

Jesus Talks with a Samaritan

Devotional Reading: [Isaiah 44:1–8](#)

Background Scripture: [John 4:1–42](#)

John 4:7–15, 28–30, 39–41

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” **8** (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9 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.)

10 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.”

11 “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? **12** Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

13 Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, **14** but whoever drinks 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.”

15 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.”

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

Key Text

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.”

—John 4:39

Jesus Calls Us

Unit 1: Called From the Margins of Society

Lessons 1-4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the barriers that Jesus ignored when talking with the Samaritan woman.
2. Explain the significance of Jesus’ discussion with the woman in

light of the prevailing cultural, political, and religious taboos he ignored.

3. Identify elements of Jesus' approach to evangelism that he or she will use.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

A. The "Wrong" Neighborhood

B. Lesson Context

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B. Spiritual Bounty (vv. 10–15)

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II. The Promised One (John 4:28–30, 39–41)

A. Question of Identity (vv. 28–30)

"Come and See"

B. Revelation of Identity (vv. 39–41)

Conclusion

A. Every Neighborhood

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Askar *Haz-kar.*

Ebal *Ee-bull.*

Gerizim *Gair-ih-zeem*

or *Guh-rye-zim.*

Hyrcanus	Hehr- <i>cayn</i> -uhs.
Manasseh	Muh- <i>nass</i> -uh.
Pentateuch	<i>Pen</i> -ta-teuk.
Samaria	Suh- <i>mare</i> -ee-uh.
Sychar	<i>Sigh</i> -kar.
syncretistic	sihng- <i>creh-tis</i> -tihk.

Introduction

A. The “Wrong” Neighborhood

As a small child, I lived in a mobile home park characterized by ethnic diversity and lower-income families. When I learned that my friends who lived across the street from the mobile home park were not allowed to come over and play with me, I was hurt and embarrassed. Apparently I lived in the “wrong” neighborhood.

Yet I remember ministers, Sunday school teachers, and youth ministers. They would take me to church services, out to eat, to baseball games, and even to a rodeo! I do not know where I would be today if they hadn’t disregarded social barriers in order to invest time in a kid like me.

Today I’m humbled at the opportunity to spread the gospel to other communities and individuals who might otherwise be barred from meeting Jesus. In today’s text Jesus himself modeled breaking barriers in ministry. What would be the impact of reaching into the “wrong” neighborhood?

B. Lesson Context

The Gospel of John was written later than those of Matthew, Mark,

and Luke, probably in the AD 80s or 90s. The Apostle John likely wrote his Gospel from Ephesus, according to long-held church tradition. John's authorship is established primarily by his identification as the beloved disciple ([John 13:23](#); [19:26](#); [20:2](#); [21:7, 20, 24](#); see [lessons 7](#) and [8](#)).

As our text in [John 4](#) begins, Jesus and his disciples had left Judea and were heading to Galilee ([John 4:3](#)), where he made the headquarters of his ministry ([Matthew 4:13–16](#)). For this journey, Jesus chose not to take one of two longer routes that would allow him to avoid Samaria ([John 4:4](#)), as some other Jews would do (compare and contrast [Luke 9:51–53](#); [17:11](#)). Samaria was the central region of what had been the kingdom of Israel, with Judea to the south and Galilee to the north. Travel between Jerusalem and the region of Galilee would take about three days on the reliable Roman roads that ran through Samaria.

I. The Stranger ([John 4:7–15](#))

A. Physical Need (vv. [7–9](#))

7. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?”

At the sixth hour (noon), Jesus came to this well that was known to have belonged to Jacob ([John 4:5–6](#), not in our printed text; see commentary on [4:12](#), below). It was uncommon for anyone to be at the well at that hour, as the day was at its hottest. From ancient times, women journeyed *to draw water* as a group in the morning or the evening (example: [Genesis 24:11](#); contrast [29:7](#)). A *Samaritan woman* came alone, likely indicating she was outcast from her community, especially from other women (consider [John 4:16–18](#), not in our printed text). *Will you*

give me a drink does not seem an unusual request at a well. But [John 4:9](#) (below) reveals several levels on which this was a very surprising request.

8. (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

Jesus and *his disciples* sometimes carried funds to buy what they needed along the way (example: [John 13:29](#)), though other times they depended on other means for their sustenance (examples: [Matthew 10:9](#); [Mark 6:8](#); [Luke 10:4](#)). This journey took them through Samaria, specifically *the town* Sychar ([John 4:5](#), not in our printed text; see commentary on [4:28](#), below). Ancient Jewish tradition suggests that the disciples would have been careful about ritual purity and social boundaries when procuring *food* from Samaritans. Ordinarily they would not accept food as a gift from Samaritans, but allowed for the need to buy from Samaritans.

9a. The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?”

The reasons Jesus’ request was surprising are given here (see commentary on [John 4:7](#), above). One was a gender issue. Women were often viewed as “less than” by men in the ancient Roman world. For a Jewish man, this would be especially true for any non-Jewish woman. Samaritan women were doubly stigmatized because of the animosity between Judah and Samaria. (On the barriers between Jews and Samaritans, see commentary on [4:9b](#), below.)

Within this conversation, *the Samaritan woman* would be amazed that Jesus knew about her several marriages *and* the man she was living with at the time ([John 4:16–19](#), not in our printed text). Both Jews and other Samaritans would consider this pattern suspicious, if not downright sinful. We do not know why she’d been married so many times. But the implication of living with a man she had not married suggests

there were less than pure reasons for the ending of the other relationships.

9b. (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

The antagonism between *Jews* and *Samaritans* dated back over 700 years, to the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel. The 10 tribes of Israel living there were taken captive in 722 BC, including the people living in the region called Samaria ([2 Kings 17:1–6](#)). The Assyrians habitually moved conquered people around the empire, so some Israelites remained while many foreign people settled in the land. When Israelites mingled with foreign peoples, the result was a syncretistic religion in which the Lord was worshipped in addition to other gods ([17:24–33](#), [41](#)).

All this religious turmoil resulted in a Samaritan religion that revered only the books of Moses (the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch). Samaritans excluded any history, poetry, or prophecy that was written later. The Samaritans believed that God should be worshipped on Mount Gerizim (see [Deuteronomy 11:29](#); [27:12](#)), *not* in Jerusalem. They also expected a Messiah like Moses, not David (see [John 4:29](#), below).

The Samaritans opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple and the city walls following the exiled Jews' three waves of return that began in 538 BC ([Ezra 4:8–24](#); [Nehemiah 4:1–2](#)). Later, the Jewish historian Josephus (AD 37–100) recorded that the Samaritans were not forced to devote their place of worship to Jupiter (as the Samaritans claimed), but instead willingly did so between 175 and 164 BC. Josephus's account likely reflects more about his bias than any voluntary Samaritan complicity. John Hyrcanus (174–104 BC) was the high priest and ruler in Judea who briefly achieved Jewish independence by throwing off Syria

and creating an alliance with Rome. In his leadership of the Jewish people, Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan place of worship on Mount Gerizim (112/111 BC). Josephus also notes that between AD 6 and 9, Samaritans attempted to defile the temple in Jerusalem during Passover by sneaking in and scattering dead men's bones on the temple grounds (compare [Leviticus 21:1, 11](#); [Numbers 5:2; 9:6–7; 19:13](#)).

Even with all this historic hostility (examples: [Hosea 7:1; 8:5–6](#)) continuing in Jesus' lifetime (example: [Luke 9:51–54](#)), he typically did not avoid Samaritans and even spoke well of them ([10:30–37; 17:11–19](#); contrast [Matthew 10:5](#)). This tendency is in keeping with Jesus' habit of associating himself with outcasts and sinners ([Mark 2:15–17; Luke 7:36–39](#)). And even more, Jesus never treated people as their stereotypes—in this case, a Samaritan and a woman. He saw the person before him and valued that person, no matter their circumstances.

What Do You Think?

What hurdles does your congregation face when reaching out to a community that might be mistrustful of your motives?

Digging Deeper

How can your congregation prepare to overcome these obstacles?

B. Spiritual Bounty (vv. 10–15)

10. 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.”

The gift of God refers to the Holy Spirit (compare [John 7:38–39](#)), consistent with other New Testament usage and nuance. Looking at Old

Testament uses of flowing water and other near synonyms offers useful insight. This is fresh, flowing water as opposed to bitter or salty water (Numbers 5:18–27; Jeremiah 23:15; James 3:11)—or no water at all. Spiritually and physically, God provides good water for his people to live (compare Numbers 24:7; Psalm 36:9; Isaiah 49:10; Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13; Ezekiel 47:12).

This Samaritan woman, however, had no knowledge of this gift in a spiritual sense or of Jesus’ true identity. Already in John’s Gospel, Jesus has been identified as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), “God’s Chosen One” (1:34), and “the Messiah ... the Christ” (1:41). But this knowledge was not widely accepted (1:9–11).

What Do You Think?

Are any of your prayers “small” compared to what Jesus offers you?

Digging Deeper

How do you balance “small” requests for “daily bread” with the “big” petition for God’s “kingdom [to] come” (Matthew 6:10–11)?

11a. “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with

The woman had not yet caught on that Jesus was speaking about spiritual truths rather than about physical realities. Jesus should need something *to draw with*, or else water would not come out of the well. One would take a bucket or jar and lower it down the well with a rope to access the water. She likely assumed Jesus had no way of drawing the water for himself, or else this Jewish man would not have spoken with the Samaritan woman.

11b–12. “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 livestock?”

The well itself had long been associated with *father Jacob*, who lived about 2,000 years prior to the encounter of today’s text. Jacob had bought the land of Shechem, eventually deeding it to his son Joseph ([Genesis 33:18–19](#); [48:22](#); [Joshua 24:32](#)), although no well was mentioned.

The Samaritans traced their lineage through Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. But because of the divergence of Israel’s ten tribes from the southern two, collectively known as Judah, the Jews thought of Samaritans as foreigners ([Luke 17:16–18](#)). This well can still be visited today. It is over 100 feet *deep* and was possibly even deeper in Jesus’ time. Even if Jesus had something with which to draw water, how could he possibly reach the *living water* at the bottom, which supplied the well?

Like the Jews, the Samaritans had great respect for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and the woman thought that Jesus could not be greater (see commentary on [John 4:29](#), below; compare [8:52–58](#)). This question presupposes a negative answer and might even be considered mocking. But based on her faith, the woman rightly questioned whether Jesus could be *greater than* the patriarchs.

13–14. Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks 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.”

Thirst is an apt metaphor for spiritual need. Just as any person or creature dies without the water they need, so too we die without the spiritual care we need. [Psalm 42:1–2](#) pictures the soul panting for God as a deer pants for water. Isaiah depicts one who would “draw water from the wells of salvation” ([Isaiah 12:3](#); compare [55:1](#); [58:11](#)). And Jesus states that

those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are blessed and will be filled ([Matthew 5:6](#); compare [John 6:35](#)). *Welling up* suggests especially vital properties in the living, spiritual *water* Jesus referred to. We could give a formula here: *eternal life* comes only as a gift of the Father through accepting the invitation of Jesus and the daily work of the Spirit.

Visual for [Lesson 3](#). Ask learners to reflect on their own desert experiences. What difference did Jesus' provision make for them?

Much More

My friend drove for a ride-share company, and many of his cus-

tomers requested rides to the nearest major airport, 70 miles away. His car was satisfactory, but he was looking for something more. A big part of his desired upgrade was a car that would lower his fuel costs. Still, his car was serviceable, so he waited for the opportune moment to make a purchase, knowing he'd also be taking on monthly car payments again.

Sitting at a red light, my friend was rear-ended, his car totaled. The “something more” suddenly became more necessity than mere desire. And my friend was delighted at how *much more* his new car gave him due to technological advances, especially in fuel efficiency. The downside—those pesky car payments.

What the world offers always has a downside. But with Jesus there are no downsides. The living water Jesus promised to the Samaritan woman was much more than she could have anticipated. What has been your experience of Jesus' *much more*?

—C. R. B.

15. 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.”

The woman's request demonstrated her confusion about Jesus' words. She was in search of literal, physical *water* to meet her immediate needs. But even with her misunderstanding, she admirably continued her inquiry and search for understanding.

The dialogue in [John 4:16–27](#) (not in our printed text) continued between Jesus and the woman. She rapidly progressed from considering Jesus to be a prophet to wondering if he might be someone even greater than that (see commentary on [4:29](#), below).

II. The Promised One

(John 4:28–30, 39–41)

A. Question of Identity (vv. 28–30)

28a. Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town

Leaving her water jar behind indicated that *the woman* left in a rush (see commentary on [John 4:30](#), below). *The town*, Sychar, sat in proximity to both Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal (see commentary on [4:9b](#), above). Its only mention by name occurs in [John 4:5](#) (not in our printed text). Though its location is unclear, there is reason to associate it with the modern village Askar. The village’s proximity to Jacob’s well—about one-half mile—as well as to both mountains lends credence to this supposition (see commentary on [4:11b–12](#), above). The name Sychar might also indicate a close relationship with Shechem, a better-known settlement in the same area. First mentioned as Abram entered Canaan ([Genesis 12:6–7](#)), the land became part of Ephraimite territory in northern Palestine ([Joshua 17:8–10](#)).

28b–29a. and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.

The woman’s invitation to *Come, see* is reminiscent of Jesus’ invitation when he called his first followers in [John 1:39](#). Describing Jesus’ knowing about her marriages and current living situation as having *told her everything* that she *ever did* reveals something about the culture this woman was living in. Her life’s summary (at least in her mind, and likely in the mind of her community as well) could be told in terms of the men she had associated with (see [John 4:16–18](#), not in our printed text). Instead of using this information to shame her, Jesus used it to further her understanding regarding his identity. He was at least a prophet

(4:19), and even more (see commentary on 4:29b, below).

In confirming Jesus' accurate and supernatural knowledge of her life story, the woman's testimony reveals that she was fully impressed by him. Given the culture, one would not expect a woman to go into town and address the public the way she did. Her reputation would seem to make her a bad witness—not someone who would be taken seriously (compare [Luke 7:36–50](#); see commentary on [John 4:30](#), below).

What Do You Think?

How willing are you to be interrupted by the opportunity to talk about Jesus?

Digging Deeper

How can you become more open to Spirit-led opportunities to share Christ?

“Come and See”

When my grandson Jesse was about 3 years old, we were walking from his house to the park nearby. Jesse ran ahead, then turned and ran back to me, shouting, “Grampa, come and see what I see! It’s a hot dog stand! I think we ought to get a hot dog!” With a level of enthusiasm I didn’t feel, I responded, “That’s a great idea, Jesse!”

With hot dogs in his near future, Jesse said, “Grampa, you’ve got a good know-er brain, but I’ve got a good think-er brain.” He was aware that my many years of life had given me more knowledge than he had, but he was proud of his ability to think of new ideas.

The Samaritan woman recognized that the man she had met was also a “know-er.” Her “think-er” brain led her to introduce Jesus to her

community. How often do you let it be known to your acquaintances that you think they need to meet Jesus? What holds you back?

—C. R. B.

29b. “Could this be the Messiah?”

The woman anticipated a positive response (contrast [John 4:12](#), above), partly based on Jesus’ own assertion that he is *the Messiah* ([4:25–26](#), not in our printed text). The Samaritan expectations of the Christ differed from Jewish expectations because of their adherence only to the first five books of the Old Testament (see [Lesson Context](#); commentary on [4:9b](#), above). Jesus fulfilled prophetic and kingly expectations, though not in the way either Samaritans or Jews had imagined (examples: [6:15](#), [41–42](#); [7:25–27](#), [52](#); [Acts 1:6](#)).

30. They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

One cannot help but notice the contrast between the disciples who went into the town to bring back food and this woman who brought *out* the people *of the town* to meet the Christ.

B. Revelation of Identity (vv. [39–41](#))

39. Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.”

In Jesus’ ministry, people living on the margins sometimes made the biggest influence on their communities (examples: [Matthew 9:9–13](#); [Luke 19:1–10](#)). This ostracized woman turned evangelist reached out to her community, which resulted in *many of the Samaritans from that town* believing that Jesus was the Christ (see commentary on [John 4:29](#), above). Significantly, her testimony was that Jesus *told me everything I*

ever did—a substantial claim when looking for a prophetic Christ.

40–41. 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.

Staying with *the Samaritans* was a significant break in Jewish custom (see commentary on [John 4:9b](#), above). As a result of Jesus’ time and preaching the gospel in Sychar (see commentary on [4:28a](#), above), *many more* believed. As the Samaritans encountered Jesus for themselves, they confessed that Jesus really is “the Savior of the world” ([4:42](#), not in our printed text).

One cannot help but ponder on how large the community of faith grew in Sychar. In [Acts 8:4–25](#), the gospel spread in the land of Samaria through the work of Philip the evangelist, the groundwork for that success undoubtedly prepared by events in today’s text.

What Do You Think?

How did others’ testimony influence your early love for Jesus?

Digging Deeper

How do you continue to seek intimacy with Jesus?

Conclusion

A. Every Neighborhood

Jesus’ earthly ministry did not include limits based on typical human barriers. His encounter with the Samaritan woman is a prime example. In Jesus’ presence, many of the boundaries that we have put up or that others have put up around us disappear ([Romans 3:22](#); [10:12](#); [Galatians](#)

3:28–29; Ephesians 2:11–22; contrast 5:11; 1 Timothy 4:7; 2 Timothy 3:1–5; Titus 3:10). As we find our identity in Jesus, we can become the conduit of mercy and grace to those we encounter. The living water Jesus gives us is available now and will continue to well up in us until we reach the age to come. The gift we find in Jesus is not a stagnant thing; it moves us from old to new, death to life, lost to found, enslaved to free; it means we are saved!

What Do You Think?

What encouragement can you find in today's passage?

Digging Deeper

What challenge do you find in the passage?

B. Prayer

Father, forgive us for the times when we have allowed barriers to prevent us from inviting others to see you. Help us to see those around us the way that you see them; help us demonstrate your love and holiness to them. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Take *every* opportunity to offer Jesus' living water.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum

supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Hand an index card to each learner. Ask learners to write down, without sharing, the name of a famous person who has lived during the past 100 years. Collect the cards, shuffle them, and hand them back out to learners. Divide the whole group into pairs. Direct one person in each pair to ask his or her partner 10 questions in order to identify the name on the partner's card. The partner must answer the questions with words and actions of the person on the card, without directly revealing the name. After 10 questions have been asked, names can be revealed. Then switch roles to reveal the name on the other card.

Gather the whole group back together to discuss: 1—How difficult was it to guess your partner's identity? 2—What questions yielded the best clues? 3—What questions do you wish you had asked? Lead into the Bible study by saying, "Sometimes we don't know what to ask because we don't know who we're talking to. In this week's lesson, notice how people respond to each other, based on what they know of each other."

Alternative. Divide learners into small groups. Distribute the "Satisfaction Guaranteed" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. After allowing a couple of minutes for groups to complete as directed, reveal the correct answers.

Into the Word

Write the heading *Jews vs. Samaritans* on the board. Share some of the lesson information regarding Jews and Samaritans. Based on your

presentation, have the class list different barriers and boundaries of the two groups.

Ask a volunteer to read [John 4:7–10](#). Divide the class into small groups. Give them time to discuss: 1—What barriers and boundaries did Jesus “break” while interacting with the Samaritan woman? 2—How did Jesus’ actions give hope to the woman?

Invite another volunteer to read [John 4:11–15](#). Allow the group to talk through how Jesus’ words satisfied the woman’s deep desires and needs.

Ask a third volunteer to read [John 4:28–30, 39–41](#). Invite groups to talk through: 1—How did Jesus approach telling the woman and his disciples who he was? 2—How did the woman share what she learned about Jesus?

Bring the groups back together. Give them time to identify ways Jesus approached evangelism in this story. List the ways on the board.

Into Life

Referring to the list from the previous exercise, ask, “What groups do not associate with each other today?” Write a few responses on the board. As a class, expand that list to barriers and groups that exist within your community. Invite small groups to review today’s text one more time and consider these questions: 1—What did Jesus do to connect with the woman? 2—Why did he do this? Have the group create a second list of how Jesus approached evangelism.

Divide the group into pairs. Distribute index cards and pens to each learner. Challenge learners to create a fusion of the lists by choosing one of the barriers or groups listed on the board and then, as pairs, choosing one aspect of Jesus’ evangelistic method from this story to apply to their

lives this week. (Example: Overcome a social barrier by asking for help.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Evangelistic Elements” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated. Not all answers need to be filled out. Encourage participants to finish the sheet at home during the week, to be discussed at the beginning of class next week.

Conclude by reading aloud [John 4:42](#) and having small groups pray that their witness would have this effect on others.