

# 8 *Living Water*

John 4:1–42



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“I love humanity; it's *people* I can't stand!” Those well-known words from a member of the “Peanuts” gang still make us chuckle. But our smiles hide the fact that we sometimes feel exactly like that. John says very little about Jesus' contact with the multitudes. But long sections of the Gospel are devoted to conversations Jesus had with individuals. Jesus was open, warm and vitally interested in people.

In John 3, we saw Jesus interacting with a religious leader who was from a very prominent family. He was very well respected in the community, and Jesus reinforced the fact that he could not depend upon his family heritage for entering the kingdom.

Now in John 4, we see Jesus having a conversation with a Samaritan, who is also a woman. She is not only looked down upon by the Jews for her race, but she is an outcast among her own people. She is not relying on her heritage or background for eternal life. Her relationships have turned out rather badly. Isolated and lonely, Jesus engages her in conversation and offers her the only thing that can satisfy her longing.

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## Getting Started:

Have you ever been *really* thirsty?

When you are really thirsty, what quenches your thirst? Ice cold Coca-Cola, Lemonade, Gatorade, Ice Tea, or water?

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1. Read John 4:1–26. Why do you think Jesus “had to go through Samaria” on his way to Galilee (v. 4)? (Jews often went around Samaria to avoid contact with the hated Samaritans.)

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**Question 1.** Jewish hatred of Samaritans had deep historical and religious roots. Seven hundred and fifty years before Jesus' day, the Assyrians invaded the northern section of Israel and deported the people living there. They left only a few poor Jews in the land. Then the Assyrians imported other conquered people and settled them in the former Jewish territory. The pagan gentile population intermarried with the Jewish people and produced a mixed racial group called the Samaritans. The orthodox Jews in southern Palestine looked at the Samaritans as a corrupt race and took great pains to remain separate from them. It was the accepted custom that Jews and Samaritans would not drink from the same vessel.

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Notice that Jesus had sent all of his disciples to get food. Do you think he did this on purpose? Why?

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2. What is surprising about Jesus' question to the Samaritan woman (vv. 8–9)?

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What present-day situations might arouse the same racial, religious and sexual prejudices?

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**Question 2.** By asking for water, Jesus was deliberately crossing three cultural barriers. The first barrier was sexual—he talked to a woman. Jewish men were advised never to talk to any woman in public. The second barrier was moral—the woman was living in an immoral situation with a man to whom she was not married (v. 18). The third barrier was racial—the woman was a Samaritan. Jesus was willing to cross these barriers in order to reach a woman who needed to believe in him.

3. How does Jesus' offer of “living water” contrast with what the woman thinks he means (vv. 10–15)?

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**Question 3.** *Living water* normally referred to running water, such as would be found in a river or stream. It was greatly preferred over still water, especially for ritual purification. The OT prophets looked forward to a time when “living water will flow out from Jerusalem (Zech 14:8; Ezek 47:9).

Read Isaiah 55:1; Revelation 7:17; 21:6; 22:17. What do these verses tell us about the water that Jesus offers?

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What does this offer of “living water” mean in your life and experience?

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4. Read Jeremiah 2:13 and 17:13. Why is God upset with His people?

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How are we sometimes guilty of doing the same thing? What are some of the substitutes that we rely on instead of the “living water” that God supplies?

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5. Why do you think Jesus brings up the woman's long list of past marriages and her present adulterous relationship (vv. 16–18)?

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6. Why does the woman begin talking about the proper place of worship (vv. 19–20)?

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**Question 6.** The proper place to worship was another issue that separated Jews and Samaritans. Because the Jews in Jerusalem refused to let the Samaritans worship at the temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim (“this mountain” in v. 20). The Jews promptly tore down the rival, apostate temple, but worship on Mount Gerizim continued. The hatred between Jews and Samaritans would be resolved only in God's new society—the church (see Acts 8:14–17).

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7. How does Jesus handle her question about this Samaritan-Jewish controversy (vv. 21–24)?

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What are the implications of the fact that God is spirit?

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The Israelites were not to make any images of God, because He is spirit. Their images would inherently fall short of capturing who God is. In addition, God cannot be limited by space (Ps 139:5-10), which would be a limitation of a material existence. Because of this, one does not have to be in Jerusalem, Mt. Gerazim, or anyplace else to worship Him. While God commands that we do worship together corporately (Acts 2:40-45; Heb 10:23-25), we can worship Him and experience His presence anywhere we are.

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Why is it significant that we worship God in truth? (John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12)

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The Samaritans had come up with their own version of Judaism, recognizing only the first five books of the Bible as Scripture. They had also added the worship of Israel's God to their worship of other gods as well. Today there are many churches and denominations who worship God, but who are not concerned about the study and teaching of God's Word. Built upon personalities, emotion or entertainment, these can attract many people, but if not grounded in God's Word, do not lead to spiritual growth, or worse, can ultimately lead people astray.

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8. What principles can you draw from Jesus' conversation with the woman to help you in discussing the gospel with non-Christians?

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**9.** Read John 4:27–42. From your reading of this passage, do you think the Samaritan woman genuinely believed? What do you see in the passage that supports your position?

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**10.** How is the disciples' confusion about food (vv. 31–33) similar to the woman's confusion about living water?

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**11.** After his encounter with the Samaritan woman, what specific lessons does Jesus apply to his disciples and to us (vv. 34–38)?

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**Question 11.** When Jesus told his disciples, “Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest” (v. 35), he may have been pointing to the approaching crowd of Samaritans (vv. 39–40).

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**12.** What has Jesus taught you in this chapter about meeting the specific needs of those around you?

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**13.** When have you been able to turn an ordinary conversation into a discussion about Christ?

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