

☒ LIFE OF JESUS

March 7, 2021 | Jesus Talks with a Samaritan Woman

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Read John 4:1–42

Pray that God would help you see where the harvest is ready in your community.

Pray that God would help you see the implications of this passage for the harvest in your community.

THIS WEEK

☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus’s mission was to transform lives through personal interaction.

☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Jesus came to transform lives, lives of individuals and lives of whole communities. As His followers, we carry on the missional work He began during His time on earth.

☒ MEDITATE

“Lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.” (John 4:35b)

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to introduce the main idea of this lesson and apply this main idea to your life.

🗣️: Why do you believe Jesus included us in the proclamation of His mission to the world?

Q: *What is your role in the mission of Jesus?*

The construction of a house is divided among several different crews, each of which accomplishes a specific task. One crew lays the foundation. Another frames the structure. Another installs the plumbing, or drywall, or electrical wiring, or flooring, and so on. Before any of this work begins, someone else designs the house and makes a building plan. Each crew performs an essential operation in the construction of the house. By working in different crews, the house is completed much more efficiently because each crew can specialize in one aspect of homebuilding.

In some ways, Jesus’s mission on earth is carried out by different crews. Jesus, through His life, death, and resurrection from the grave accomplished all that was needed for our salvation. The Holy Spirit is the internal witness in everyone who believes. Our role is to give voice to the gospel in whatever context we find ourselves. The difference, of course, is the reason for the division of labor. In building a house, construction crews are governed by efficiency. Jesus’s mission is not governed by efficiency but by necessity. Only the incarnate Son of God could accomplish what is needed for our salvation. For our part, we need to be included within Jesus’s mission for our own sanctification.

In John 4:1–42, Jesus confronted a Samaritan woman with the truth of who He was and what He had come to do. When she returned with the rest of her village, Jesus took the opportunity to teach the disciples that they would “reap” the harvest He and the Holy Spirit would “sow.” This passage shows us that we are an extension of Jesus’s ministry and mission on the earth. Just as the disciples were to reap the harvest Jesus prepared, we too, even after all these years, are commanded to harvest the fields that have been sown for us.

Q: *How are we connected to the ministry of the disciples and ultimately to the ministry of Jesus?*

Q: *How does Jesus’s work provide us with the confidence we need to carry out His mission?*

APPLICATION POINT – The wonderful thing about taking part in Jesus’s mission is that we can never do more than what He has prepared in advance for us to do. Jesus is the one who has planted the field. Our job is merely to harvest what He has sown. It is fine to have evangelism and baptism goals, but even with these goals in mind,

we have to remember that it is never our duty to save anyone, nor are we even capable of saving anyone. Our responsibility is to be faithful in sharing the good news of what Christ has done. Whether a person accepts the good news we share is not up to us. As you prepare to read and interact with this lesson, express in prayer your belief that Jesus has “sown the fields” in advance. Pray that God will keep you faithful to pursuing the harvest He began.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+ In John 4:1–42, Jesus engaged a woman with claims that He was the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus’s interaction with this woman and His disciples is filled with insights into how we can best approach sharing our faith in our day.

1. MAKING CONNECTIONS
2. DEALING WITH DIVERSIONS
3. THE CHRISTIAN’S PRIORITY
4. AN UNEXPECTED MODEL FOR MINISTRY

GOING DEEPER

+ *This section will examine John 4:1–42 in more detail to understand our role within Jesus’s mission.*

1. MAKING CONNECTIONS

■ JOHN 4:1–15

🔍: *What were the circumstances of Jesus’s journey through Samaria?*

🔍: *Where did Jesus encounter the Samaritan woman?*

There is nothing extraordinary about Jesus encountering the Samaritan woman. Jesus was not on a mission trip or an evangelistic crusade. He was simply traveling from Judea to Galilee. He was leaving Judea because He was beginning to draw attention away from the ministry of John the Baptist. We cannot know for sure why this was a

problem. Perhaps Jesus knew John's ministry needed to come before His own in God's plan, or perhaps He did not want the kind of attention John's ministry entailed. Whatever the case, Jesus was not going to this Samaritan town, Sychar, to start an evangelistic movement. He met this woman at a well near the town, a common meeting place in that time. Most households probably made several trips to the well during the day, but it was not the place where you would expect to conduct business or have a substantial religious conversation. Nothing about the details of this encounter makes us think Jesus was looking to have a religious conversation with someone. He simply took the opportunity that was provided to Him.

We are given opportunities every day to share our faith in Jesus Christ with the people we encounter. The problem is, unlike Jesus on this occasion, we often do a poor job of taking advantage of those opportunities. Many of us have become adept at separating our evangelistic witness from our everyday lives. Evangelism is something we do on mission trips or when there is a special emphasis at church. We let opportunities to share our faith with others pass without even realizing it. This was not the case with Jesus. He was not on a special mission trip. He was not in a place where religious conversation would have been expected. He simply took the opportunity which God had provided.

Q: *What are some ways you can connect the people you encounter doing normal, every-day activities with the gospel of Jesus?*

Q: *In a world that increasingly de-emphasizes personal interaction, how can you continue to interact personally with people for the sake of the gospel?*

APPLICATION POINT – Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, our society was already devising ways to limit personal interaction. It is more convenient to arrive at a store and have your groceries loaded into your trunk than to get out of your vehicle, enter the store, and shop for the things you need, but you have not interacted with anyone. It is easier and quicker to shop online, but it cuts out all personal interaction. Working from home is often far more convenient than driving to the office every day, but personal encounters are limited to online meetings. Many of these cultural developments are more financially viable as well.

Christians, however, cannot think of life only in terms of convenience and finances. We are gospel people, and the spread of the gospel typically demands personal interaction. Christians may need to consider whether we need to resist some or all of the structures our society is creating to de-personalize our lives. Nevertheless, many of the cultural developments noted above will not go away. Christians are going to have to develop new ways of interacting with people, especially after a pandemic that has dissolved many of the ways we used to interact with others. Within your group, brainstorm about how we can continue to create personal interactions with people who need to hear the gospel we hold so dear.

Q: *How does Jesus initiate a gospel-centered conversation with the Samaritan woman?*

Q: *How would you explain Jesus's analogy comparing the gospel and water?*

When He entered Samaria, Jesus entered hostile territory. Although the Samaritans were descendants of Abraham, Jewish people at the time of Jesus shunned them as an aberration from Judaism. Many of the Samaritans were the offspring of intermarriages between the Israelites who remained in the land after the fall of the Northern Kingdom and the exiles from other nations the Assyrians brought to repopulate the area. When the Jewish people returned from their exile in Babylon, they held the Samaritans at arm's length. This space created even further differences between the two peoples, including the religious differences alluded to in this passage. Thus, Jesus could assume very little common ground between Himself and the Samaritan woman. The Samaritan woman's background also suggests that she was placed firmly on the fringes of even her own society.

This cultural distance did not, however, dissuade Jesus from engaging her in a spiritual conversation. Instead, Jesus found a point of conversation with the woman and an analogy with which to explain the good news concerning who He is. Their conversation did not immediately revolve around the intricacies of the gospel or theology. Instead, Jesus requested a drink of water and then made a comparison between the water and His own ministry. The analogy Jesus offered flew straight over the Samaritan woman's head. This does not mean that she was unintelligent. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, no one can understand and accept the truth of the gospel. Notice that Jesus did not get discouraged or give up. Instead, He used the common ground established between them to continue the conversation.

Q: *What analogies do you use to illustrate the gospel to unbelievers?*

Q: *How have you responded in the past when people have failed to understand your presentation of the gospel?*

APPLICATION POINT – Since no two conversations are ever the same, no two conversations surrounding the gospel are the same. That is why it is good to have a number of tools or methods for sharing your faith with non-

believers. Sometimes, you will be able to have an extended discussion. At other times, however, you may only have a minute or two to share your faith. How will you approach these conversations? Sometimes you will be sharing with people a lot older or a lot younger than you are. You may be sharing with someone who grew up in a church context or someone who is completely unfamiliar with anything related to the church. How will you be prepared for these challenges? Consider starting an evangelism journal. This can be a place to record the conversations you have with others about the gospel. You can write down what was said, what went well, and what did not go so well. Evaluating your conversations can help you create a strategy for sharing your faith with this person in the future. An evangelism journal simply gives you a place to record and reflect on the conversations you have about the gospel so that you can be better prepared to share your faith.

2. DEALING WITH DIVERSIONS

■ JOHN 4:16–26

Q: *How would you explain the abruptness of how Jesus shifted their conversation?*

Q: *Why do you think Jesus addressed this woman's relationship issues?*

As John records the conversation, Jesus's command that the woman get her husband seems to come out of nowhere. We have to remember that we are not necessarily given the entire conversation between Jesus and the woman. It is likely that there was some additional dialogue leading up to Jesus's statement. Whatever the case, Jesus was aware of the woman's marital background and current relationship. When sharing the gospel, we are going to encounter people who are entangled in sin. When confronted with her past, the woman acknowledged Jesus as a prophet. We often think of prophets as predicting the future, but Old Testament prophets just as often confronted sin in their contemporary cultures. Thus, Jesus was speaking prophetically to the woman in confronting her past sins.

What is our responsibility when we encounter people who need the gospel but are entangled in sin? First, we must never give the impression that sinners have to get their lives straightened out before they can accept the gospel. If that were the case, none of us would ever be able to accept the gospel because none of us will ever be able to completely rid our lives of sin (1 John 1:8). Second, we are obligated to confront sin in the lives of others when we share the gospel with them. They cannot save themselves by getting rid of their sin, but the power of the gospel is what delivers them from sin, both the eternal consequences and the present bondage. If we fail to address sin, we fail to fully explain the gospel of Christ.

Q: *When sharing our faith, we do need to confront sin, but we cannot address every sin in a person's life. How do we decide what sin to address?*

Q: *Why would we be tempted to compromise our beliefs about sin when sharing the gospel?*

APPLICATION – Although conversion is ultimately not up to us, there is a temptation to try to “sell” someone on the gospel when we are sharing. If we were selling something, we would want to focus on the features of the product that would make that person want to buy it. The gospel is the most wonderful news a person can hear, and we want to present the gospel in an attractive way. We cannot, however, try to appease the person we are sharing with by ignoring the need for repentance of sin. To do so would compromise the very faith we are sharing. We obviously cannot address every sin in a person's life, and we do not need to. But if we are aware of sin that is deeply engrained in a person's life or if we know a person is committed to a particular sin, we must tell them that the gospel demands repentance, a turning away from sin. As Christians seeking to share our faith with others, we need to be aware of the major sins within our own culture and be committed to confronting them when sharing our faith. In the group time this week, identify some of these sinful patterns within our culture.

Q: *How did the Samaritan woman respond when Jesus confronted her with her past?*

Q: *How did Jesus respond to the woman's diversion?*

When Jesus confronted the Samaritan woman with her sin, she immediately tried to change the subject. She brought up a point of contention between Jewish and Samaritan religious practices. The temple was in Jerusalem. Thus, Jerusalem became the central place for worship and religious affairs, at least when the people were serving God instead of pagan idols. Jerusalem, however, was in Jewish territory, and the Samaritans loathed the idea of having to travel to Jerusalem. They built their own temple at a location that also had religious significance in their ancestral past.

When sharing your faith with others, we will often find the conversation steering off the course that we anticipated. Sometimes, the person we are sharing with intentionally tries to divert the conversation to something they are more

comfortable with. On other occasions, our conversation partner is just moving to what seems to them to be the next natural topic. Whatever the case, we have to be ready to respond. Sometimes, we may need to recognize the diversion and get the conversation back on the intended track. At other times, we will have to try to create a bridge to the gospel from where the person is wanting to go. Notice that this is the path Jesus took with the Samaritan woman. He did not dismiss her diversion and return to her marital problems. Instead, He introduced her to the spiritual truth she needed from the topic she wanted to discuss. That is the marvelous thing about the gospel. The gospel is central to all of life, so we can lead people to a conversation about the gospel from almost anything.

Q: *What are some ways that you can prepare yourself to lead others to the gospel when the conversation does not go the way you planned or expected?*

Q: *What are some of the most likely diversions you may encounter when trying to have gospel conversations today?*

APPLICATION POINT – It is unlikely that you will be as adept at leading people to the gospel as Jesus was. It can be challenging to think “on your feet” when you are in the midst of sharing with others. This is another reason that keeping an evangelism journal can be helpful. This will be a way to reflect on how your conversations went and think about better possible routes to the gospel that you could have taken. When you are in similar situations in the future, you will have a better plan for how to move forward from wherever the conversation goes.

3. THE CHRISTIAN’S PRIORITY

📖 JOHN 4:27, 31–38

Q: *What did the disciples try to get Jesus to do?*

Q: *What was Jesus’s response?*

Upon returning from the town, the disciples were initially concerned that Jesus was speaking with a woman. They were more concerned with cultural mandates than they were for this woman’s need for Jesus. After she was gone,

the disciples urged Jesus to eat. Jesus responded by trying to help them see the enormous opportunity for ministry that was coming their way. In Jesus's mind, this was no time to be thinking about food! Instead, He was seeking to nourish His soul through reaping the spiritual harvest that was approaching Him. Jesus also encouraged the disciples to quit thinking about what they considered a pressing physical matter to focus on the spiritual opportunity at hand. Jesus compared the Samaritan crowds coming to seek Him to a field that had already been sown and was ready for harvesting. The hard work had been done. The disciples merely needed to take part in the joyful labor of helping others believe.

🕒: *What are you prioritizing in your life at the expense of making Jesus known?*

🕒: *How can you transform what you typically do for fun and leisure into opportunities to make Christ known?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus offered the disciples a new set of priorities. Where they were concerned with Jesus's physical needs, Jesus turned their attention to the people's spiritual needs. This same process needs to happen for us. The physical needs of life can often be overwhelming to figure out, and they tend to multiply. We have to take steps to provide food, water, and shelter for ourselves and for those we love. In our current moment, however, it is often not physical needs that take our attention away from sharing Jesus with the lost but our love for leisure and entertainment. We live in the most abundant time in human history. We have luxuries, both in time and matter, that previous generations could not have dreamed. But this excess has not increased our witness to our Savior. If anything, it has diminished it! American Christians need to rethink how we spend our leisure time. This does not necessarily entail a dramatic shift in the things we do. Perhaps instead of watching the big game alone this weekend, you could consider hosting others, both believers and non-believers. Perhaps instead of being entirely consumed with your own goals when you leave your home, you could also go with the gospel on your heart. When people with the gospel ready on their minds meet people who need what Christ has to offer, the harvest will be taken in.

4. AN UNEXPECTED MODEL FOR MINISTRY

📖 **JOHN 4:28–30, 39–42**

Q: *What was the woman's response to meeting Jesus?*

Q: *What was the initial catalyst for this Jesus-movement among the Samaritan village?*

Again, as readers of John's Gospel, we have to remember that we are likely only seeing snippets of Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman. There was more said between them than John included in the story, and he intended for his readers to fill in some of the gaps in conversation. In this case, the woman was receptive to Jesus's claim to be Israel's Messiah. She immediately returned to the town and shared her encounter with Jesus. Notice that her background, which would have once been a source of embarrassment and shame for her, now became the focal point of her joyful message in the town, and this transformation is evidently a validation of Jesus's message for the townspeople. In many ways, the Samaritan woman is the faithful witness the disciples should have been. They entered the town and came back by themselves because they were preoccupied with their physical needs. She went back into the town as a transformed person and inspired droves of people to seek Jesus. When people who have been transformed by the power of the gospel are unleashed in the world, they cannot help but be an attractive witness to the goodness of knowing Christ.

Q: *How has Jesus transformed your life in a way that others need to hear?*

Q: *Are you making Christ attractive to those who need Him?*

APPLICATION POINT – If you are a Christian, then Jesus has changed your life. Sometimes that change is obvious, as in the case with the Samaritan woman. For others, especially those who grew up in Christian homes, that change can be hard to see, but it is there. In your evangelism journal, write down how Christ has changed your life. Be ready to share this testimony with others who need to be changed by the gospel of Jesus.

NEXT STEPS

Several of the application points in this lesson suggest creating an evangelism journal. This journal can serve as a record of what you are doing to spread the gospel and as a think-tank where you can plan how to be more successful in sharing your faith. The next step is to move forward with this journal. If you already have a prayer journal or some other type of journal you keep to help you grow in your faith, you do not have to start a new journal. You can combine evangelism entries into what you have. The thought of sharing the gospel with others may make you uncomfortable. You are not alone, but your discomfort is not a reason to forego taking part in the great harvest that has been sown for you to reap. Perhaps the first entry in your journal should just be a candid admission of your timid nature in this area. Then challenge yourself to move past this nervousness.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

My Lord, help make me aware of the harvest you have sown in my community.

Lord Jesus, I pray that my love for you would overflow from me to the point that the whole world would know what you have done for me.

God, I pray that your Holy Spirit would be at work preparing a harvest in my family, in my neighborhood, and in my country.

Father, start a movement for the growth of the gospel in my town. Overwhelm believers with the need to share the gospel and reap the harvest. Make the people who need the gospel receptive to it.

