John 4:1-15

When Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard he was making and baptizing more disciples than John 2(though Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were), 3he left Judea and went again to Galilee. 4He had to travel through Samaria; 5so he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar near the property that Jacob had given his son Joseph. 6Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, worn out from his journey, sat down at the well. It was about noon.

7A woman of Samaria came to draw water.

“Give me a drink,” Jesus said to her, 8because his disciples had gone into town to buy food.

9“How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.

10Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would ask him, and he would give you living water.”

11“Sir,” said the woman, “you don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this ‘living water’? 12You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and livestock.”

13Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. 14But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.”

15“Sir,” the woman said to him, “give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and come here to draw water.”
EXPLAIN

Leaders: Feel free to use any of the “Explain” materials to guide discussion as it is needed or to expound on a certain area of the text as it comes up during your Life Group time, but the purpose of this section is to deepen your own personal understanding of the Word. Your members have access to all of this material as well.

In John 3, Jesus encountered a member of Israel’s religious elite, a man named Nicodemus. Now, He meets someone on the opposite end of the spectrum—a Samaritan woman living with questionable morals. It turns out that they both have the same problem: they are sinners desperately in need of a Savior to fulfill them the way the law—or in this case, multiple husbands—could not.

vv.1-3 The reason Jesus left the deeply religious region of Judea was because of His growing notoriety, which was surpassing even the most famous prophet of the day, John the Baptist. How, exactly, Jesus learned that the Pharisees were looking into His ministry, we don’t know, but His insight into human nature told him exactly what their response would be. He was perhaps trying to cut off any early opposition that would have slowed these early stages of His earthly ministry.

v.4 Jesus “had to go” through Samaria in two different senses. First, He had to go through Samaria because it was the only way to get back to Galilee from Judea. Second, He had to go through Samaria because He had a divine appointment with a woman at a well to get to.

vv.5-6 The exact location of Sychar has been disputed for years. It has been essentially narrowed down to two spots: the site of ancient Shechem (which has been excavated) or the modern village of Askar. They are both near the traditional site of Jacob’s Well. Jacob’s Well is not a thing described for us in Genesis, but tradition locates it near the foot of Mount Gerizim. In other words, this is a spot we can be reasonably sure we can still visit today.

Notice also how Jesus does nothing to minimize Jesus’ humanity in this passage (and elsewhere in this gospel: see 11:3, 11:33-35, 12:27, and 19:28). Jesus is someone who sympathizes with us and understands our physical needs. He never diminished the physical needs of the woman in the coming verses; rather, He uses them to demonstrate her desperate need for a Savior. David did a similar thing in Psalm 42:1—“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so I long for you, God.”

vv.7-9 Jesus’ request of the woman is interesting because of the historical hatred for Samaritans most Jews had. Since Jesus was asking her for water, we can assume she’d already drawn it—and had probably drunk from it already. When John points out that Jews have no dealings with Samaritans, he explains that, since Samaritans were considered by Jews to be in a continual state of uncleanness, most Jewish people believed drinking after them would make them ceremonially unclean. Jesus not only approaches this woman and speaks to her, but He asks to drink from her water jug.

v.10 Jesus’ answer to her question is not a direct answer, but is the initiation of a teaching moment. Like His encounter with Nicodemus in the previous chapter which centered around a misunderstanding of being “born again”, this encounter centers around a misunderstanding of Living Water (see Jeremiah 2:13, Zechariah 14:8). Jesus redirects all of the conversations back to who He is: the only source of Living Water that we can find. May we understand who Jesus is and ask, as the woman did (though with better understanding), “Give me this water always!”
APPLY

Your Leader Guide will have material that the participant guides do not have. The **bolded** material is what the people in your group will have, the other material is only for you to help guide discussion.

This guide can be as strict a script or as general a resource as the leader needs it to be.

Read the passage out loud as a group and answer some questions about it:

1. **What do you know about the author of this book?**
   **When was it written, and for what purpose?**
   **What makes this book different than the “synoptic” gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke?**

   Traditionally, this gospel is attributed to John the Apostle (not to be confused with John the Baptist). The author of this gospel does not name himself, but from the end of the book we see something that can help us narrow it down. We see that the “one who testifies to these things” and “wrote them down” (21:24) was “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (21:20). From 21:1-14, we know the author was one of the seven disciples who were fishing with Peter, and since he calls himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” we can assume that he was among the inner circle—Peter, James, and John—that accompanied Jesus at the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:51), the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1), and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33).

   Since the text distinguishes between Peter and this “disciple whom Jesus loved”, we can assume that Peter is not the author. Also, since James was martyred early in the history of the church (see Acts 12:2), he is likely not the author, either, since this gospel was written considerably later than the events of Acts 12. Therefore, though John does not name himself the author, most credible scholars do not find sufficient reason to doubt that John the Apostle is the author.

   John was written considerably later than the other gospels, and for an entirely different reason. The first three gospels were written to give orderly accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry, but John states his reason at the end of the book: “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). Since John is not a synoptic gospel, it is not trying to give a synopsis of Jesus’ ministry; rather, it is a theological treatise about the Messiah.

2. **What do you think the purpose of this passage is?**
   **What do you think John wanted his audience to take away from it?**
   **What verses make you think that?**

   By showing Jesus’ compassionate encounter with a Samaritan woman of questionable morals, John demonstrates that everybody—even those often overlooked by the religious elites—need His saving grace, and that He is the one who can satiate their thirsty souls.

   John’s original audience would have seen how compassionately Jesus treated outsiders who didn’t have accurate pictures of who God is and how He wants His people to worship Him. They also would have noted the parallels between Jesus’ words here and Jeremiah 2:13. Jesus called Himself the giver of living water, the very same living water the people of Israel craved thousands of years earlier.

3. **Notice the people and places that John mentions in this passage.**
   **What do you know about the places: Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Sycam, Jacob’s Well?**
   **What do you know about the people: Pharisees, John the Baptist, the unnamed woman?**
   **While you read about Jesus’ interaction with this woman, did anything strike you as interesting?**
   **Did you see anything new that you hadn't seen before?**

   The kingdom of Israel was not, at this time, united. It was split up between the northern part (Galilee, which included the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum, Cana, Nazareth, and the Sea of Galilee) and the
southern part (Judea, which included Jerusalem, Beersheba, Bethlehem, and Emmaus). Samaria was the area in between these two regions and was populated mostly by non-Jewish people, even if some of them held onto a cultural, non-practicing sort of Judaism. Sychar, in particular, was the historical site that had deep significance in Jacob’s life (see Genesis 48:21-22 and Joshua 24:32).

This unnamed woman is an interesting character. We find out later that she's had multiple husbands, the implication being that she is living in continual, habitual sin—which she likely battled on a constant basis. Hence the reason she is at the well midday.

4. Read verse 6.
   Why do you think John pointed out what time of day it was?
   How does that affect the meaning of Jesus’ encounter with this woman?

Jesus met this woman at the precise moment she didn't want to run into anyone at all. She would have been drawing water during the hottest part of the day intentionally—the only reason you would be at the well with the scorching Israelite sun beating down on you is if you were counting on it being empty, thus avoiding any awkward encounters or conversations. Jesus chose this time to be there, though, and He used it to great effect.

As Jesus interacts with her, notice how gracefully He reveals the condition of her heart, and the gentleness with which He both confronts her with the truth and the lack of harsh judgment he shows. She is living in sin, yes, but He does not push her away because of it. Instead, He uses her own realization of her spiritual thirst to teach her an important truth about God and the One He sent to quench our thirst.

5. Out loud, read the questions that the woman asked Jesus, and then read His responses to her. If you want, continue doing this through verse 26.
   What are your reactions to the way He answers her questions?
   How does Jesus gently lead her to reveal what she's truly thirsty for?
   What physical things did this woman use to try to satisfy her spiritual thirst?

On the surface, it may seem like Jesus is giving frustrating answers to practical questions that the woman was having. But in reality, each answer He gives points her closer to a spiritual truth that will impact her life far greater than some mystical never-ending well of physical water would. Now, instead of filling her life with potential suitors to try to make herself whole, she can turn to the One for whom her soul was made.

6. God gives each of us a thirst for a relationship with Him.
   What are things that we use to try to quench the thirst only Jesus can satisfy?
   How have you had your “spiritual thirst” quenched by Jesus?
   How does this affect you in your day-to-day life?

We are living in the land of cracked cisterns. Everywhere we turn, we see more things that promise to satisfy us and make us complete. We need that new software update, that weekend stress release, that new car or clothing line. Everyone has their own things that they turn to, but the truth of the matter is that once we find our identity, security, and fulfillment in Christ alone we do not rely on temporary solutions to numb the pain of eternal problems anymore.

7. What role can you play in directing thirsty people to the One who can satisfy them?
RESPOND

Consider the following and respond either publicly or privately, depending on the dynamic of your group.

- **What wells are you still drawing from that will ultimately not satisfy you? What do you need to do to draw from the well of Living Water?**

Encourage one another through email, text messages, or coffee dates throughout the week to build up and encourage each other.