

But Whoever Drinks

Jesus provides eternal satisfaction for all who trust in Him.

JOHN 4:11-26

MEMORY VERSE: JOHN 4:14

STUDY John 4:11-26. Pay attention to how the Samaritan woman came to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Use information from Explore the Text on pages 65-69 to gain insight into Jesus's use of the phrase "living water." Reflect on the places people look for satisfaction outside of a relationship with Jesus.

CREATE a teaching plan for your group using the ideas on pages 70-72. Focus on helping the group recognize their thirst for Jesus and the satisfaction only He can provide. Consider ways to incorporate the Music option (p. 72) to focus on Jesus's description of "true worship."

GATHER the following items:

- Extra *Personal Study Guides* (PSGs)
- Index cards and pens
- Any materials needed for the options on page 72.

Prepare to display:

- Pack Item 1** (*Map: Key Cities in John's Gospel*)

Make copies of:

- Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*)
- Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Jews and Samaritans*)

CONSULT *the Bible Adult Commentary* for additional commentary and biblical insights related to the focal passages (available for purchase from Lifeway.com).

REINFORCE the session by considering some of the ways people in your community seek satisfaction outside of God. Invite the group to join you in praying for your community, asking God to open the people's eyes to recognize that their true thirst is for Jesus.

KEY DOCTRINE

God the Son

God the Son now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord. (See Colossians 1:27; 1 John 4:14-15.)

FIRST THOUGHTS

We are thirsty. Advertisers play to that thirst, promising us their product will give us what we are missing. Social media feeds our thirst as well, knowing what will cause us to keep scrolling through the endless feeds. People throughout history have had that same thirst, looking for something that will quench it—anything. Jesus encountered a woman thirsting as well and helped her find the water for which she longed.

(In PSG, p. 55) **What physical realities do people look to for satisfaction?**

BIBLE SKILL

Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases.

Examine Jeremiah 2:13 and 17:13, Zechariah 14:8, John 7:37-39, and Revelation 7:17. How do these passages' use of the term "living water" give insight into what Jesus told the Samaritan woman? Write a one-sentence summary defining the term based on these passages.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 4:1-54

Jesus didn't have to travel this road. Many Jews crossed to the east side of the Jordan River instead of going through Samaria. They avoided contact with the despised Samaritans whenever possible.

But Jesus had a different agenda. He had a divine appointment with a woman who certainly didn't expect her life to change that day. Because of her, Jesus deliberately traveled through the Samaritan town of Sychar. Sychar is identified with Shechem, the original capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Many scholars accept the site as modern Nablus or Askar, close to Shechem.

Jacob traveled to Paddan-aram, where he met Rachel near a different well. On his way back to Shechem, Jacob purchased a plot of land and likely dug the well mentioned in John's account (Gen. 33:18-20). Years later, Jacob gave this property to his son Joseph. An ancient well identified as Jacob's Well exists today and is located within an Orthodox monastery.

Although weary from his journey, Jesus was not too tired to fulfill His Messianic purpose to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Around noon, He waited by the well while His disciples went to buy food. Into this setting came a Samaritan woman, alone and wary of the strange Jewish man.

When Jesus spoke to her, He broke several customs that surprised her. Men did not speak to unaccompanied women. Jews did not speak with Samaritans. Jewish strangers did not ask for help from a Samaritan woman. As we later discover, she was a woman with a sketchy past, making the encounter increasingly odd. Yet, tradition would not prevent Jesus from reaching out to her.

Jesus's encounter with the woman at the well, her response to Him, and the subsequent witness to the people of the city provide the primary focus for this session. We will learn how people can be led to see Jesus as

the Christ and follow Him. Some of our preconceptions may need to burst along the way as the details of the story emerge. The goal of Jesus's mission and of our study involves making one's way past cultural barriers to see lives transformed through the gospel of Jesus.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

THIRST QUENCHED? (JOHN 4:11-15)

Verses 11-12

Like patients reacting to doctor's probes, people with painful issues often shy away from dealing with uncomfortable problems. As Jesus engaged in conversation with a Samaritan woman about physical water, she shifted the focus by responding to Jesus's comment about **living water**. Her previous response (see v. 9) may have contained a sense of scorn—or, at least, skepticism. In her past experiences, she had likely suffered the prejudice that Jews showed toward •*Samaritans*. When Jesus offered her *living water*, though, her tone changed. She addressed Him as **Sir**. This term translates a word that could also be rendered as “lord” or “master,” but in this context it simply demonstrates respect.

The woman focused on the practical aspects of Jesus's statement. For example, she observed that Jesus did not have a **bucket** for drawing water. Such a bucket probably would have been made of animal skins rather than wood. Plus, Jesus would not only need a bucket, but also a long rope. The **well** was **deep**, making it even more difficult to get water. Jacob's Well drops nearly 100 feet with water at the bottom fed by an underground spring.

Jesus's offer of *living water* was not intended to come from Jacob's Well, but the woman did not understand the spiritual allusion. She only saw what was in front of her. Like Nicodemus in John 3, her confusion was fueled by a lack of spiritual discernment.

Hints of derision seeped back into the woman's attitude as she challenged Jesus's standing compared to Jacob. Most Samaritans were descendants of foreign groups imported by Assyria after the native populace was taken into exile (2 Kings 17:6,24). Some Samaritans were descended from Jacob as their ancestors were left in the land by Assyrian conquerors. Others were the product of intermarriage between the Hebrew remnant and pagan immigrants. Consequently, orthodox Jews scorned the Samaritans. Yet, this woman asserted a common heritage.

Her claim that Jacob gave **us the well** suggests she may have been related to Joseph, who had been given that parcel of land along with the well (John 4:5). Another interpretation would view the well as being provided for all residents of this area through the centuries. In any case, the woman's primary point was the well's identification with Jacob who **drank from it**, as well as providing water for **his sons and livestock**. With His offer, Jesus appeared to claim superiority to Jacob, which in fact He was. Such an idea, though, left the woman skeptical.

VERSES 11-12

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’?”

¹² You 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.”

VERSES 13-15

¹³ Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again.” ¹⁴ But 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.”

VERSES 16-18

¹⁶ “Go call your husband,” he told her, “and come back here.” ¹⁷ “I don’t have a husband,” she answered. “You have correctly said, ‘I don’t have a husband,’” Jesus said. ¹⁸ “For you’ve had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

Verses 13-15

Gently drawing the woman deeper into His analogy, Jesus pointed out that the **water** from Jacob’s Well was not completely satisfying. **Everyone who drinks** this kind of water **will get thirsty again**. The woman was focused on concrete reality, but Jesus wanted her to recognize a deeper need and a greater resource. He was offering water that didn’t satisfy physical thirst for a little while, but living water that quenched spiritual thirst forever.

Unlike the momentary refreshment of cool water on a hot day, Jesus offered the woman something different. Even more, it was available to **whoever drinks** it. The woman had come to the well during the heat of midday because other women would not be there. She was aware of her reputation around Sychar. But Jesus emphasized that His offer was not based on status or reputation. Anyone could receive it, including her.

What’s more, this water could not be acquired by human effort. It was something Jesus alone could provide. As Jesus said in verse 10, this was a gift of God. The Greek wording in verse 10 implies something given freely. So, even a social outcast could drink and **never get thirsty again**.

Jesus went further to claim this water would be like a **well of water springing up . . . for eternal life**. Jacob’s Well was fed by a spring, but it could only sustain physical life. Jesus’s living water supplied *eternal life*. What Jesus provides is far superior to anything Jacob’s Well had to offer.

Again, the woman addressed Jesus respectfully as **sir**. He finally had her attention because **this water** meant she would no longer have to **come here to draw water**. She hated the degradation and drudgery of this daily routine. If Jesus could solve this problem, she was eager to accept His offer! She said, **“Give me,”** seeing that she needed what only He could provide.

People find lasting spiritual satisfaction only in Jesus. Seeking pleasure in worldly ways only leads to temporary highs and lasting lows. Jesus offers the only truly life-giving solution.

(In PSG, p. 58) **How does our spiritual need resemble an unquenchable thirst?**

SIN EXPOSED (JOHN 4:16-20)

Verses 16-18

The woman only understood Jesus’s offer in terms of her physical and emotional issues, but He wanted to address her deeper spiritual needs. Jesus directed her to **call your husband** and then **come back here**. On a cultural level, it would have been more appropriate for a stranger to give a gift in the presence of the woman’s husband. However, in this case, Jesus pushed the discussion to highlight the woman’s spiritual poverty. Her marital status and history revealed a more serious problem than temporal thirst.

The woman tried to avoid revealing her shame by simply answering, **“I don’t have a husband.”** The text does not indicate her tone or body

language in this response. Given the context of the passage, though, readers understand that her evasive answer suggests that she was trying to move the conversation in a different direction.

In His divine omniscience, Jesus knew all about the woman already. He quietly commented that she answered **correctly** when she said she did not **have a husband**. Jesus was not trying to condemn her. Instead, He was letting her know that He was fully aware of her situation.

Jesus demonstrated this knowledge by pointing out that she had been married to **five husbands** and was currently living with a man who was not her husband.

We do not know why he moved from husband to husband before living with a sixth man. Many scholars believe she was simply immoral, moving from one relationship to another. However, according to the law, men could divorce wives for any reason, so it is possible that she had been rejected five times by five different men. In addition, since women in that culture relied on men for support, she may have viewed her current situation as a matter of survival. Whatever the specifics, the main point is that Jesus clearly revealed that he knew all about her, even though they had just met.

Of course, Jesus did not obtain this information through normal, human means. He had supernatural insight into this woman's life. He knew her better than she knew herself. This reminds us of Jesus's knowledge of Nathanael prior to their meeting (John 1:48). Likewise, this woman could not hide anything from Him.

(In PSG, p. 60) **What makes admitting our past failures and current sin so difficult?**

Verses 19-20

Again, the woman did not answer sincerely, trying instead to redirect the conversation to something less painful. Using the honorific **sir**, she observed that he was **a prophet**. Average people believed prophets could divine the future and knew things ordinary persons did not. Jesus must have fit into her understanding of a prophetic figure. Still, she was not willing to discuss her personal situation and fell back on her tactic of debating theological issues instead of confronting personal needs.

Worship location was a major point of contention between the Jews and Samaritans. Following the Assyrian exile, resettled immigrants established pagan altars on various high places, including Mount •*Gerizim*. The woman may have pointed to nearby Gerizim as she mentioned **our ancestors** worshiping on **this mountain**.

Gerizim actually had a strong history of Yahweh worship prior to establishment of the temple in Jerusalem (Deut. 11:29; 12:5). Samaritans also built a temple there during the reign of Alexander the Great, but it was destroyed about 150 years before Jesus's encounter with the woman.

VERSES 19-20

¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman replied, “I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”

Using the term **you Jews**, the woman appealed to the two different religious traditions as a basis for her defense. **Jerusalem** was home to the temple, originally built by Solomon and rebuilt later by Herod. Jews from Galilee, as well as Judea, believed authentic worship focused on the place the Lord had chosen to place His name (1 Kings 8:20; 9:3).

TRUE WORSHIP (JOHN 4:21-24)

Verse 21

VERSE 21

²¹ Jesus told her, “Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

Jesus addressed the Samaritan simply as **woman**. It was not a condescending comment, but rather it was similar to the term He used in addressing His mother (John 2:4; 19:26). Yet, Jesus was firm, declaring that the debate about location was irrelevant. The phrase **Jesus told her** coupled with **believe me** form a strong emphasis on what He was about to say. Looking forward to **an hour** that was **coming**, Jesus pointed to a day in the near future. Its arrival was sure and imminent, and it would reframe the issue of worship in light of genuine faith.

Jesus was not saying no one would **worship** the **Father** either on **this mountain** or in **Jerusalem**. Instead, He was probably anticipating the destruction of the temple in AD 70, when the structure that the Jews cherished would suffer the same fate as the Samaritan temple on Gerizim. This made substance more important for worship than geography. He emphasized the “Who” of worship more than the “Where.”

Verses 22-23

VERSES 22-23

²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him.

The woman included Jesus in the phrase “you Jews.” Jesus used a similar phrase **you Samaritans** to generalize His comment. The Samaritans only accepted the five books of Moses, known as the Torah. Beyond that, they mixed religious and ethnic heritage to create non-canonical religious writings that corrupted historical fact and spiritual truth. Consequently, they did **not know** what they were worshiping. In contrast, Jesus said the Jews knew God and the Scriptures, even if they didn’t always act like it.

Jesus’s statement that **salvation is from the Jews** did not mean only Jews would be saved. The preposition *from* suggests a source rather than results. God chose to send His Word and His Messiah through the people He created as a missionary nation to bear His name to the world.

Jesus again referred to **an hour** to indicate eschatological anticipation. In fact, it was **now here** because He was on the scene, ushering in a new era of spirituality. People could now experience a relationship with the **Father** made possible by the sacrifice of the Son.

True worshipers understood they could worship the Father in all places. What made their worship true was the substance of worship. Instead of going through routines and rituals in selected locations, they worshiped God **in Spirit and in truth**.

In reality, God was never impressed by the blood of bulls and goats. He was more interested in the obedience and faith behind those sacrifices. Ultimately, only the blood of His Son could atone for human sin (Eph. 2:13; 1 John 1:7). That’s what each sacrifice pointed toward.

Verse 24

Describing God as **spirit** does not limit Him but describes His nature. He is not flesh and bone like His creation. As spirit, God is not confined to time or space or matter like we are. Consequently, He must be worshiped **in Spirit and in truth**.

To worship God *in truth* requires more than sincerity. Many pagans worship their gods with complete sincerity, but their worship is not based on truth. God revealed Himself through His Son. Only worship that corresponds with both can be described as *in Spirit and in truth*.

(In PSG, p. 61) **How do we know when we have worshiped God in Spirit and in truth?**

VERSE 24

²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.”

TRUE FAITH (JOHN 4:25-26)

Verses 25-26

The woman was out of answers. She could not argue against the wisdom of Jesus’s words. Yet, despite her lack of scriptural insight, she had a sense of the most important issue. She believed the **Messiah** was **coming**. *Messiah* is the Hebrew word translated **Christ** in Greek. Her statement was an expression of raw faith. It wasn’t perfect, but it was a start.

She understood that the Messiah would explain everything. We will never know everything about Christ theologically, but we can know Him personally. It is possible that this statement was the beginning of her faith journey.

Some people falsely say that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah, but this occasion corrects that error. Jesus simply and directly said **I, the one speaking to you, am he**. Using terms reflective of God’s self-revelation as “I am,” Jesus declared Himself to be the Messiah (Ex. 3:13-14). The woman need look no further. Her anticipation was realized in the presence of the person before her. All her longing, every painful need, each point of confusion—everything could be satisfied in the Savior.

(In PSG, p. 62) **What role does faith play in a person’s understanding of spiritual truth?**

VERSES 25-26

²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” ²⁶ Jesus told her, “I, the one speaking to you, am he.”

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION

BEGIN: As the group arrives, hand out index cards and pens. Direct them to silently read the opening paragraph and question on page 55 of the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG): **What physical realities do people look to for satisfaction?** Encourage the group to write their answers on an index card and return their card to you. After a few minutes, share some of the answers.

PROBE: Lead the group to discuss whether they agree or disagree with this statement: *Physical and emotional longings and desires sometimes point to even deeper spiritual needs.* Point out that sometimes our response to things connects to our spiritual lives.

TRANSITION: *Jesus addressed this when He met a Samaritan woman at a well. She was concerned with her physical thirst, but Jesus recognized that she had a deeper need. In response, He offered her living water to quench her spiritual thirst.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Distribute **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Jews and Samaritans*). Use this handout and the information from *Understand the Context* (PSG, p. 56) to provide background on the relationship between Jews and Samaritans. Point to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Key Cities in John's Gospel*) to show the route most Jews took between Judea and Galilee and Jesus's route through Samaria. Point out the city of Sychar in Samaria and note that this is where Jesus decided to stop in John 4.

READ: Call for a volunteer to read John 4:11-15, as the group considers why Jesus repeatedly used the word "thirsty."

SCAN: Invite the group to scan the first three paragraphs under *Explore the Text* for John 4:11-15 (PSG, pp. 57-58) and to underline ways Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman went against societal norms of the day.

COMPARE: Guide the group in comparing and contrasting the kind of water the woman was looking for and kind of water Jesus was offering. Encourage the group to cite evidence from the text that the woman was not on the same page as Jesus.

ASK: How does our spiritual need resemble an unquenchable thirst? (PSG, p. 58) Share Isaiah 12:1-3, emphasizing water as a metaphor for salvation. Talk about other places in Scripture where water is compared to life. Guide the group to locate this session's memory verse on **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*). Encourage the group to memorize John 4:14 this week.

TRANSITION: *Jesus used a physical need to open the door to this conversation. Once He had engaged the woman, He could take the next step in helping her realize that her problems went beyond thirst and water.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read John 4:16-20. Direct the group to pay attention to the woman's response to Jesus when her sin was exposed.

CONSIDER: Divide the group into teams of two or three people. Instruct the teams to review John 3:16-17 and discuss the ways Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman exemplified the truth of these verses. Call the group back together to share insights gained from their discussions. Emphasize the difference between exposing sin and condemning sin.

DISCUSS: *Why was it essential for Jesus to confront the woman about her sin?*

As answers are shared, highlight the Samaritan woman's response and her attempt to redirect the conversation. **What makes admitting our past failures and current sin so difficult?** (PSG, p. 60)

REFLECT: Write the following quote from Augustine's *Confessions* on the board or on a large sheet of paper: *Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.* Lead the group to consider how Jesus's encounter at the well illustrates Augustine's point.

TRANSITION: Read aloud the last paragraph under verses 16-20. (PSG, p. 60) *Augustine was right that our hearts can only find true rest in Jesus. But to find that rest, we need to see our sin for what it is and confess it to Him. Sometimes, we are as guilty as the Samaritan woman when it comes to ignoring our sin or trying to "change the subject" when things get too uncomfortable for us.*

READ: Direct someone to read aloud **John 4:21-24**, as the group notices how Jesus described true worship.

INTRODUCE: Invite the group to identify some current disagreements that churches have about worship. *Everything Jesus said about the proper way to worship is in these verses. But He never mentioned the actual things people often argue about. He focused on attitude and motivation instead.*

STUDY: Use information from the Leader Guide (pp. 68-69) and pages 60-61 of the PSG to help the group understand the historical context of Jesus's discussion with the Samaritan woman. Ask: **How do we know when we have worshiped God in Spirit and in truth?** (PSG, p. 61).

READ: Read aloud **John 4:25-26**, inviting the group to look for evidence of the Samaritan woman's faith.

EXPLAIN: Direct attention to the woman's statement in verse 25. Point out that at this point, the woman had not yet recognized Jesus as the Messiah, although she believed the Messiah was coming. Ask: **How did Jesus respond?** Emphasize that He clearly identified Himself as the Messiah. Summarize the rest of the story (John 4:27-42). Share that this simple encounter with Jesus not only changed the woman's life forever, but it also made a difference in the whole town.

EMPHASIZE: Call attention to the title of this session, emphasizing the word *whoever*. Ask: **How would Jews have responded to "whoever" including Samaritans? How does Jesus's compassion toward the Samaritan woman remind us that He offers eternal satisfaction to whoever will trust in Him?** Challenge the group to consider the "Samaritans" in our culture and how they can actively reach out to those who might feel like outcasts.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Invite the group to review the story of the Samaritan woman. **What does her experience reveal about salvation?** Encourage them to consider spiritual thirst and eternal satisfaction. Direct the group to the application statements under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 63) for additional guidance.

RESPOND: Direct attention to the second set of question set under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 63). Lead the group to examine their lives for things in which they seek satisfaction. Challenge them to spend time this week confessing those to God and seeking Him more deeply.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking God to help the group enjoy the true satisfaction is only found in Jesus.

OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages.

MUSIC

Secure a copy of “Living Waters,” by Keith and Kristyn Getty. Invite the group to consider how they can call others to come and drink from the living water of Jesus.

LOGICAL

Divide the group into teams of two or three people. Direct each team to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 58). Invite a representative from each team to write their one-sentence summary on the whiteboard or on a large sheet of paper. Then, guide the group to combine these summaries into a final one-to-two-sentence definition of “living water.” Lead the group to discuss how they could use this definition to lead others toward Jesus.

ART

Gather watercolor paints, brushes, paper, cups of water, and paper towels.

Call on a volunteer to read the memory verse, John 4:14. Invite the group to use the art supplies to create an image that symbolizes “living water.” Once the paintings have dried, hang them around the learning space for the rest of the quarter.

DRAMA

Enlist two volunteers to create a short presentation where one represents a Samaritan and the other a Jew. Direct them to **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Jews and Samaritans*) and other tools to understand the conflict between these groups. Encourage them to explain the historical background, the conflict over worship, and the reasons for how the groups treated each other.

PHYSICAL

Gather a variety of drinks, including water, a drink with added sugar, and a drink with caffeine.

Share the drinks with the group as they arrive. As the group settles in, ask some volunteers to share why they chose their respective drink. Suggest that while various drinks can cause temporary satisfaction, water is the only drink that truly quenches your thirst. Say: *The very thing that makes many other drinks appealing, like sugar or caffeine, actually makes your thirst worse.* Invite the group to consider how this parallels the empty promises of sin compared with the eternal satisfaction of Jesus.

REFLECTIVE

Gather paper and pens.

Invite the group to create journal entries from the perspective of the Samaritan woman as she reflected on her encounter with Jesus. Allow them the freedom to imagine the woman’s feelings before and after the meeting. Point out that the story of the Samaritan woman continues through John 4:42. Suggest that they consider her feelings about how Jesus responded to her, her reflections looking back on her own response to Him, and how her life was changed by her encounter with the Messiah.