



“Loving Beyond Limits”

John 4

Small Group Plan

“He had to go through Samaria”

— John 4:4 —

After King Solomon died Israel was divided into two separate nations. The northern tribes used the name Israel and the southern tribes used the name Judah. After the northern kingdom, with its capital at Samaria, fell to the Assyrians, many Jews were deported to Assyria, and foreigners were brought in to settle the land (2 Kings 17:24). The intermarriage between these foreigners and the remaining Jews resulted in a mixed race, impure in the opinion of Jews who lived in the southern kingdom. Thus, the pure Jews hated this mixed race, called Samaritans.

There were two possible routes for Jesus from Judea back up to Galilee. The longer was through Gentile country on the east side of the Jordan. The shorter was straight through Samaria. Most Jewish travellers crossed over the Jordan river and came through Perea on the east side to avoid the hostility of the Samaritans towards people who passed through their land. In fact, Jesus had himself once met this bitterness as he traveled south to the feast of tabernacles (cf. Luke 9:51-56).

The fact that most Jews would go miles out of their way to avoid the easier route through Samaria makes Jesus’ trip very interesting. John 4:4 does not say, Jesus went through Samaria. It says, *“He had to go through Samaria.”* Why did he have to go that way?

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- When you were growing up, was there a group of people or a part of town you were told to avoid? Explain.
- How has this viewpoint changed?
- *“Thirst”* is a theme in this story. What are people’s thirsts today and how do they satisfy them?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

John 4:4-9

¹ Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John— ² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. ⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

- Why did Jesus **have** to go through Samaria?
- Why did Jesus ignore the social and religious taboos of his day and deliberately choose to travel this way?
- Why did this woman go to the well during the hottest time of day?
- How would you describe her reputation?
- Why did Jesus risk his own reputation by talking to her?

John 4:10-15

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

- When Jesus talks about living water does the woman seem confused, intrigued, or afraid? Explain.
- When she asks for this special water (v. 15) what does she think it is?
- Jesus tries to expose what she is really thirsty for. What does she really want and need — acceptance, forgiveness, purpose, joy, relationship, security, meaning ... what?

John 4:16-26

¹⁶ He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” ¹⁷ “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” ¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹ “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” ²⁵ The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

- Why does Jesus get so personal (vs. 16-18)? What is he trying to accomplish?
- Why is Jesus so blunt when he talks to the woman about faith (v. 22)?
- How is his view of worship different from the woman’s?
- What does it mean to worship “in spirit and truth” (v. 24)?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- What are most people in our culture thirsty for?
- What are **you** most thirsty for?
- Why are we uncomfortable being around people who are not like us?
- List the various kinds of prejudices that exist today.
- How is prejudice a barrier to a Christian’s witness?
- How could you rewrite verse 4 giving yourself a “have to” that would push you out of your comfort zone?
- Close by asking God to break down the social barriers that separate us.