

Leader's Guide
Sports in Focus Guide Three

Below are some additional insights for
John 4:1-54
Source for answers: MacArthur New Testament Commentary

KEYS to the PASSAGE:

The contrast between the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus, for example, was striking. He was a devoutly religious Jew; she was an immoral Samaritan. He was a learned theologian; she was an uneducated peasant woman. He recognized Jesus as a teacher sent by God; she had no clue who He was. He was wealthy; she was poor. He was a member of the social elite of Israel; she was the dregs of Samaritan society—an outcast among outcasts, since the Jews regarded all Samaritans as unclean pariahs.

Jesus' revelation of Himself to this woman demonstrated that God's saving love knows no limitations; it transcends all barriers of race, gender, ethnicity, and religious tradition. In contrast to human love, divine love is indiscriminate and all-encompassing (cf. 3:16). That Jesus chose to make Himself known first not only to a Samaritan, but also to a woman, was a stinging rebuke to members of Israel's religious elite—who rejected Him even when He did reveal Himself to them.

The story of the Lord's encounter with the woman at the well unfolds in four scenes: the circumstances, the contact, the conviction, and the Christ.

1. How would you describe the woman at the well? What impresses you about her?

Taken aback that Jesus spoke to her, the Samaritan woman said in astonishment, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" As noted above, it was culturally incorrect for a man, especially a rabbi, to speak to any woman, particularly an immoral outcast. But her question reveals that what she found most surprising was that Jesus, being a Jew, would speak to her, a Samaritan woman since, as John explained in an understated way, Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Even more astounding was His willingness to ceremonially defile Himself by drinking from her water pot, since He had no vessel of His own from which to drink (v. 11). (The word translated dealings in John's explanatory note literally means "to use the same utensils.") But Jesus was the infinitely holy God in human flesh. He could not be defiled by a Samaritan water pot. Whatever He touched—even corpses (Luke 7:12–15) or lepers (Matt. 8:2–3)—did not taint Him, but instead became clean.

Shaken by Jesus' amazingly accurate knowledge of her sinful life, the woman said, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet." By calling Him a prophet, she affirmed that His knowledge of her sordid lifestyle was accurate. No longer did she attempt to hide her sin; rather, this statement constituted a confession by which she was turning from her sin, hoping to receive the water of eternal life.

2. What did Jesus mean by the phrase "living water" (v. 10)?

Jesus' words about living water again involve double meaning (see notes on 3:14; 8:24; 11:50–51; 19:19; cf. also 3:7–8). Literally, the phrase refers to fresh spring water (Gen. 26:19; Lev. 14:6), but John 7:38–39 identifies this "living water" as the Holy Spirit dwelling within a believer (cf. Jer. 2:13; Ezek. 47:1–6; Zech. 14:8; also Isa. 12:3).

Patently, Jesus answered her skeptical question and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water

will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.” Jacob was rightly accorded a place of honor by both Jews and Samaritans. Yet, as Jesus pointed out, everyone who drank of the water from his well would thirst again. It is a measure of Jesus’ incomparable greatness that whoever drinks of the water that He will give him shall never thirst; but the water that He will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life (cf. Isa. 12:3). Here was the living water of spiritual life (cf. 7:38) that her parched soul desperately needed (cf. Ps. 143:6).

Still thinking primarily on the physical level, she replied eagerly, “Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw.” Her response parallels that of the Galilean crowd, who responded to Jesus’ teaching about the bread from heaven, “Lord, always give us this [physical] bread” (6:34; cf. v. 26). Whatever else the living water did, she was ready to receive it if it would eliminate her daily trip to the well and give her also eternal life.

At this point, the woman does not appear to have been clear on the matter of spiritual transformation. Jesus had spoken to her about the water of eternal life, and she seemed willing to accept it, but no conditions had been stated. As with any lost sinner, this woman needed to understand two crucial issues before she could receive the living water of eternal life—namely, the reality of her sin and His identity as Savior. In these last two points, Jesus addressed both of those issues.

3. How did Jesus describe God, His Father, in the conversation with the Samaritan woman?

v. 21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 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 is seeking such people 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 (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” 26 Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

4. What lessons in evangelism can we learn from Christ’s encounter with the Samaritan woman?

Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well illustrates three nonnegotiable truths about salvation. First, salvation comes only to those who recognize their desperate need for spiritual life they do not have. Living water will be received only by those who realize that they are spiritually thirsty. Second, salvation comes only to those who confess and repent of their sin and desire forgiveness. Before this promiscuous woman could embrace the Savior, she had to acknowledge the full weight of her iniquity. And, third, salvation comes only to those who embrace Jesus Christ as their Messiah and sin bearer. After all, salvation is found in no one else (cf. 14:6; Acts 4:12).

5. Why do you think the Jews of the Old Testament and the Jews of John’s Gospel missed out on the living water offered by Jesus?

The hope of the Messiah lies at the heart of the Old Testament. From the third chapter of Genesis (Gen. 3:15) to the third chapter of Malachi (Mal. 3:1), the Hebrew Scriptures repeatedly proclaim that the Savior is coming. In fact, all three parts of the Old Testament canon—the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets—make precise predictions about Him and His ministry (cf. Luke 24:25–27, 44–45).

As the generations of Israel became familiar with these passages, they took God's promises to heart. Though they waited eagerly, year after year, for their coming Savior, their sense of expectation only increased as the centuries passed. Thus, by the time of Jesus' birth, anticipation regarding the Messiah had reached an all-time high.

But then the unthinkable happened. The Messiah came, and Israel rejected Him. Under the influence of their religious leaders, the people refused to embrace the One for whom they had been waiting and instead had Him murdered.

It was not that the evidence was unclear. In fact, "the Old Testament, written over a one-thousand-year period, contains nearly three hundred references to the coming Messiah. All of these were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and they establish a solid confirmation of His credentials as the Messiah." (Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999], 164). Instead, it was that Israel's religious establishment felt threatened by Jesus' ministry—He challenged their authority and confronted their hypocrisy.

In response, the Pharisees stubbornly refused to believe the truth about Him (7:48). They openly contradicted His teachings, and scorned any who followed Him. When they heard the astonished crowds wondering about Jesus, "This man cannot be the Son of David [i.e., the Messiah], can he?" (Matt. 12:23), the Pharisees indignantly declared, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons" (v. 24). The very fact that He cast out demons was powerful evidence of His authenticity. Yet, the religious leaders were so obstinate in their unbelief that they attempted to turn even that against Him.

Eventually, in the most heinous and apostate act in its history, Israel delivered its Messiah into "the hands of godless men and put Him to death" (Acts 2:23)

6. Put in your own words what Jesus meant when He spoke of never thirsting again.

7. What is the significance of Jesus' claim that "I have food to eat of which you do not know?"

Jesus again speaks in terms of the physical world to teach about different realities in the unseen spiritual world. The accomplishment of Jesus' mission is more important to him than physical food (cf. Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4; also Matt. 6:25; Mark 3:20–21).

8. How is doing God's will filling and satisfying?

9. How do you know what God's will is? How can Jesus' example help you discover God's will?