

John 4:1 – 29

^{4:1} Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were), ³ he left Judea and went away again into Galilee. ⁴ But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans. ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, '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.'

¹¹ The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?' ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' ¹³ Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'

¹⁵ The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.' ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' ¹⁷ The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!'

¹⁹ The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' ²¹ Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'

²⁵ The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' ²⁶ Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.' ²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?'

²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?'

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Wells:* There were two wells this woman could have gone to. One well was in Sychar itself, and was closer. The village women would have gone to this well in the morning when it was cool. The other well was Jacob's well, outside the town, near a caravan route, which is the one this woman goes to.
- *Wells as Romantic:* In the Old Testament, romantic encounters happened near wells: Adam and Eve, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah.
- *Men and Women:* Normally, an upright man would not talk to an unknown woman.
- *Jews and Samaritans:* Samaritans were descended from Assyrians intermarrying with Jews during the Assyrian captivity starting 721 B.C. They did not believe in any biblical book after Deuteronomy, resisted the line of kings who were descendants of David, and worshiped on Mount Gerizim, not on Jerusalem.
- *Multiple Marriages:* Under Greek cultural influence, men had the power of divorce.

Notes on Leading the Passage

Moments in Group Study of the Passage	What or Why
<p>1. State the background notes to the group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Jews and Samaritans dislike each other for ethnic and religious reasons. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The ethnic difference: In 721 BC, Assyria invaded Northern Israel and intermarried, resulting in the Samaritan people. The Jews to the south regarded the Samaritans with disdain. ii. The religious difference: Samaritans did not recognize anything after Deuteronomy and did not recognize the Jerusalem Temple as the place to meet God. b. The sixth hour is high noon. Hours were counted from the morning. c. Men and women. Upright men did not speak to unknown women openly in public. This was forbidden. (Mack Stiles, <i>Speaking of Jesus</i>, p.111) d. There were <i>two</i> wells the Samaritan woman could have gone to. One was in the village, closer to her. The other was outside of her village, on a caravan route. The Samaritan woman goes out farther to a more trafficked place. (Mack Stiles, <i>Speaking of Jesus</i>, p.111) e. The well has romantic connotations. It was culturally symbolic. In the Old Testament, men and women met by wells. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Adam and Eve were united in marriage by a supernatural river in Eden ii. Abraham sends his servant Eleazar to find a bride for his son Isaac. Eleazar meets Rebekah by a well, and asks her, ‘Give me a drink.’ iii. Rebekah and Isaac met by a well, Beer-la-hai-roi, literally <i>well of living water</i>. iv. Jacob met Rachel by a well v. Moses met Zipporah by a well vi. Jesus is sitting “upon” the well. The Greek word used is “epi” and not “para,” so there is no ambiguity. 	<p>People should have all the background information they need to come to the conclusions themselves.</p>
<p>2. Get the Juices Flowing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Then say, “Let’s take a few minutes to read it on our own for a few minutes. Circle words or interactions that you don’t understand. Try to get into how the woman perceives Jesus at different points. What keeps her in the conversation? Then after a few minutes, we’ll break up into pairs and share our questions and observations.” b. Break up into pairs and discuss what you see. Do this for 5 – 10 minutes. c. Bring people back together. Ask, “So – first let’s deal with all the questions – anything confusing or unclear – we had about this passage.” Let people state their questions. Say, “We’ll try to hit all of those questions in the course of our discussion.” 	<p>Remind people how to do manuscript study</p> <p>Breaking up in pairs is helpful for quiet people to start talking</p>
<p>3. Let the Group Process the Passage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. You want to start viewing Jesus from the woman’s perspective. Try to work with something the students have questions about. Some good possibilities to start with are: In what ways might the woman think Jesus is picking up on her at first? If they don’t raise this as a question, say, “It sounds like this woman goes to the most popular bar in town. Jesus goes there too and asks her if she wants to buy him a drink. What do you think of that?” b. Try to work with the question of why this woman stays in the conversation with Jesus. Don’t try to answer questions about what Jesus means. Be open at this point to various interpretations of what Jesus is saying, because the woman herself may not be sure what exactly Jesus is saying. 	<p>Start as open-ended as possible. Avoid ‘yes/no’ questions</p> <p>Sometimes you need to translate the terms and phrases into contemporary language.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. For example, ask, “So what might this woman think about the fact that this Jewish man was striking up a conversation with her?” ii. What kind of “dealings” does this woman think Jesus wants with her? iii. What if we rephrased Jesus’ response in v.10 as, “If you knew a gift of God when he’s standing right in front of you, you would have asked him to give you something to drink,” what would that sound like? Double entendre? Again, don’t try to explain or defend Jesus, even if students think he’s being sketchy. That’s part of the intrigue of the passage. iv. Ask, “When Jesus talks about living water, what might the woman think about?” Possible answers: moving water like in a bubbling stream running right next to her house; a new well; a great experience, i.e. a double entendre implying something about wealth, provision v. Whatever this woman thinks, she starts to flatter Jesus. In v.11 she says, “Sir.” She might be teasing him by asking, “Yeah right, what can you draw with? The well is deep.” vi. Why does she ask Jesus if he is greater than “our father Jacob” in v.12? Why make reference to “his sons and his cattle”? Answer: She’s asking if Jesus has got the wealth and manpower to dig a new well. It takes resources to do that. She’s essentially asking him, “So, how big is your bank account??? Are you a rich guy that wants to hook up???” vii. So the woman in v.15 that she wants the ‘living water.’ All the way up to this point, she might think that Jesus is talking about something else. 	<p>Don’t try to defend Jesus, especially in the beginning.</p> <p>Translate terms and phrases to contemporary language</p>
<p>4. Draw lessons from the key section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Jesus says in v.16, ‘Go call your husband and come back.’ Why does he do this? Answers: because it’s etiquette? Because it’s his way of finding out how committed she is to the guy she’s with? Because it’s his way of getting into the deeper patterns in her life. She was probably rejected by some of the five husbands (possibly widowed). Now she thirsts for what she feels like she doesn’t have. b. She says in v.17, “I have no husband.” That can be read on the surface as a statement of fact. Or, it can be read with suggestiveness, as if she meant: “I’m available to you.” I think with the woman going to the more trafficked well to be seen, given her somewhat loose relations with men, it’s the latter. c. Jesus calls her out in v.17b and 18. He knows about her!!!! In fact, when he says, “The one you have now is not your husband,” he could also infer that she has, not just an unmarried man, but <i>someone else’s</i> husband: “The one you have now is not your husband!” d. Ask, “Why do you think Jesus does this to her?” Answer: Because he’s calling attention to her deeper thirst and deeper pattern. She lives in a cycle. Not just that she comes day after day to this well. But that she comes day after day to men. She is thirsting for love, for connection, for security, for an experience of the Eternal – ultimately, for God. e. CRUCIAL QUESTION FOR THE AUDIENCE: Ask, “What kinds of cycles do you find yourself in? Or what cycles do you see ourselves as people running around in?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Allow for time to reflect and be somewhat honest (obviously, people aren’t going to bare their souls here) ii. Be prepared to share your own story, in some way, in advance. 	<p>It’s okay to suggest a few different options on how to interpret details of the passage.</p> <p>This is where the discussion might slow down, depending on how much trust people have for each other.</p>

<p>Doesn't have to be lurid and detailed. Could just be, "I sought fame time and time again..."</p> <p>iii. This is the point at which the audience's story is interpreted by the biblical story. This is the point of identification and revelation.</p>	<p>That's ok. Don't panic.</p>
<p>5. Looking towards Jesus for resolution</p> <p>a. Ask, "What do you think is going on in v.19? What's with this Gerizim or Jerusalem thing?" Let people discuss. Two possibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. She's changing the subject because she's uncomfortable that Jesus knows all this stuff about her. Kind of like asking, "What's your take on freewill and predestination?" ii. She's asking, "Okay – I recognize that I need God. Where do I find him? Which mountain?" I prefer this interpretation because Jesus honors her question and takes it seriously in the following verses. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notice the poignancy of her alternatives. If she needs to go to Gerizim to find God, then everyone will recognize her, laugh at her, perhaps throw a few stones. If she needs to go to Jerusalem, she'll be scorned as a Samaritan and perhaps thrown out. 2. Don't let the audience get hung up on the Gerizim and Jerusalem debate and Jesus' explanation of it. The main point Jesus is making is, "Actually, neither. You don't have to go anywhere. Before this, you would have had to go to Jerusalem (we worship what we know) and not Gerizim (you worship what you do not know) – so the two places are not identical. But now that I'm here, you can just worship in my Spirit and in my truth." This answer is merciful, because now the woman doesn't have to go to either place. 3. Tie to living water and eternal life: The Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit Jesus gives, comes to live in us and be a source of life to us. This is what Jesus offers. This is GREAT NEWS!!! This is the way out of our cycles of brokenness!!! 4. Jesus is being portrayed as the new temple, in human flesh. That is because Jesus is sitting "upon" the well. The imagery of the Jerusalem temple was that life, symbolized by water, flows out from it (e.g. Ezk.47). Jesus is invoking the symbolism, by saying that he sits atop of the water, the life. That reinforces a major theme in John's Gospel, but also what Jesus wanted to tell the Samaritan woman. <p>b. Start to wrap up. Say, "So the woman says that she and others expect the Messiah (a Jewish deliverance figure) to come and explain all things and renew people's relationship with God. Jesus says that he is that One. Wow!! I'll bet she's really surprised. Here he is standing right in front of her."</p>	<p>It's okay to suggest a few different options on how to interpret details of the passage.</p> <p>Keep the focus on the personal ramifications</p> <p>You want to avoid long periods of pondering questions that are obvious or answered by the text. At times, you need to state points yourself.</p>
<p>6. Gather people's opinion about Jesus. For example, you can ask, "By v.30, what do you think about how Jesus interacts with this woman from start to finish?" But leave it open-ended, too. Ask, "What is attractive and challenging to you about Jesus in this interaction?" And, "How might Jesus be relevant to those cycles of thirst that we talked about?"</p>	<p>Allow for multiple opinions and responses to Jesus.</p>

