

REFLECTION GUIDE

JOHN 4:1-18 | THIRSTY NO MORE

KEY TERMS

Samaria - The region between Judea (where Jerusalem is located) and Galilee (where Nazareth and Capernaum are located). After Assyria conquered the area in the 700's BC, the remaining Israelites intermarried with Assyrians, leading to centuries of hostility between Jews and Samaritans, whom Jews viewed as impure.

Living water - In 1st century Israel, *living water* literally referred to flowing water from springs (which were rare in Israel), as opposed to standing water from wells. The term is also used metaphorically in the OT to refer to the abundant life only available in God (see Jer 2:13) and is foreshadowed as coming to God's people (Zech 14:8).

DID YOU KNOW?

Both Isaac and Jacob's marriages began at wells—birthing the nation of Israel (see Gen 24 and 29). Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan women leads to her serving as the first evangelist (John 4:39)—beginning the birth of the Church, the new Israel.

SYNOPSIS

After Jesus' ministry creates tension with John the Baptist's disciples (see John 3:26) and draws attention from the Pharisees (John 4:1), he leaves Judea and heads to Galilee (v. 3). In verse four, John interestingly says Jesus *had to* travel through Samaria and there's debate as to why John uses this word. The quickest route was through Samaria, so John may just be saying Jesus *had to* go this way. However, strict Jews—such as the Pharisees—purposely took a longer route in order to avoid Samaria. For John, this word *had to* (from the Greek word *dei*) often is associated with divine imperative and Jesus' mission. Therefore the emphasis seems to be on the divine nature of this encounter.

In Samaria, Jesus takes a break at Jacob's well—traditionally seen as a well dug by the patriarch Jacob—and at noon (*the sixth hour*) a woman comes to the well (vv. 6-7). The time of day and location of the well are significant because this was not the typical time of day for women to draw water, nor was this the closest well to the woman's home. These details along with the fact that she comes alone—also not typical—suggests that this woman was a societal outsider. Jesus asks the woman for a drink and initiates a conversation, breaking several cultural barriers (Jewish/Samaritan, male/female, religious/social outcast, vv. 7-9). In their conversation, Jesus suggests that in fact the woman should be asking him for water because he has *living water* and *whoever drinks Jesus' water will never be thirsty again* (vv. 10-15). It's common to cast this woman as an immoral woman who has bounced from husband to husband, but it's far more likely that her former husbands have died and/or divorced her. Whatever the exact situation, Jesus gently confronts her brokenness and offers her something better.

GOING DEEPER

Look back at John 3:1-7 and Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus. Compare and contrast Nicodemus with the woman at the well. How are they different? What do they have in common? With these two in mind—what *kinds* of people does Jesus offer himself to? What does Jesus offer them both that he offers to each of us?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read John 4:1-18. Make 5-7 quick observations. What seems important? What seems surprising?
2. Throughout the Gospel of John, we've seen a focus upon the fact that Jesus is *both* fully human *and* fully God. In this passage, what evidence do you see of his humanity? What evidence do you see of his divinity?
3. In this encounter, Jesus reached across lines of race, gender, religion, and moral standing. What does this show us about the gospel?
4. How does their conversation about "water" work on two different levels? How is Jesus using this image to make a deeper point about her life?

LIVING THE WORD

5. In our city, what are some common ways that people seek to quench their "thirst" and fulfill their lives? Where are we tempted to look for excitement, comfort, peace, security, joy, etc. to fill a void that God can fill better?
6. In this passage, Jesus pushed past surface talk to speak about the woman's relational history. Why is honesty about our desires and struggles necessary for us if we are going to experience a deep, meaningful spiritual life?
7. What does Jesus promise to all those who come to him? How do we receive the good thing that he offers? How do we know if we have it?