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LEADER'S GUIDE

NO ONE IS TOO BAD • THE GOSPEL



Photograph by Greg Schneider/Worldwide Challenge

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

JOHN 4:4-26

This passage details an encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. According to verse 4, they met because Jesus “had to go through Samaria.” A map of that time period shows that the shortest route for Jesus to take from Judea to Galilee would indeed take him through Samaria. Jews rarely chose this route. There was great animosity between Jews and Samaritans, going back several hundred years. Normally, Jews would cross the Jordan, travel north, and then recross the Jordan, rather than travel through the land of the Samaritans. Jesus had no such prejudices. He “had to go through Samaria” not only to get to Galilee, but also because he had a divine appointment with a particular woman who needed His forgiveness.

In verse 6, Jesus arrived at a well at noon, at roughly the same time a local woman came to draw water. The presence of the woman at the well was unusual because at noon it would be very hot—a bad time to be in the sun carrying heavy burdens. The fact that she was there at noon probably indicates she was intentionally avoiding the company of others. We’ll see why in a minute. When she approaches, Jesus does something very startling—He asks her for a drink.

Several cultural barriers stand between Jesus and this woman. Gender, race, religion, social standing, holiness—any one of these things could have prevented Jesus from interacting with her. In her response in verse 9, she raises two of these barriers but Jesus chooses to not focus on them. He suggests that asking her for water is a small thing compared to the interaction they could have. If she would just ask, He would give her “living water.”

The woman is confused by His offer (or at the very least thinks that He is!). Jesus clarifies that He is not talking about literal water, but something far greater. He is offering her eternal life, claiming that He is the source of it.

In verses 16-18, the conversation turns very personal as Jesus probes into her relationships. Having offered her eternal life, He now surfaces her need of forgiveness. She has been married five times and is now living with a man who is not her husband. In verse 19, the woman changes the subject. She reacts much like any of us would, squirming under the light of inspection. Her promiscuity likely led to social ostracism, which explains why she was drawing water at noon. Jesus’ purpose wasn’t to berate her, but to surface her need. Having accomplished this, He graciously lets her change the topic.

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

In John 3, we learn that no one is so good that they aren’t in need of God’s forgiveness. We all “must be born again.” In chapter 4, we look at the other end of the spectrum and see that no one is so bad that they can’t receive God’s love and forgiveness. From the social elite and externally righteous Pharisee, to the promiscuous social out-cast, the gospel is for all.

We want to hear from you! Please send your feedback on this study to cru.comm@uscm.org.

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In verses 21-24, Jesus responds to her question, or rather dispenses with it. She had raised a point of quibbling between the Jews and Samaritans concerning the place from which God ought to be worshiped. Jesus replies that from the Jews will come a Savior, and that through Him all people—including Jew and Samaritan—will be invited to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Then Jesus does something else extraordinary. He explicitly identifies himself as the Messiah. Several things may have contributed to His open confession. Jesus had an enormous amount of work to do and knew that His life was leading to the cross. Making such a claim openly would increase the rage of those who opposed Him, and hasten His crucifixion. But in Samaria, there was less likelihood that word would travel to the religious leaders who were against Him. That probably gave Him greater freedom to speak plainly to the needs of this woman.

Jesus didn't go through Samaria because He was in a hurry to get to Galilee. Rather, He needed to meet with this woman. He crossed several barriers without regard for social customs, told her who He was, surfaced her need for forgiveness, and offered her eternal life. No one is beyond the reach of the love and mercy of God. The gospel is for everyone.

Furthermore, everyone can do the work of an evangelist. This woman was an outcast and had little credibility due to her sinful life. She also knew very little theology, and even less about Jesus. Yet she was able to give her testimony about what Jesus had said and done for her.

Anyone who has put their faith in Christ and received His forgiveness for their sins has a story to tell.

This study is accompanied by an article. Take the time to read it over before the study. Hand it out to the group at the end of the study and have them read it this week.

WHAT IF THERE'S A PROBLEM?

None apparent.

WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

Three application points come to mind.

1) Like Jesus, we should be looking for divine appointments. Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Look for those opportunities God has prepared for you, and then walk through them.

2) How can you cross any barriers between you and other students? Seek out relationships with students of another ethnic group, or who are part of a different subculture on campus.

3) Have the group spend some time this week giving further thought to how they could share the gospel through simply sharing what Christ has done for them. Ask them to look to share Christ with one person over the week by simply sharing about their own faith in Christ, and what He has done in their life.

MEMORIZE

Give the group members time to finish writing their testimonies, and over the course of the week, try to commit them to memory.

WHAT ARE THE ANSWERS?

1. Jesus never constrained His behavior to the prejudiced or hateful practices of His culture. He had an appointment to keep that His Father had set up for Him with a Samaritan woman.
2. Gender, race, religion, social standing, holiness.
3. Anger from the Jews.
4. He dismisses it, but seems to indicate that it is of no consequence to Him.
5. Discuss the nature of Jesus' offer.
6. To surface her sin and need for forgiveness.
7. Allow the group to share their thoughts.
8. He allows her to change the subject. He is patient with her and initiates with her, holding out the offer of salvation, though she is by all definitions a "sinner."
9. Because she needed to know it, and Samaria, due to its isolation, was a safe place for Jesus to reveal Himself at this point in His earthly ministry.
10. To show that the gospel is for everybody, even the worst of sinners. Also to foreshadow the forthcoming proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles.
11. "He told me everything I ever did."
12. It's difficult to invalidate one's own personal experience. It also breeds greater personal interest.
13. Give the group time to fill out the outline.