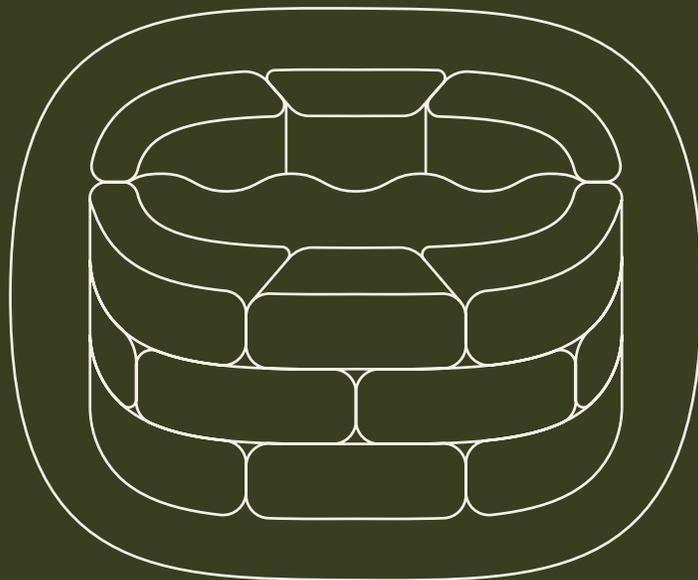
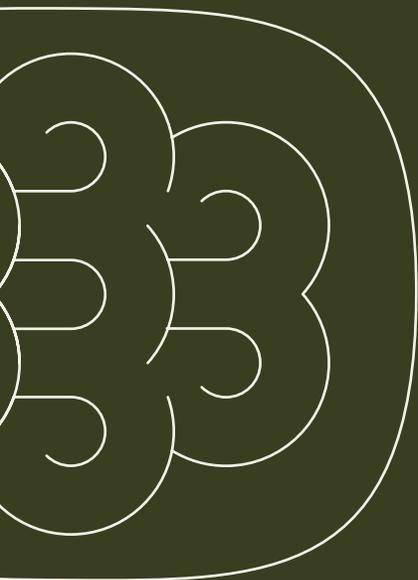


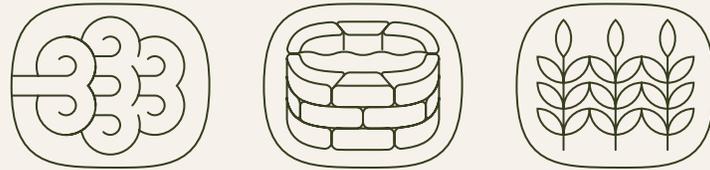
JOHN'S GOSPEL

THE TRUTH

Encounters with Jesus

A Three-Week Study





Welcome to our
“Encounters with Jesus”
mini-study, taken from
our 30-week course
on John’s Gospel.

This mini-study is an opportunity for you to study
BSF content for yourself. Whether you are intending
to try a class or simply do the study on your own,
we hope God speaks to you through His Word.



What is BSF?

Bible Study Fellowship is a global community of 450,000 men, women, students, and kids studying God's Word together. Each year, BSF groups study for 30 weeks, either in person or online.

How does the Bible study work?

This sample study includes three lessons. Each lesson takes one week to complete.

To get started:

1. Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.
2. If completing the study in a BSF group, discuss your answers collectively each week.
3. Listen to the weekly teaching on the week's passage (with your group or via the recorded audio lecture).
4. Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

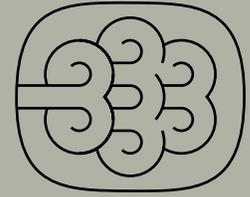
Repeat for each lesson!

How do I join BSF?

If a friend has invited you to join their group, simply attend with them. Otherwise, to find a class in your local area, or to join a BSF Online group, go to join.bsfindernational.org.

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others. Thanks for choosing to study with Bible Study Fellowship!





Jesus, Nicodemus, and John the Baptist

LESSON
SCRIPTURE
JOHN 3

Lesson Questions

Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day. If completing the mini-study in a BSF group, answer the questions before the group meets to discuss the answers.

First Day.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truths from the notes or discussion on Jesus's power and authority changed your thinking?
2. In what ways did the lecture help you understand or appreciate God's gift of salvation?

Second Day: Read John 3:1-8.

Nicodemus meets with Jesus who tells him about being "born again."

3. a. What might have been Nicodemus's motivation to approach Jesus? Why at night? (See also John 2:13-20, 24.)

8. How does the incident involving Moses in the wilderness point to Jesus? (See also Numbers 21:4-9.)

9. a. Describe your personal understanding of what it means to be saved. (See also Acts 4:12 and Romans 10:13.)

- b. What part of your definition of “saved” puzzles you or moves you to praise God?

Fourth Day: Read John 3:16-21.

God gave Jesus as a gift to humankind.

10. Describe what is true of a person who believes in Jesus. (See also John 3:36.)

11. From each passage below, describe someone who does not believe in Jesus.

John 3:16

John 3:17-19

John 3:36

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

12. How do the truths in verses 16-21 challenge or encourage you?

Fifth Day: Read John 3:22-36.

John the Baptist accepts his role in relation to Jesus.

13. a. What concern did John the Baptist's disciples bring to him?

b. How did John the Baptist respond to the growing interest in Jesus?

c. In what way do you want to follow John the Baptist's example?

14. Who did John the Baptist say Jesus is? Who do you say He is?

Sixth Day: Review John 3.

Jesus gives light and new life to those who believe in Him.

15. What glorious truth about Jesus most impacted you in this week's study?

No Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) assigned for Group and Administrative Leaders this week

*Next step: Listen to the lecture.*

Lesson 4 Notes

Dig deeper into this week's passage by reading the lesson notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

John 3

Focus Verse

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Outline

- Nicodemus Encounters Jesus – John 3:1-15
- Jesus Alone Brings Salvation – John 3:16-21
- John the Baptist Exalts Jesus – John 3:22-36

Engage

Did darkness frighten you as a child? Even as adults, the darkness of today's world alarms us as uncertainty, violence, sin, fragility, and vulnerability surround us. **Humanity's darkness threatens our joy, contentment, and hope for the future.** Sometimes we choose physical or metaphorical darkness to hide what we don't want others to see, know, or believe about us. We might even try to hide from God, who sees and knows all.

God responded to our need in a glorious way: Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, left heaven's glory to dispel darkness. Under the cover of night, Jesus shed light on Nicodemus's greatest need—to be born again. This conversation helps us understand the light of salvation that Jesus shines on humanity. John the Baptist also aimed the spotlight on the One who came to save. Jesus offers the world the profound gift of Himself. He bids us to believe in Him and receive His gift. **Jesus gives light and new life to those who believe in Him.**

Nicodemus Encounters Jesus – John 3:1-15

Jesus increasingly attracted attention as His public ministry progressed. He cleared the temple courts, foretold His resurrection, and performed signs that revealed His divine authority. Everything Jesus did stirred curiosity and raised questions. Many professed to believe but Jesus knew the truth about their hearts. Most in the gathering crowd did not truly know or understand that Jesus was their Messiah and Savior and surrender to Him.¹

Light in the Darkness – 3:1-3

Who Was Nicodemus? – 3:1

A Pharisee named Nicodemus became intrigued by Jesus. A wealthy member of the Pharisees, a scholarly sect of Jewish leadership, Nicodemus also served as an influential member of the

¹ Jesus knows hearts: John 2:23-24

Sanhedrin—the ruling council. **Nicodemus did not oppose Jesus but neither was he convinced that Jesus was the Messiah.** Because the Pharisees had already begun to oppose Jesus,² Nicodemus exercised guarded curiosity and discretion in meeting Jesus.

Nicodemus sought a private conversation with Jesus at night to ask his rising questions, likely unwilling to compromise his stature among his peers and community. **Little did Nicodemus know that he would encounter the Light of the World in the darkness of that night.**

Who Is Jesus? – 3:2

A well-schooled authority on Jewish scripture, Nicodemus respectfully greeted Jesus as “Rabbi.” Nicodemus approached Jesus with a power-packed statement revealing his understanding that Jesus’s miracles revealed divine power. **Nicodemus’s words set up a basic question every person must answer: Who is Jesus?**

Jesus’s Response – 3:3

Rather than responding directly to Nicodemus’s statement, Jesus reached for this curious Pharisee’s heart. “Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.’” As a Pharisee, Nicodemus believed religious knowledge, upright character, and the high regard of his peers adequately prepared him to enter God’s kingdom.

Like all Jewish boys, Nicodemus had been circumcised eight days after birth, the mark of belonging to God’s people. He lived as a devout and upright Jew and did not doubt his place in God’s kingdom. However, Nicodemus’s conversation with Jesus took an unexpected turn. **Jesus upended Nicodemus’s preconceived ideas by unveiling his need to be born again.**

Exposed to the Light – 3:4-8

Practical Question – 3:4

Nicodemus responded to Jesus’s stunning statement with a practical question. He could not fathom the physical perplexity behind the words “born again.” Nicodemus reasoned that no one could reenter their mother’s womb. John records multiple times when people routinely misunderstood Jesus.³

Yet Nicodemus possibly recognized a spiritual implication within Jesus’s answer. Could Jesus’s words mean that he lacked preparation to enter God’s kingdom despite his tidy religious background? At this moment Nicodemus could not yet understand the spiritual truth Jesus declared. **Like every human ever born, Nicodemus did not need a second beginning; he needed a new beginning—rebirth by the Holy Spirit.**

Born of Water and the Spirit – 3:5-8

Jesus continued to add depth and clarity to His first statement. His expanded explanation begins with a defining truth: “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.”

2. Rising opposition: John 2:18

3. Misunderstanding: John 2:19-21; 3:3-4; 4:10-11, 32-33; 6:32-33

Born of Water

“Water” has been understood in various ways.

Physical birth: This interpretation points to physical birth. Obviously to be saved, you first must be born. However, it seems unlikely Jesus would emphasize such an obvious fact with His hallmark introduction to crucial truth: “Very truly I tell you.”

Water baptism: Challenges exist with this interpretation. An outward action or ritual cannot produce new, spiritual life.¹ Rather the Holy Spirit imparts new spiritual life as only God can.² God commands water baptism but as an outward sign of this inward reality.

God’s Word: Throughout Scripture, water often represents the cleansing, life-giving power of God’s Word through the power of the Holy Spirit.³ Jesus declared His disciples clean “because of the word I have spoken to you.”⁴ Paul said Christ gave Himself up for the church “to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.”⁵ Peter likened believers’ purity, obedience, and love for one another with being “born again ... through the living and enduring word of God.”⁶

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1. **Outward signs:** Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 2:15-16; 5:1-6
 2. **Spirit gives life:** Job 33:4; Ezekiel 36:26-28; Galatians 6:8; 1 Peter 3:18
 3. **Life-giving Word:** Deuteronomy 32:2; Isaiah 55:10-11; John 4:10; 7:37-39
 4. **Cleansing Word:** John 15:3
 5. **Cleansed church:** Ephesians 5:26
 6. **Purifying truth:** 1 Peter 1:22-23

Born of the Spirit

Jesus explained the difference between being born of flesh and the Spirit.

Being born of “flesh” points to physical birth in a physical body, which includes our will, thoughts, and emotions. **Humanity’s fall in Eden left all flesh subject to temptation, weakness, sin, and death.**⁴ Though Jesus descended from heaven to be born in the flesh through a human mother,⁵ He is the only sinless person to ever live. Therefore, Jesus alone could offer the only appropriate sacrifice to pay for the sin of humankind.

Being born of “the Spirit” refers to new birth by the Holy Spirit, who indwells all who believe in Jesus as Savior. **Only God can give spiritual life, which allows a sinner to be born again as a new creation in Christ.**⁶ In this regenerated state, God gives His redeemed children a new will to live for Him. The Holy Spirit enables those who become a new creation in Christ to “see” God’s kingdom. With God-given spiritual eyesight, believers understand that God has rescued them from their sinful state and delivered them “into the kingdom of the Son he loves.”⁷ The Spirit gives believers eternal life and an unending relationship with God that cannot be reversed, even by physical death.⁸

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4. **Fall:** Genesis 3
 5. **Word became flesh:** John 1:14
 6. **New creation:** 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10
 7. **Rescued:** Colossians 1:13
 8. **Eternal security:** John 10:27-29

Jesus compared the Spirit with the wind, an unseen but observable expression of nature.

Those born of the Spirit recognize His leading. In both Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the Bible, the word for spirit is also the word for wind. The Holy Spirit is as refreshing as a cool breeze on a hot day.

The Fulfilled Promise – 3:9-15

Spiritual Ignorance – 3:9

Despite his vast knowledge of the Old Testament, Nicodemus remained perplexed. Unable to grasp Jesus’s disconcerting words and seemingly challenged for a meaningful response, Nicodemus simply asked, “How can this be?”

“What We Know” – 3:10-11

Despite his extensive learning, Nicodemus remained blinded by unbelief. Jesus marveled that Israel’s teacher failed to understand what Scripture plainly promised and that Jesus came to fulfill. By contrast, Jesus’s first disciples—unschooled fishermen—immediately left their livelihoods to follow Him.⁹ Their first encounter with Jesus resulted in belief in Him as the Messiah. Nicodemus questioned who Jesus is, whereas the disciples accepted Jesus with childlike faith.¹⁰

Jesus exposed the root of Nicodemus’s confusion—a refusal to believe. The plural “we” in Jesus’s statement regarding those who know and see likely includes His Father and the Holy Spirit as well as those who already believed. Faithful followers such as John the Baptist and Jesus’s disciples recognized God’s glory in Jesus. Conversely the Jewish leaders, including Nicodemus, witnessed Jesus’s authority but refused to believe.

Divine Authority – 3:12-13

Belief in Jesus, the one God sent, is the only way to know and understand heavenly truth. **As their conversation continued, so did Jesus’s call for Nicodemus to believe.** Jesus, the Son of Man, came from heaven to reveal eternal truth. He challenged Nicodemus to acknowledge His divine authority and accept Him as the promised Messiah. Jesus taught with authority. He alone came from heaven to declare truth about Himself and His kingdom.¹¹

The Cross to Come – 3:14-15

Reaching back to an Old Testament text that would have been familiar to Nicodemus, Jesus offered a tremendous revelation—the redemptive work of the cross. Responding to His people’s rebellion in the wilderness, God brought a plague of poisonous snakes.¹² The dying Israelites asked Moses to pray. God commanded Moses to make a bronze snake which illustrated the sting of sin and death. As the snake was lifted on a pole, God promised He would heal anyone bitten who looked at the snake. **This miraculous physical deliverance received by looking at the snake pointed to Jesus and His defeat of death on the cross, a demonstration of God’s mercy for humanity.**

9. **Followed the Messiah:** Matthew 4:18-22; John 1:41, 49

10. **Childlike faith:** Luke 18:17

11. **Witness to the Father:** John 1:18

12. **Plague of snakes:** Numbers 21:6-9

Jesus told Nicodemus that He, the only Son of God, came to take our sin, death, and punishment. He would be lifted up like the snake.¹³ The Israelites who obeyed God's Word in faith and looked at the snake lived. **All who look by faith to Jesus, who bore sin's punishment on the cross, receive eternal life.** Because of Jesus's sacrifice, believers do not face eternal punishment but live as God's beloved children by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

The words "so the Son of Man must be lifted up" point first to the cross and also look ahead to Jesus's ascension into glory as the Son of Man and Son of God.¹⁵ **To receive eternal life by faith is to see Christ uplifted and dying for you on the cross and now ascended into heaven alive forevermore.** "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to [Him]".¹⁶ He is our Lord and our Savior, equal with God the Father.

✦ Jesus Alone Brings Salvation – John 3:16-21

God chose to save us because He loves us. Willingly and obediently, Jesus Christ took on flesh, casting His light in our dark world. He came to die in our place so we might live with Him forever. God is love. God is light. God is our salvation.

The Love Gift: Jesus – 3:16

At this point the dialogue with Nicodemus seems to stop, and John writes words that crystallize and summarize Jesus's amazing message. The wonder contained in this well-loved verse can be lost in its familiarity. **Out of His great love, the Father willingly offered His only Son to die on the cross as an atonement for our sin.**¹⁷ God's own Son suffered so that eternal life and joy would be available to all who believed. Had God's love for humanity been less or had there been another way, God never would have sent His Son to die. Those who receive God's love gift of Jesus receive life for all eternity.

When people truly believe in Jesus, they have everlasting life now and have "crossed over from death to life."¹⁸ Believing this, we can live with confidence in Jesus's profound promise: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand."¹⁹

No Condemnation – 3:17

Jesus came to earth to redeem, not condemn, humanity. **Jesus came to make salvation possible.**²⁰

Death without Him – 3:18

Like two sides of the same coin, salvation for all who believe means judgment for those who do not. All people are like sheep, prone to stray and destined to perish.²¹ Many people joke

13. **Jesus took our sin:** Isaiah 52:13–53:12; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24

14. **Salvation:** John 5:24; Romans 8:1, 14-17

15. **Jesus's ascension:** Acts 2:33; 5:31; Philippians 2:9

16. **Jesus's authority:** Matthew 28:18

17. **Atonement:** John 10:11; 15:13

18. **Crossed over to life:** John 3:36; 5:24

19. **Eternal life:** John 10:28

20. **Savior:** 1 Timothy 4:10

21. **Like sheep:** Isaiah 53:6

about or reject the idea of hell. However the reality of hell does not change because someone dismisses the idea. Jesus's frequent warnings and the teaching of Scripture make judgment in hell and the dreadful face of eternal punishment clear.²²

To refuse to believe and receive God's gift means to receive the "second death."²³ Hell represents the eternal, conscious torment that results from rejecting Christ. Just as Scripture describes the incomprehensible beauty and blessing of God's eternal kingdom,²⁴ the reality of hell is far worse than we can fathom.²⁵

Light Versus Darkness – 3:19-21

Jesus brings light into this darkened world. Those who reject Jesus love darkness, sin, and rebellion against God. **Only Jesus delivers people from the sin so deeply rooted within us.** He brings people out of darkness and into the light of His love. A desire for Jesus and His power in your life indicates that you truly seek God and His goodness and light. John's Gospel does not record Nicodemus's response to the truth about salvation that Jesus presented. Later when the Sanhedrin attacked Jesus, Nicodemus called for patience in giving Jesus a hearing.²⁶ And after Jesus's death, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus's body off the cross and wrapped Him in spices and linen in accordance with the Jewish burial customs.²⁷ Many believe that Nicodemus responded to Jesus's offer of salvation after this encounter but before Jesus's crucifixion.

✦ John the Baptist Exalts Jesus – John 3:22-36

Disciples' Concern – 3:22-26

After His encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus left Jerusalem for the province of Judea where John the Baptist continued to call people to repent and be baptized. During this time, Jesus baptized people as well. **Earlier, Jesus personally identified with us through His own baptism by John.**²⁸

John the Baptist's disciples saw his influence waning as Jesus's popularity grew. The thought of another teacher siphoning people from the godly man they loved, admired, and followed concerned them. They took their complaint directly to their leader.

God's people are not immune from shortsighted envy and its divisive results. Paul admonished the church at Corinth for their contentious alignment around their preferences.²⁹ Jesus Himself would admonish His disciples for lobbying for positions of prominence.³⁰ John the Baptist could easily have felt neglected or forgotten as the spotlight shifted to Jesus, who seemingly owed much to John the Baptist for introducing Him to the world.

22. **Eternal punishment:** Matthew 7:13; 11:24; 18:6, 8; Luke 16:19-31; John 3:36

23. **Second death:** Revelation 20:14-15

24. **Eternal kingdom:** Revelation 21-22

25. **Reality of hell:** Matthew 13:42, 49-50; 25:41; John 8:24

26. **Nicodemus calls for hearing:** John 7:50-51

27. **Burial customs:** John 19:39-40

28. **Jesus's baptism:** Matthew 3:13-17; John 1:31-34

29. **Believers' preferences:** 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

30. **Seeking prominence:** Matthew 18:1; 20:20-22

From the Darkness of Death to the Light of Life

The Doctrine of Salvation

Nicodemus did not realize he was a man in need of Jesus's salvation. Nicodemus and all people enter the world as sinners deserving death. Jesus, our only hope, died in our place.

As we are born again through faith in Jesus Christ, we receive God's gift of salvation. The sins for which Jesus died will never rise to accuse or haunt believers again.¹

Salvation in Christ brings freedom from sin's penalty, power, and presence. Sin results in death:² physical death and spiritual death—eternal condemnation by God and separation from Him. Through His death on the cross, Jesus bore sin's death penalty for all who place their faith in Him. Salvation from sin's power describes the present dimension of salvation. The Holy Spirit works within a believer to recognize and overcome sin in daily life.³ This gradual victory over sin's power will not be complete until we are glorified. Although we still struggle on earth with sin's pull and power, all Christians anticipate a future day when Jesus ushers in a new creation and they are forever delivered from sin's presence.⁴

To ignore or reject Jesus's gift of salvation means you must bear sin's penalty and live under its present bondage without hope of eternal deliverance. If Jesus does not pay the price for your sin, you must bear that burden yourself. Purpose in life and assurance regarding eternity rest on Jesus Christ and His gift of love. Without faith in Jesus's atoning sacrifice and resurrection life, the grave beckons without hope.

God did not ignore our perilous state as sinners but sent His own Son to die a death He did not deserve to give us life we could not earn. Because of Jesus, believers face the challenges of life and the certainty of physical death with unquenchable hope. Sin's cost is paid. Sin's tyranny is broken. Sin's stranglehold will end. The glory of Christ and the wonder of His love bring a heart of humility and gratitude for such an indescribable gift. Jesus came to earth so we could walk in the light with Him. What a wonderful Savior!

1. **Sin forgiven:** Psalm 103:11-12; Isaiah 38:17; Jeremiah 31:34

2. **Sin's wages:** Romans 6:23

3. **Overcoming sin's power:** Romans 6; 8:1-17; Philippians 2:13; Colossians 1:13-14.

4. **Sin's presence removed:** Revelation 21:1-8

John the Baptist's Reply – 3:27-30

John the Baptist's wise and humble reply proves his godliness, surrender, and God's purpose for all believers. **He recognized the truth: It's all about Jesus.**

John the Baptist contentedly focused on the work God had given him.³¹ He repeatedly confirmed that he was not the Messiah.³² He rejoiced when Jesus, the Bridegroom, made Himself known.³³ John the Baptist remained clear about his place and purpose—God called him to point and make way for the One who came to save.

31. **Believer's purpose:** Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 12:2

32. **Not the Messiah:** John 1:19-20

33. **The Bridegroom:** Matthew 3:1-17; Mark 1:4-11; John 1:29-34

John the Baptist felt utter delight when people left him to follow Jesus because he saw the visible fruit of his obedient, God-honoring labor. **John the Baptist rejoiced that God had sent him to point others to Jesus, the Bridegroom.** His role was to be a friend who brings to the Bridegroom the bride—God’s people, the church. What a friend John the Baptist had in Jesus!

John the Baptist closed with an inspiring statement that should challenge us—“He must become greater; I must become less.” **His deepest desire was for Jesus to become greater.** If you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, is this your life’s goal? Seeking a following represents a true temptation. There is no higher calling than leading others to Jesus.

The Greatness of Jesus – 3:31-36

Four Qualities – 3:31-35

Four distinct qualities set our Lord Jesus Christ apart from John the Baptist.

- **Jesus’s origin – 3:31:** Jesus was and is above all. Jesus is from heaven; John is from earth.
- **Jesus’s insight – 3:32:** Jesus declared what He had seen and heard in heaven. John the Baptist’s knowledge, while inspired by the Holy Spirit, was limited. “No one accepts his testimony” refers to most people in John the Baptist’s day and, sadly, in our day. Counter to the world’s thinking, John the Baptist accepted God’s Word as true. Still he had only partial knowledge.
- **Jesus’s truthfulness – 3:33:** Jesus spoke the very words of God. All that Jesus says is true. Jesus brings the “last word” of God.³⁴
- **The Holy Spirit without limit – 3:34-35:** John the Baptist ministered in the Holy Spirit’s power, but Jesus alone baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Though fully God, Jesus lived as a man indwelt by the Holy Spirit without limit. The Father placed all things in the hands of Jesus, His only, beloved Son.

Eternal Life – 3:36

This chapter ends with a resounding conclusion: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.” One of two destinies awaits every person. God’s wrath remains suspended over everyone who does not turn to Christ for salvation. God’s Word could not be clearer, and His gift could not be more glorious. He wipes away the debt and shame of sin. **Jesus gives light and new life to those who believe in Him.**

✦ Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Nicodemus approached Jesus in the dark and was exposed to the Light of the World. In His dialogue with this inquisitive Pharisee, Jesus outlined for all believers the necessity of being born again to see the kingdom of God. No mere wise and righteous teacher, Jesus is God in

³⁴. Last word: Hebrews 1:1-3

the flesh. Through faith in Jesus, believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit and promised an eternal relationship with God beginning immediately and continuing into the heavenly kingdom.

To believe in Christ is to believe He is the Son of God. This is what you were created for. To believe in Jesus is to lean on Him, love Him, and flourish in His light.

John the Baptist loved Jesus. God gave him the role and privilege of introducing Jesus to the world. John the Baptist did not feel slighted by taking a secondary role but fulfilled His God-given purpose with contentment and joy. He never sought to collect disciples for himself.

John the Baptist modeled Jesus's call to all His followers—to share the gospel with the world and make disciples of all nations.³⁵

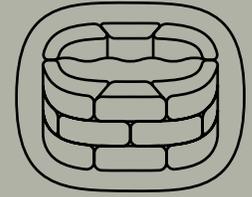
Apply It

Nicodemus, a well-educated and admired leader, lived a morally upright life. Yet he remained a sinner in need of the Savior. He sought out Jesus with curious questions. What questions do you have for Jesus? How do the words “you must be born again” speak to you? If you are uncertain about the idea of new birth, will you pour out your questions to God? Faith is not a leap in the dark but reasonable trust in eternal truth. Today God calls you to step into the light of His truth—questions and all! **How might you allow the Lord to provide necessary answers as you trust Him?** If you know Jesus by faith already, then rejoice in what you have received—forgiveness and new life—as an amazing eternal gift from God.

Jesus spoke the truth to Nicodemus—no one may enter God's kingdom unless they are born of water and the Spirit. **God gives everlasting life through His Word and the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit.** Today many people of the world and even in our churches, believe if they behave well, they will earn God's favor. At the same time, these same people hesitate to give complete allegiance to Jesus. Jesus knows the hearts of all people—those who truly seek Him and those who do not. Nicodemus was curious enough to seek Jesus out but not courageous enough to walk into the light at that moment. What do you risk in following Jesus? Where do you take your questions or concerns? Go to the source of truth and perfect wisdom. The world is full of people who “stand condemned” and will perish unless they know and believe in Jesus. Jesus came not to condemn the world but to save us. If you have questions, who will you speak with regarding salvation? Will you ask God to guide you as you tell others about the salvation that comes only through God's Son?

John the Baptist's example of humility and surrender should inspire us. How easy it is to seek the attention and favor of others and to desire our fame more than God's glory. John the Baptist stepped up to obey God and stepped back to exalt Jesus. In what ways do you struggle to achieve that balance? Denying self remains a constant battle, even as we seek to serve the Lord. How willing are you to serve God and others in ways people seldom notice? How bold are you to step up and speak out when doing so risks the criticism of others? **Pointing to Jesus represents the greatest privilege we can experience.** How willing are you to shine the light on the Light of the World? The giver of life is worthy of the wholehearted devotion of our lives.

35. **Make disciples:** Matthew 28:18-20



Jesus's Witness in Samaria

LESSON
SCRIPTURE
JOHN 4:1-30

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 4 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What fresh thought or perspective about new birth in Christ from last week's notes or group discussion stirred your thinking or encouraged you?

2. How did a thought from the lecture expand your thinking or deepen your love for Jesus?

Second Day: Read John 4:1-9.

Traveling through Samaria, Jesus encountered a woman at a well.

3. Read 2 Kings 17:24-41 and Ezra 4:1-5. What facts about the Samaritans help explain why the Jews did not associate with them?

7. a. How did the woman show both belief and unbelief in John 4:15? What did Jesus say that specified her immediate problem?

- b. In what ways has Jesus led you to recognize your own most urgent need? (See also 1 John 1:8-10.)

Fourth Day: Read John 4:19-26.

Jesus revealed Himself as the Messiah to the Samaritan woman.

8. What difference between the way the Samaritans and the Jews worshiped did the woman note in verses 19 and 20? Why might she have raised this point?

9. a. How did Jesus identify Himself with the Jews and God's revelation to them?

- b. What does this truth say about the importance of the Old Testament for believers today?

10. a. What kind of worshiper does God seek? (See also Romans 12:1.)

- b. How might you worship God in this way?

Lesson 5 Notes

John 4:1-30

Focus Verse

"But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:14)

Outline

- A Divine Appointment – John 4:1-6
- A Life-Altering Conversation – John 4:7-26
- A Transformed Woman – John 4:27-30

Engage

Everyone seeks satisfaction. Our hearts are bottomless pits of discontent. Whether we admit it or not, we desperately strive for relief from the restless void that lurks deep within. Children often seek satisfaction in new toys, friends, or parental approval. As we grow up, we pursue fulfillment through education, popularity, or athletic achievements. As adults, we think a bigger house, more money, a better job, or a healthier body will finally quench our thirst and ease our fears of not measuring up. But inevitably, we find ourselves disappointed, disillusioned, and exhausted. Yet we seek more. Where does true satisfaction lie?

Ministering to people, Jesus moved from a private evening conversation with a puzzled, pious Jewish man to a tender midday appointment with a sinful, shunned Samaritan woman. Carrying fear and shame along with her water jug, this woman encountered Jesus. He engaged her in conversation to gently expose her sin and offer a powerful solution. He invited her to drink from His spring of living water that would quench her every thirst and never run dry. Jesus offers this same living water to all who come to Him. **Only Jesus can fully satisfy our deepest longings.** Nothing in this world will ever be enough. Those who seek fulfillment in Christ experience freedom and fellowship with Him. By the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit, Jesus transforms lives. He enables His people to worship God genuinely in spirit and truth.

✦ A Divine Appointment – John 4:1-6

John recorded the second of three successive, life-changing encounters Jesus had with individuals:

- Nicodemus the Pharisee (3:1-21)

- Samaritan woman (4:1-30)
- Gentile official (4:43-54)

Though Nicodemus did not respond immediately, each of these spiritually thirsty people became a witness to Jesus. Individually, each encountered the source of abundant life and eternal satisfaction.¹ **Each represents people Jesus came to seek and save—the Jew, the Samaritan, and the Gentile.** Jesus would later command His disciples to follow this pattern in their Great Commission—to witness “in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”²

From Judea – 4:1-3

After His nighttime meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus traveled south with His disciples from Jerusalem to the Judean countryside. The Pharisees’ hostility toward Jesus steadily grew as they observed His ministry. The fact that Jesus’s disciples were baptizing more people than John the Baptist did not escape the Pharisees’ attention and caused them grave concern. **Because His rising popularity would soon provoke direct conflict with the current religious establishment, Jesus led His disciples out of Judea toward Galilee to avoid a premature confrontation.**

Through Samaria – 4:4

Though Israel was only 120 miles (190 km) from north to south, the land was divided into three territories. The province of Samaria lay between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north. The shortest travel route between Jerusalem and Galilee passed through Samaria. **Jews, however, often took the six-day journey around Samaria—across the Jordan River and east through Perea.**

Why would Jewish travelers take this detour? **Bitter distrust and conflict had long separated Jews and Samaritans.** Their fierce rivalry stretched back more than 700 years to the days of the Assyrian Empire. Assyria crushed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, taking captive and deporting most of the population. To replace the exiled Israelites, Assyria forcibly resettled peoples from other conquered lands in Samaria.³ The Israelite population who remained intermarried with imported Gentile settlers in direct violation of God’s command.⁴ Their descendants combined the worship of other gods with a confused belief in the God of Israel.⁵ This represents the Jewish version of the origin of the Samaritan people, while the Samaritans tell a different story. Traveling Israelites would cross back over the Jordan toward Galilee to avoid the “contamination” of Samaria.

Samaritans accepted only the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch) as authoritative Scripture. Centuries before, when Jewish exiles returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, the Samaritans’ offer to help rebuild God’s temple was rejected.⁶ Later, around 110 BC, the Jewish king John Hyrcanus attacked Samaria and burned down the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. A century later, during the period of Roman rule in Judea, a group of Samaritans defiled the Jerusalem temple with bones of dead people.⁷

1. **Life in His Name:** John 20:31
 2. **Great Commission:** Acts 1:8
 3. **Samaria settlement:** 2 Kings 17:24-34
 4. **Intermarriage:** Deuteronomy 7:3-5
 5. **Mixed faith:** 2 Kings 17:41
 6. **Opposed temple:** Ezra 4:1-5
 7. Josephus, Antiquities 18.2.2 §22

With this history in mind, Jesus seems to deliberately take the direct route to Galilee through Samaria. When we read, “Now he *had to go* through Samaria” (emphasis added), we sense the Lord had a predetermined appointment. **Jesus broke with the bitterness of history out of divine necessity.** He intentionally bypassed centuries of hostility to reach a despised and discontented woman to whom He would extend a gift of love.⁸

Jacob’s Well – 4:5-6

Jesus’s route through Samaria followed the ridge of land that passed by Sychar, the location of Jacob’s Well. Scholars today identify two possible locations for the village of Sychar: ancient Shechem at the foot of Mount Gerizim, or modern-day Askar on the slope of Mount Ebal. Scripture does not record Jacob digging this particular well, but Shechem was where the patriarch Jacob first bought land in Canaan.⁹ Jacob seems to have included this land in his deathbed gift to his son Joseph. When God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites brought Joseph’s bones with them and buried his bones at Shechem.¹⁰ A well more than 100 feet (30 meters) deep can still be seen at this spot.

Jesus and His disciples arrived at the well at midday when the heat was most intense. **Exhausted from His long journey, Jesus needed physical refreshment.** So He sat by Jacob’s

8. Love: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8
 9. Jacob’s land: Genesis 33:18-19

Jesus Meets Us Where We Are

In John 3 and 4, Jesus encounters two vastly different people, demonstrating His love and desire for all He meets to know and believe in Him.

Nicodemus	Samaritan Woman
Came to Jesus at night	Conversation at midday
Initiated conversation with Jesus	Conversation initiated by Jesus
Thorough knowledge of Scripture	Knew Samaritans’ mixed religion
Fully Jewish	Despised Jews
Moral and religious	Five failed relationships; living with man outside marriage
Highly respected man	Outcast woman
Rich and influential	Poor and powerless
Named	Nameless
Slow to believe and receive	Quick to believe and receive
Honored Jesus later	Confessed and shared her faith in Jesus immediately

10. Joseph’s burial: Joshua 24:32

Well. While the disciples went into the nearest town to buy food, Jesus set the stage for His interaction with a spiritually thirsty and emotionally weary woman.

✦ A Life-Altering Conversation – John 4:7-26

Jesus's exchange with this Samaritan woman is the Lord's longest recorded conversation in the Gospel accounts. **Jesus loves to pursue human hearts.** In this encounter, Jesus probes into the heart of the Samaritan woman, inviting her to see what she truly desired—the "living water" that only He provides.

Developing a Relationship – 4:7-9

Taking the Initiative – 4:7-8

While the disciples were in town, the woman arrived at the well. **Drawing water at noon, the hottest time of the day, was unusual.** Water's necessity for daily chores led local women to gather early each day at the well where they could enjoy conversations with one another. Perhaps this woman came later to avoid encountering her peers.

Imagine this woman's surprise when she observed Jesus sitting at the well. As a Jewish rabbi, Jesus would most likely have withdrawn 20-30 feet from the well to indicate His permission for her to approach. Men did not usually converse with women publicly. Certainly no Jewish man dared to speak to a Samaritan woman. **Cultural limitations did not limit Jesus.** Instead He took the initiative to speak with her.

"Will you give me a drink?" asked Jesus, who was tired, thirsty, and in need of a cup of cool water. **Jesus's desire to meet this woman's deeper need mattered more than His thirst.** Jesus knows the hearts of all people.¹¹ Jesus saw a wounded heart and the unsatisfied thirst of this woman's soul.

By asking for water, Jesus placed Himself in her care. Our Lord was thoughtful, unselfish, empathetic, understanding, and humble as He sought to win the confidence of this lonely woman.

Woman's Reply – 4:9

Surprised that Jesus would speak to her, this woman replied, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" **The Lord deliberately broke down manmade cultural barriers and began His divine process of softening this woman's heart.**

Introduction to Living Water – 4:10-12

Jesus's request spurred the woman's interest, if not her confidence. She likely did not realize His intent to awaken her desire for what she desperately needed. **With patience and love, Jesus progressively revealed Himself as the giver of soul-satisfying living water.**

11. Knows hearts: John 2:25

Jesus's Offer – 4:10

Four points stand out in Jesus's offer of "living water":

- Living water is God's gift.
- Living water is tied to Jesus's identity.
- Living water is available to those who ask.
- Jesus gladly gives living water.

The woman still saw Jesus as an ordinary man. Jesus graciously revealed His true identity to her. **She needed to recognize Him as the Messiah.** Only Jesus can give God's gift of living water to those who ask.

Living water refers to fresh, flowing spring water, rather than the still, stagnant water in a cistern. In the Old Testament, God said, "They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."¹²

Jesus's offer of living water includes the Holy Spirit, who gives eternal life.¹³ The Holy Spirit indwells all who receive Jesus, producing an inner spring of joy that continually renews and satisfies the heart of the true believer.

Woman's Reply – 4:11-12

The woman's reply reveals that her mind remained fixed on the impracticality of Jesus drawing fresh water from a 100-foot (30-meter) deep well. **Jesus seemed to offer the impossible.**

As if uncertain how to respond, she blurted out, "Are you greater than our father, Jacob?" Did her comment express an accusative or defensive reply? **Perhaps the woman's thoughts turned toward the promise accepted by the Samaritans that God would send a prophet like Moses—one who could produce water out of a rock.**

Divine Satisfaction – 4:13-15

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. **Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**"

Temporary Satisfaction – 4:13

Ordinary water cannot permanently satisfy. Earthly pleasures can only temporarily quench thirst, and emptiness soon returns. This woman's unhappy life left her emotionally thirsty and continually unsatisfied. **Without God, earthly gifts come up empty.**

12. **Living water:** Jeremiah 2:13; Zechariah 14:8

13. **Holy Spirit:** John 6:63; 7:37-39

Eternal Satisfaction – 4:14

Jesus's words reach beyond this woman to us. **To drink the living water Jesus promises means He meets our deepest inmost needs.** Through faith in Jesus, we find true love, peace, joy, and meaning. Jesus satisfies our soul's deepest thirst immediately and eternally.

Inevitable trials come to every person. **Believers find that God's gift of living water produces profound contentment and peace in Him no matter what life brings.** As we trust Him, we gain unshakeable confidence in His wise and loving purposes, even in our darkest hours.¹⁴

Desire for Satisfaction – 4:15

This woman's reply represents another example of people misunderstanding Jesus by being too literal.¹⁵ She missed the spiritual symbolism of the living water. However, Jesus, always patient, continued to probe and stir within her a desire for continual satisfaction. **As Jesus continued to unfold His revelation of Himself, she began to want what Jesus offered and asked for this gift.**

Conviction of Sin – 4:16-18

Confronting the Truth – 4:16

Always the Great Physician,¹⁶ Jesus gently opened a wound in this woman's heart so His divine healing could begin. "Go," Jesus said, "call your husband." **Conviction of sin is the first step in receiving living water from Jesus.**

Partial Confession – 4:17a

"I have no husband," she replied. Imagine the tension and likely shame this woman might have felt. Yet the man standing before her came not to condemn but to save.¹⁷ She gave a truthful but incomplete answer—the man with whom she was living was not her husband. **Jesus would expose her situation, shining His light on what she attempted to conceal.**

Jesus's Full Knowledge – 4:17b-18

Jesus knows our hearts—He understands our hurts and comprehends our sin. In the wake of five failed relationships, this woman likely felt hopeless. Resigned to failure and scorn, she may have seen no other choice than to live with a man out of wedlock.

Rather than condemn, Jesus called her to see her sin and her true state from God's perspective. In compassion, Jesus revealed He knew her completely. The secrets of her heart were open to Him.¹⁸ Jesus's words did not scold or condemn but offered hope. Jesus loved this woman deeply. **Knowing the worst, Jesus would offer His best.**

14. **Contentment:** Romans 8:28; Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:6; Hebrews 13:5

15. **Misunderstanding:** John 2:19-22; 3:4

16. **Great Physician:** Mark 2:17

17. **Save not condemn:** John 3:17

18. **Knows our hearts:** 1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 44:21; 1 Corinthians 14:25; Hebrews 4:12-13

One Worthy of Worship – 4:19-24

Misplaced Worship – 4:19-20

This woman recognized Jesus as a prophet but would discover He is so much more. Was she repenting or changing the topic because Jesus was so close to seeing her deepest hurts? Either way, her shift in the conversation allowed Jesus to continue to offer hope.

Like eyes adjusting from deep darkness to dazzling light, this woman could not yet fully comprehend everything about Jesus. The only religion she had known mixed false religions and an abridged version of the Old Testament. Samaritans believed their own version of history that revised some facts. Their altered beliefs elevated themselves over the hated Jews and their own Mount Gerizim over the temple in Jerusalem.

The temple of God is built within the hearts of those indwelt by the Holy Spirit, enabling His people to worship in Spirit and truth.

True Worship – 4:21-24

Jesus cited the past, present, and glorious future. He revealed the profound impact of living water. **A time would come when all who believe—Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles—would worship the one true God in Spirit and in truth.**

A Prophecy – 4:21

God symbolically dwelled in Jerusalem's temple. **Jesus promised that a time would come when there would no longer be one place of worship.** All the symbolism of the temple, especially the sacrifices, pointed toward God's Son.¹⁹ Jesus's sacrifice on the cross provided the only way to renewed fellowship with God.²⁰

God's Revelation in the Old Testament – 4:22

As He continued, Jesus corrected the woman's wrong assumptions. He addressed the false worship of the Samaritans—no small matter. Jesus stated, "You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews." **God first revealed Himself to the Jews and through the Old Testament.** And through the Jews came the promised Messiah.

Worship in Spirit and Truth – 4:23-24

Salvation would come first through the Jews but would not be restricted to them.²¹ Jesus repeated the phrase "a time is coming." But here He added, "and has now come." **Jesus's presence merged the past and the future, offering to all the world full entry into His kingdom through faith in Him.** Jesus's perfect life, atoning crucifixion, and death-defying resurrection and ascension inaugurated the eternal life He promised. The Holy Spirit would be poured into believers.²² This same Spirit now lives permanently within all who receive Jesus.²³ As Jesus foretold, no temple currently stands in Jerusalem.²⁴ The temple of God is built within the hearts of those indwelt by the Holy Spirit,²⁵ enabling His people to worship in Spirit and truth.

19. **Temple sacrifices:** Deuteronomy 12:11, 13-14; 16:5-6; 1 Kings 12:25-30; Hebrews 9

20. **Only way:** John 14:6; Romans 5:1-2

21. **First the Jews:** Romans 1:16

22. **Spirit poured out:** Acts 2:1-4, 33; 10:45

23. **Sealed by the Holy Spirit:** Ephesians 1:13

24. **Jerusalem temple:** Matthew 24:2

25. **Temple of the heart:** 1 Corinthians 3:16

Transformed into New Life

The Doctrine of Redemption

The Samaritan woman lived an empty life carrying an empty jar. Then she encountered Jesus—the One who offers life to the full. Enslaved by her sin and seeking fleeting satisfaction, this outcast woman’s life seemed to offer little value in a broken world. Yet Jesus found this woman precious in His sight, and He graciously gave of His time, His love, and His life. **Like this woman, all people are broken by sin and ripe for redemption.**

The term “redemption” comes from the ancient world of commerce where enslaved people were bought and sold. **Jesus has purchased, or redeemed us, from sin’s slavery.** Jesus died in our place. His blood frees us from sin’s penalty and power—and ultimately sin’s presence. He transforms our lives, declaring us righteous in His sight.

The Old Testament story of Hosea’s purchase of Gomer exemplifies this transaction.¹ In the New Testament, Peter advances this truth in 1 Peter 1:18-19: “It was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” **At the moment of our redemption, we become Christ’s possession.**² We are redeemed *from* our empty lives and *for* belonging to Jesus.

Failure to accept Christ’s redemption leads to an empty life void of God’s forgiveness and unable to experience God’s love or wisdom. Those who refuse Christ’s sacrifice remain under God’s wrath and will live separated from God forever.³

Understanding the price Christ paid for our redemption magnifies His grace for sinners. God did not abandon us to our helpless estate.⁴ **Only through faith in God’s Son, Jesus Christ, can our lives be redeemed and transformed.** The Holy Spirit seals and indwells believers, who are reborn into a new life and can live a life filled with joy even in the most difficult circumstances. God’s children live as salt and light on earth,⁵ sharing the good news of the gospel. The redeemed are assured they will worship in God’s presence forever.

1. **Hosea and Gomer:** Hosea 3:1-2

2. **Christ’s possession:** Romans 6:22-23; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 1:7

3. **Eternal separation:** Mark 16:16; John 3:18, 36; 5:28-29; 8:24; 15:6; Revelation 21:8

4. **God did not abandon us:** John 3:16-18

5. **Salt and light:** Matthew 5:13-16

Meet the Messiah – 4:25-26

Woman’s Desire – 4:25

The woman confessed longingly, “I know that Messiah ... is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” **Though not Jewish, this woman knew the Messiah was also meant for her.** After Jesus had dug a well in this woman’s heart, she revealed her real need. Jesus would reveal the real answer.

Revelation of Jesus – 4:26

“I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” **Sometimes the simplest words carry the deepest meaning.** The Messiah—the Savior of the world, God’s only Son, the perfect Lamb—revealed Himself to this broken, previously hopeless, lonely outcast from a small village of an idolatrous nation. She was met and understood by Jesus. Through this unexpected, unconventional encounter, this woman believed and trusted the Light of the World.

A Transformed Woman – John 4:27-30

Disciples Return – 4:27

Surprised and speechless, the disciples returned with their groceries. Yet no one asked what they all wondered. **Why was Jesus, a Jew, speaking to someone who was both a Samaritan and a woman?** Confused, the disciples remained unaware that this woman would soon join their cause in telling the world about Jesus. Jesus came for anyone and everyone who would believe in Him.

New Possession – 4:28-29

This woman approached the well for physical refreshment. She left with so much more! She encountered Jesus, her Savior. His boundless gift of eternal refreshment was not hers alone but meant to be shared. **Like the first disciples who followed Jesus, she left behind what she had.** As if on wings, she hurried to tell others the good news, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”

People’s Response – 4:30

Filled with effusive joy, this woman’s message must have overflowed with profoundly convincing truth.²⁶ The same townspeople who considered her an outcast ran to meet the only One who could satisfy their thirst. **Only Jesus can fully satisfy our deepest longings.** The curious townspeople who headed to that Samaritan well found Jesus waiting, prepared to give them all they truly needed.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

After His nighttime encounter with Nicodemus, the respected Pharisee, Jesus chose to travel through the forbidden territory of Samaria. By a well in the heat of the noonday, He met an outcast woman. **Jesus pursues all people—both the favored and the forgotten.** A thirst that cannot be satisfied by anything or anyone other than God abides within us. The greatest need of all people is to know Him. Yet Jesus comes to us, and He comes *for* us.

26. Overflow of the heart: Matthew 12:34

Jesus shows us that we remain thirsty, like the Samaritan woman, when we search for satisfaction apart from Him. **Our sin and this world's pleasures cannot satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts.** In loving grace and with no condemnation, Jesus lifts the cover of our lives to expose our sin and reveal the dissatisfied heart within.

Freed from the burden of our sin, Jesus opens our eyes to new life in Him. **Complete satisfaction lies in Jesus.** In Jesus, the Samaritan woman found true love, compassion, understanding, wisdom, and power. She had a story to tell. This new, overturned, exciting life propelled her from being rejected to telling others of the Messiah.²⁷ The salvation Jesus brings not only deals with sin, it enables redeemed people to walk with God.

Apply It

Do you feel like you never measure up? Who or what has continually failed to meet your expectations? The fragmented relationships, bruised egos, and smeared reputations of this life can paralyze us with disappointment and doubt. **Jesus continues to love us in our brokenness.** He continues to pursue us. Jesus came from heaven into this shattered world to save us. He comes to where we are to reach us as we are. His love cannot be deterred by our sin. How will you turn to the only One who came to redeem our broken lives?

A relentless thirst grips every single person today. The pursuit of wealth, notoriety, possessions, and acclaim leads many to want more and more, only to find that fulfillment escapes them. Jesus alone offers what truly satisfies. Jesus knows we need more than a cool drink of water on a scorching day. **Jesus provides newfound peace and joy in this life and for eternity.** Only in Him can our souls find rest. Where do you find satisfaction—in things of God or things of this world? Turn to Jesus. Ask Him to satisfy you with the living water that springs up into eternal life.

People who respond to Jesus's offer of eternal life have good news to share. The Samaritan woman did not understand everything about Jesus and eternity, but she responded in life-transforming faith to what she did know. She ran to her town and shared what she knew. Jesus welcomes all who turn to Him and transforms those who believe in Him to become salt and light on earth.²⁸ Do you hesitate to talk about Jesus because you are afraid of questions you cannot answer? If you have accepted the living water Jesus Christ offers, *you* have a story to tell. Will you turn to Him and ask to who He is calling you to share His good news? What a privilege!

27. **Witness:** Matthew 28:18-20; John 4:39-40

28. **Salt and light:** Matthew 5:14-16

4.
 - a. In what ways were Jesus's disciples confused by His words?

 - b. What are some works God gives believers to do today? (See also Matthew 6; 28:19-20; Acts 20:24; and any other Scriptures that come to mind.)

5.
 - a. What typically consumes your day-to-day focus and priorities?

 - b. In what ways does God redirect your thinking and priorities to help you align with His purpose for your life?

Third Day: Read John 4:35-38.

Jesus taught His disciples about sowing and reaping His harvest.

6.
 - a. What did Jesus mean when He spoke of the "harvest" in verse 35?

 - b. How did Jesus expand His disciples' vision about the harvest? (See also John 4:28-30.)

7.
 - a. Who is the "sower" and who is the "reaper" in verses 36-38?

 - b. What are the "wages"?

c. What lessons might Christians learn from these verses?

8. In what ways do Jesus's words about the harvest challenge, encourage, or motivate you?

Fourth Day: Read John 4:39-42.

Many Samaritans believed in Jesus.

9. Describe the progression of the spiritual harvest among the Samaritans recorded in these verses.

10. In what way does this response in Samaria reflect God's plan for the world? (See also Acts 1:8; 8:4-8, 12.)

11. a. What do you learn from the testimony of the Samaritan woman?

b. How might God use your personal testimony to reach others with the gospel? With whom could you share today?

Fifth Day: Read John 4:43-54.

Jesus healed a royal official's son.

12. Where did Jesus travel and how was He received by the people there?

13. a. Describe the man who approached Jesus, his situation, and the request he made.

b. How would you explain the way Jesus responded to him?

14. What does this miracle teach you about the way the Lord shows grace and answers prayers?

15. How is God growing your faith today as you wait on Him to answer your most fervent prayer?

Sixth Day: Review John 4:31-54.

Eternal priorities matter more than temporal pleasures.

16. What truth from this lesson stands out as God's clearest message to you this week?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, character study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: John 4:31-54

Next step: Listen to the lecture.

Lesson 6 Notes

John 4:31-54

Focus Verse

“My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” (John 4:34)

Outline

- Feasting on God’s Will – John 4:31-34
- Focusing on God’s Harvest – John 4:35-42
- Finding God’s Healing – John 4:43-54

Engage

We experience this physical world while living in bodies of flesh. The things we see and touch often fully absorb our attention. We plan our next meal and await our next paycheck. We walk, talk, and work as the years pass by. **Daily life can utterly consume our time, energy, and focus.** How do we live in this world *and* figure out what really matters? Surely God intends more for us than an inch-deep focus on this physical world. What helps us see beyond the fleeting and visible to seek and embrace what will last forever?

Throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus sought to raise His followers’ focus from an earthly perspective to a heavenly one. When people limited His words to the physical realm, Jesus expanded and elevated their thinking. Jesus explained spiritual rebirth to Nicodemus, who puzzled over physically reentering his mother’s womb. Jesus offered the Samaritan woman living water, not just liquid water. As John 4 closes, Jesus led His disciples to see beyond physical food to spiritual food. He directed their attention to the spiritual needs of people around them and the eternal satisfaction of doing God’s will. **Eternal priorities matter more than temporal pleasures.** May the Lord lead us to see the world and measure our lives the way He does.

✦ Feasting on God’s Will – John 4:31-34

God sent His Son into the world to reveal His life-giving power to real people. **Through a series of targeted encounters and meaningful conversations, Jesus engaged with people to open their hearts to truth.** He spoke to Nicodemus,¹ the Samaritan woman,² and a father in desperate need.³ These encounters increasingly clarified the truth of Jesus’s identity and power.

1. **Nicodemus:** John 3:1-21

2. **The Samaritan woman:** John 4:1-26

3. **Desperate father:** John 4:46-54

The Disciples' Temporal Mindset – 4:31-33

When the Samaritan woman left, Jesus's disciples implored Him to eat. To their surprise, He replied, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." This perplexed the disciples, who had returned from town with purchased food. Had someone else delivered Jesus a meal? Their focus remained on the literal and physical rather than Jesus's deeper spiritual meaning.⁴ **Jesus sought to move His disciples beyond the realm of grumbling stomachs to grasp something far more important.**

Jesus had just experienced something far more satisfying than any meal. As He spoke with this outcast woman, Jesus saw her heart soften as she absorbed and responded to His invitation. He watched her reach out to receive His gift and become a child of His eternal kingdom. And then, she eagerly shared the good news with others. This woman's budding faith and joyful response brought deep satisfaction to Jesus.

Jesus's Eternal Mindset – 4:34

Having captured His disciples' curiosity, Jesus purposefully trained them. He invited His chosen band of developing leaders to experience the permeating joy of God's eternal work. Jesus would entrust these very men to carry on His commission when He returned to His Father. He told His disciples, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." Jesus approached His earthly ministry as a divine endeavor. He desired to finish victoriously. He lived to accomplish God's will. **Jesus's greatest satisfaction came by accomplishing the very work God sent Him to do.**

Jesus spoke of spiritual sustenance and nourishment that far exceeded the temporary enjoyment afforded by any earthly pleasure. Deep satisfaction came not through what He took in, but what He gave out to others. We often struggle to understand "God's will" for our lives but Jesus did not. He came to earth with specific tasks God willed Him to complete. **Most importantly, Jesus came to die for the sin of humanity—a work He resolutely declared "finished" as He hung on the cross.**⁵ Jesus poured out life and light to many as He set His sights on completing the work God sent Him to accomplish. Pleasing His Father brought Jesus untold fulfillment.

✦ Focusing on God's Harvest – John 4:35-42

God's Harvest Explained – 4:35-38

As Jesus and His disciples traveled, they undoubtedly passed many fields—planted, growing, and awaiting harvest. Jesus again offered a physical illustration to teach deeper spiritual truth. He quoted a common farming proverb, "It's still four months until harvest." **Jesus graciously raised the thinking of His disciples from the expected sequence of a physical harvest to the spiritual harvest God brings in the lives of people.** Farmers prepare the soil, plant seeds, remove

4. **Literal not spiritual:** John 2:19-22; 3:4-12

5. **Finished work:** John 19:30; Hebrews 12:2

weeds, pray for rain, and eventually harvest a crop. In the spiritual realm, God's Word is sown into human hearts.⁶ Sometimes people respond in faith immediately. At other times, God's people wait patiently for a harvest of faith. Jesus wanted His disciples to open their eyes to the spiritual opportunities all around them.

The spiritual seed Jesus planted within the Samaritan woman's heart had already produced a crop ready to harvest. Jesus told His disciples, "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." Perhaps at that moment, men and women streamed out from the town of Sychar to meet the Lord. The Samaritan harvest was ready to reap. In farming the ripeness of the crop creates urgency to reap the harvest. Similarly, God calls believers to recognize both the fleeting nature and constant supply of spiritual opportunities. We never have a guarantee of more time to invest in others and sow the seed of the gospel. And yet, we live surrounded by spiritual need in people all around us.

Jesus spoke of "harvesting" people for eternal life. The "wages" those who work in the fields receive are the joyful rewards of sharing the gospel. This remained Jesus's constant focus. **God orchestrates a network of workers to share the labor and privilege of reaping God's harvest.** Some plant seeds of truth that others harvest.⁷ One person sows, perhaps for many years and through much prayer, while enduring hardship and great sacrifice. Then another person reaps the harvest as people come to faith and lives are changed. The harvest of a soul for Christ often incorporates the investments of many people. The teamwork and collaboration among God's people allow sower and reaper to rejoice together when God's kingdom advances.

God's Harvest Experienced – 4:39-42

Jesus's disciples immediately witnessed the profound truth of His words. **Though the disciples themselves had not personally shared the gospel in this town, they experienced an outpouring of Samaritans who believed in Jesus.** The investment Jesus made in a lonely woman reaped an amazing harvest.

The Samaritan Woman's Testimony – 4:39

The woman Jesus gently and compassionately called to faith immediately shared what she knew with the people in her town. She had formerly drawn water in the noonday heat, possibly to avoid people. Now, this woman joyfully and confidently declared, "He told me everything I ever did." She did not understand or explain the full picture of all that Jesus is and what He came to do. She simply told people she knew what Jesus did for her.

Jesus's intimate knowledge of this woman and the depth of her pain touched her powerfully. She wasted no time in telling others about Jesus. **A personal account of a changed life offers a compelling witness to the truth about Jesus.** In a small village such as Sychar, this woman's reputation and past were likely common knowledge. Her testimony and transformation were so convincing that her neighbors put down their work in the middle of the day. They came out of the town to meet Jesus themselves. Many believed in Him.

The harvest of a soul for Christ often incorporates the investments of many people. The teamwork and collaboration among God's people allow sower and reaper to rejoice together when God's kingdom advances.

6. Sowing spiritual seed: 1 Peter 1:23

7. Shared cultivation: 1 Corinthians 3:5-6

The Samaritans—Who Were They?

Samaria was the capital city of the northern tribe of Israel during the divided kingdom period in Israel's history. When Israel fell to Assyria, the majority of the people who lived in the Samaritan territory were deported. Those who remained developed into an ethnically mixed people who practiced a hybrid religion that blended aspects of Judaism with pagan worship.¹ They established Mount Gerizim as their primary worship site and rejected the Jerusalem temple and Levitical priesthood.

In New Testament times, Jewish people shunned the Samaritans with great disdain. They went out of their way to not set foot in Samaritan territory. Despite this, Jesus intentionally went through Samaria to reach people there. He reversed the perception of Jewish superiority and demonstrated that salvation was for the entire world. When Jesus commissioned His followers before He ascended to heaven, He sent them as His witnesses in the power of His Spirit to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.²

1. **Samaritan religion:** 2 Kings 17:24-33

2. **Great Commission:** Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8

Jesus's Powerful Words – 4:40-41

The people of Sychar were not content merely to hear about Jesus from this transformed woman. These Samaritans came to Jesus and urged Him to stay in their town. Surely Jesus rejoiced at this request and the openness of these people to receive His message. For two days, Jesus stayed and talked with the townspeople. **Because of Jesus's presence and words, many more came to faith.**

Believing and Receiving the Savior – 4:42

The Samaritans' faith became grounded in their own personal relationships with Jesus.

Believers share the gospel with others, but true living faith cannot be a secondhand experience. The townspeople told the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

This Samaritan response presents the first large group of people to receive salvation and openly confess Jesus as Savior. These non-Jews received the truth and represented the host of people from all nations, times, and places who come to faith in Christ. The offer of salvation came first to the Jews, but in grace, God sent His Son to save the world.⁸ These Samaritans lacked the spiritual advantages of the Jews,⁹ yet now boldly confessed Christ.

The Jews, through whom the good news of salvation came, remained largely indifferent to God's gift. Those called "the first" ignored or despised the Savior, while "the last" pressed forward.¹⁰

8. **Savior of the world:** John 3:17

9. **Jewish advantage:** Romans 3:2; 9:4

10. **First and last:** Luke 13:29-30

God's Lavish Blessings to the Undeserving

The Doctrine of Grace

Everything God does reflects all that He is. His actions toward humanity reveal His character. By nature, God is gracious—inclined to offer blessings and favor to the undeserving. **God's grace refers to His bestowing of benefits that are not earned or merited by human effort.** By God's grace, the beauty of His creation reveals His creative power and majesty to all humanity. Believers and unbelievers alike experience sunrises, sunsets, and rain that waters dry ground. The most powerful expression of God's grace is seen in the sacrifice of God's Son to redeem people enslaved by sin and death. God extends grace to the unworthy by offering salvation and spiritual blessings that cannot be earned.

Salvation in Christ comes by grace through faith.¹ If human goodness or works could earn salvation, it would not be by grace. Because God is the author of salvation and provides everything a sinner needs to receive eternal salvation, all the glory goes to Him. Sinners are saved because of God's unmerited favor toward us in Christ—which cannot be earned.² **God's grace not only brings sinners salvation, but also sustains them in life and for eternity.**³

To fail to understand or appreciate God's grace means living life trying to earn God's favor or completely ignoring Him. Because the best we can offer God is flawed and inadequate, attempts to earn His favor will always come up short. We try to feel better by comparing ourselves to others we deem worse than we are. Without seeing God as inherently gracious, we wrongly think He is harsh and punitive rather than kind and welcoming.

God's posture toward humanity is utterly gracious. He knows the depth of our neediness. He moves toward us to meet us where we are and give us what we need. To relish God's grace, we must realize we deserve nothing but judgment. **When God opens our eyes to recognize His grace, we see His ongoing care and provision in salvation and daily life.** Proper understanding of God's grace regularly moves our hearts toward humility and worship. We experience peace because of God's grace. We depend on God's grace and trust Him for all we truly need. By grace, when God looks at a believer, He sees only Christ's imparted righteousness, which cannot be earned. All praise and glory belong to the God of all grace!

1. **Grace in salvation:** Romans 3:21-24; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 2:11

2. **Salvation cannot be earned:** Romans 4:1-8

3. **Sustaining grace:** John 1:16; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Hebrews 4:16; 2 Peter 3:18

In the early days of the Church, many Samaritans turned to Christ.¹¹ These two days Jesus spent in Sychar laid the foundation for the belief of many to follow. **One sinful woman's faith in Jesus as Messiah became the turning point for an entire town.** Is it any wonder Jesus "had" to go through Samaria?¹²

11. **Samaritan believers:** Acts 8:5-25

12. **Through Samaria:** John 4:4

✦ Finding God's Healing – John 4:43-54

Jesus Returns to Galilee – 4:43-45

After two days, Jesus traveled to Galilee where the people welcomed Him. Jesus taught that a prophet is not honored in His own country. This inclusion probably reflects a contrast with the reception in Samaria. Many of the Galileans had witnessed all Jesus had done while in Jerusalem for the Passover feast.¹³ Though rejection escalated as Jesus's ministry progressed, the Galileans received Him at this point.

Jesus Heals the Royal Official's Son – 4:46-54

This encounter represents yet another gracious revelation from Jesus that affirms who He is and calls people to belief. **John's presentation of Jesus includes relational conversations that reveal truth about Jesus.**

Jesus's Conversation with a Desperate Father – 4:46-49

Jesus returned to Cana where He had turned water into wine.¹⁴ **A royal official approached Jesus with an intense personal need.** John's account reveals only essential facts about this man. He lived at Capernaum, roughly 20 miles (about 30 km) from Cana. A loving father, he desperately worried about his son who lay ill—seemingly with no hope for recovery. When the royal official heard that Jesus had returned to Galilee, he left his sick son and traveled to Cana to see Jesus. This father faced a need that neither his position nor power could resolve. Difficulties we cannot control strip us of pretense, pride, and independence. The man begged Jesus to come and heal his son who was near death.

Difficulties we cannot control strip us of pretense, pride, and independence.

Jesus's reply to this man's desperate cry for help may seem at first strange or even harsh. Jesus answered, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe." **We must realize Jesus intended to heal the boy, but His greater priority was to awaken faith in the royal official.** The "you" in Jesus's statement is plural, indicating He also spoke to the unbelieving people in His presence.

The man must have felt the sympathy and compassion in Jesus's words. He persistently begged for Jesus to come to Capernaum before his son died. The cry of his heart exceeded a desire to observe miraculous wonders. **Through His next words, Jesus encouraged this desperate father to take the next step of faith.**

Jesus's Challenge to a Father's Faith – 4:50-54

Jesus's reply communicated His authority and healing power. He told the man, "Go, your son will live." **With His answer, Jesus called this father to believe without visible proof.**¹⁵ The father had to trust that Jesus could heal his son from afar. Jesus invited him to fasten his faith solely on God's word and power.

13. Passover in Jerusalem: John 2:13-25

14. Water to wine: John 2:1-11

15. Faith not sight: 2 Corinthians 5:7

The official took Jesus at His word and departed for Capernaum. His budding faith sprang into action. On his way home, the man's servants met him with news of his son's recovery. He asked when his son revived and noted the healing occurred at the exact time Jesus spoke to him.

This man of high standing came to Jesus with a frantic physical need. Jesus challenged his faith. Because he trusted the Lord's promise, he experienced the joy of Jesus's power and compassion on his behalf. **Jesus not only met an intense physical need in the royal official's family, but also met their desperate spiritual need; the man and his entire household came to saving faith in Jesus.** God often uses difficult circumstances to identify our spiritual needs and build our faith. The son's physical life was spared, and the entire family experienced spiritual new life through faith in Christ.

John recorded this miracle as Jesus's second "sign" after coming from Judea to Galilee. **The Gospel writer continues to make a case for Jesus's identity, power, and authority to call people to believe in Him.**

Jesus met temporary, physical needs with a constant eye on spiritual, eternal priorities. He called earthbound people to look beyond this world's joys and challenges to focus on weightier eternal matters. Nothing is more important than doing God's will. Jesus resolutely stayed the course to go where the Father sent Him and accomplish His plan. **Eternal priorities matter more than temporal pleasures.** By God's grace, He turns our focus to what truly counts for eternity.

✦ Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Jesus's disciples returned from the town of Sychar with food just as Jesus had finished His life-changing conversation with the woman at the well. The disciples offered Jesus physical nourishment, but He called them to a richer sustenance. **Jesus's "food"—His deepest source of soul satisfaction—came from doing His Father's will.** Nothing in this world compared to the pleasure of obeying His Father and completing His assigned work.

Jesus taught His disciples by comparing a farmer's physical harvest with the spiritual harvest of people coming to saving faith. While farmers follow an expected progression from soil to seed to harvest, the spiritual "fields" before the disciples were already ripe for reaping. Jesus raised His disciples' awareness of the spiritual needs and opportunities all around them. He described the joy of harvesting souls for God's kingdom. Jesus explained the collaborative efforts of those who sow and reap as people come to faith. He challenged His followers to set their sights on the spiritual investment He was calling them to make in people with desperate spiritual needs.

In an immediate and visible demonstration of this truth, many Samaritans came to faith in Christ. Some believed based solely on the testimony of a woman who was transformed by Jesus at the well. Jesus stayed there two days and personally invested in the people in Sychar. Many more believed.

Returning to Galilee and the town of Cana, Jesus met a royal official with a desperately ill son. This father begged Jesus to heal his dying son. Jesus spoke targeted words that stimulated this father's faith. **Jesus pronounced that the boy would live and sent the man home with newfound faith.** Indeed, the boy revived at that exact moment. The man and his entire family came to faith in Christ because of this sign of Jesus's power and authority.

Apply It

How have you experienced the incomparable delight of obeying God? This world offers many brands of supposed satisfaction and fulfillment. We often seek identity and purpose in education, jobs, entertainment, positions of influence, and much more. Jesus helps us realize He has so much more for us than the temporary happiness and fleeting pleasure this world offers. Jesus thrived on doing His Father's will and He wants us to flourish by pursuing what really matters. **While God's will for us may sometimes seem like an elusive pursuit, what He wants most is for our hearts to so long for Him that nothing else compares to pleasing Him.** In what way has God nourished your soul as you value His treasures more than this world's pleasures? What helps you keep your eyes on the higher prize when this life's cares encroach on your time and focus?

The Samaritan woman did not know everything about Jesus but boldly testified to His power in her life. Never underestimate the power of your story. How has Jesus transformed your life? In what way has the gospel entwined with your call to believe and follow Christ? Who needs to hear what you know about Jesus? God has uniquely positioned you to proclaim boldly what you do know to people who do not know Christ. The gospel represents the power of God to set sin's captives free. **Tell people what Jesus has done for you.** You never know what God will do with your story.

God builds His kingdom through a network of people who care about eternity and people. **God is calling you to invest in His harvest.** Whether you pray for someone for many years or offer a passing comment in a daily conversation, God weaves our investments into His harvest in His time. You may teach students who do not seem to listen. You may pray for family members and look for opportunities to speak into their lives. We should not take credit for what we are privileged to reap or sense failure when visible results seem few. What do you do if you constantly sow but never seem to reap? Keep on sowing. Only eternity will measure the fruit God will bring from your spiritual investments in people around you. God can be trusted with whatever you invest in His kingdom.

The Lord faithfully invites us into deeper faith. Jesus knew what the royal official needed to hear and experience to seek Him and grow in faith. God may use hardship, blessings, challenges, or joys to reveal Himself. God loves us enough to allow us to run out of human solutions so we will seek Him. What has God used in your life to rob you of self-sufficiency and draw you to Himself? What situation has revealed your desperate need for what only God could provide? As you live and pray for those you love, ask God to use whatever it takes to build faith in Him. God controls what we cannot. He works in ways that reveal both our neediness and His transformative power. When will you look to the Lord for strength you lack and answers you need? No matter what we face, our highest calling is to trust God.

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