they both can relate. Think again of those people in your life who don't know Jesus. In the space below, list their names, how you could meet them on their territory, and what a common interest might be.

Name	The Interaction	Common Interest
<i>Example: John</i>	<i>Going to a baseball game</i>	<i>Sports</i>
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arouse curiosity about the faith

Not everyone is going to be innately interested in hearing about Jesus. In the story, Jesus engaged the woman in conversation by moving from a common interest (water) to a spiritual element (living water). Think of the names you wrote down in the question above. What are specific ways through conversation and lifestyle you could create curiosity about Jesus in these relationships?

don't be condemning

John 4:16-21 is a wonderful example of Jesus leading someone to the truth. Notice that Jesus did not condemn the woman but rather cultivated the conversation by speaking truthfully about the circumstances of her own life. He pointed out her true needs without criticizing her.

1. If Jesus had condemned the woman, what would this have done to establishing the relationship?

2. How can you let people know you care for them even when you disapprove of their lifestyles?

present the truth of Jesus Christ

Jesus confronted the woman with the fact that He was the Messiah. She had no choice but to respond.

1. Have you ever sensed God providing an opportunity for you to share the good news of Christ with someone? How did you respond?

2. If so, what was the experience like? If not, what prevented you from doing so?

3. Think about some of the names you wrote down above. What are some of your fears or concerns about sharing the gospel with these people?

4. Read through the following passages. What promises from God are revealed in these verses in regard to facing our fears about sharing the good news with others?

Matthew 7:7-8: _____

Luke 21:10-15: _____

2 Corinthians 12:9-10: _____

Philippians 4:6-7,13: _____

5. Read Mark 8:4-15, the Parable of the Sower. What is the job of the sower in the story? How does this relate to sharing our faith with others?

reflect

1. What makes it difficult for you to share your faith?

2. What happens when witnessing turns into a condemnation of non-Christians?

3. What might make people curious about Christianity? What are elements in your life that might intrigue a non-Christian?

4. Think back to the names you wrote down of people who do not know Jesus. Are you willing to make a commitment to move forward in sharing your faith with these individuals? If so, what is one thing in the next week you could do to begin the conversation?

5. If not, what is holding you back?

meditation



Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

1 PETER 3:15-16

Note

1. I am grateful to Fritz Ridenour and his excellent book *Tell It Like It Is* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1968) for first introducing me to these principles in a different form.