

SMALL GROUP • GOSPEL OF JOHN

Week 4 Preparation Guide

Living Water

John 4:1-30 and 39-42

Big idea: Jesus satisfies the deepest thirst in every person.

Begin with prayer

Father, meet me in this passage with the same grace and truth Jesus showed at the well. Reveal the places where I look for life apart from you, and teach me to receive the living water that only Christ gives. Make my life a clear witness to his mercy. Amen.

A prayer for this week

Read John 4:1-42 in one sitting before slowing down. Notice the movement of the story: Jesus goes out of his way to meet one woman, exposes her thirst without crushing her, gives her a new identity, and then uses her witness to bring a whole town toward him.

1. Jesus goes where others would not

Jesus travels through Samaria and sits at Jacob's well, tired and thirsty. A Jewish rabbi speaking publicly with a Samaritan woman was socially surprising. The hostility between Jews and Samaritans was old and real; her own personal history made the meeting even more exposed. Jesus does not avoid her. He begins with a simple request for water.

Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.'

John 4:7 ESV

This is not a story about Jesus waiting for the woman to become respectable enough to approach him. He takes the initiative. His grace crosses ethnic hostility, moral shame, religious confusion, and social distance.

REFLECT Who do I tend to overlook, avoid, or quietly consider too far from Jesus? What would it look like to see that person with Christ's compassion?

2. What is living water

Jesus uses the woman's ordinary need for water to speak about a deeper need. The water he gives is not a more comfortable version of the life she already has. It is the life of God in a person: forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and the Holy Spirit's ongoing presence.

Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

John 4:14 ESV

Jesus is not promising that Christians will never feel longing, grief, fatigue, or desire. He is promising that no created thing has to carry the weight of being our savior. In him, the deepest thirst is met: we are known, cleansed, welcomed, and given eternal life.

REFLECT Where have I been asking something other than Jesus to make me feel secure, significant, comforted, or alive?

3. Truth without shame and grace without denial

Jesus asks the woman to call her husband. He knows her story fully, including the brokenness she has tried to live with. Yet he does not expose her to mock her or reduce her to her sin. His truth creates the space for real worship and real healing.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:24 ESV

The woman tries to shift to a religious debate about the right mountain. Jesus answers the question, but he goes deeper: true worship is no longer secured by a location or hidden behind religious talk. It is a truthful response to the Father through the Son, made alive by the Spirit.

REFLECT Is there an area where I use busyness, religious language, or distraction to keep Jesus from speaking honestly to me?

4. Jesus reveals himself

The woman speaks of the coming Messiah. Jesus gives a remarkably direct answer: 'I who speak to you am he.' In this quiet conversation, Jesus makes known what her heart has been seeking. The Savior is not distant. He is standing before her, speaking grace and truth.

The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he.'

John 4:25-26 ESV

The Christian life is not ultimately about locating the right technique for a better life. It is about coming to the real Jesus, receiving what he gives, and worshiping the Father through him.

5. A changed person points others to Jesus

The woman leaves her water jar and goes into town. Her first message is not polished or complete: 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?' But it is honest, and it points away from herself toward Jesus.

Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.

John 4:39 ESV

Her story does not end with people believing because of her alone. They come to Jesus, hear him for themselves, and confess that he is 'indeed the Savior of the world' (John 4:42). A transformed life naturally points others to him; we are witnesses, not the Savior.

REFLECT What part of my story could honestly help someone see Jesus more clearly?

Prepare for Thursday's discussion

What are people chasing today to satisfy their souls?

Name real things without only criticizing them: approval, romance, achievement, money, comfort, control, entertainment, or even religious performance. Why do they make such convincing promises?

Why do you think Jesus chose the Samaritan woman?

Notice what the passage actually says. Jesus pursues someone others avoid, shows that no one is outside his reach, and makes her a witness to her community.

Who first introduced you to Jesus?

Think of a person, a church, a family member, or a season in which God used someone else's witness. Thank God for that person and be prepared to tell the story simply.

How to read John 4 the second and third time

Second reading: focus on what Jesus reveals about himself. Underline his words and ask what each one shows: he gives living water (vv. 10, 14), knows the woman's full story (vv. 16-18), calls people to worship the Father in spirit and truth (vv. 23-24), and openly identifies himself as the Messiah (vv. 25-26). The point is not merely that Jesus can meet a need; he is the Savior who brings people to the Father.

Third reading: follow the woman's movement. She begins guarded and skeptical: 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me?' (v. 9). She recognizes Jesus as a prophet (v. 19), wonders whether he is the Christ (v. 29), then tells her town to come and see him. By the end, many Samaritans believe in Jesus for themselves and call him 'the Savior of the world' (vv. 39-42). Notice that Jesus meets her honestly, not shamefully, and her encounter with him becomes a witness to others.

Background for thirst and living water

Jesus' language at the well belongs to a much larger biblical story. In the Old Testament, thirst often pictures the human need that only God can meet. Water pictures God's life-giving presence, mercy, and salvation. These passages make John 4 richer, not by changing its meaning, but by showing that Jesus fulfills God's long-standing invitation.

Isaiah 55:1-3 - God's free invitation

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! ... Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good ... Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.

Isaiah 55:1-3 ESV

Isaiah speaks to people who are spiritually needy and unable to purchase what they most need. God invites them to receive freely. That helps us hear Jesus' promise in John 4: living water is a gift of grace, not something earned through achievement, morality, or religious effort.

Jeremiah 2:13 - false sources cannot satisfy

My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Jeremiah 2:13 ESV

Jeremiah confronts God's people for leaving the true source of life and relying on substitutes that cannot hold water. In John 4, Jesus does not merely point out the woman's broken attempts to find life; he offers himself as the true and lasting source. The question for us is similar: what am I asking to satisfy me that was never meant to carry that weight?

John 7:37-39 - living water and the Spirit

Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."' Now this he said

about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive.

John 7:37-39 ESV

Later in John's Gospel, John explains Jesus' image directly: the living water points to the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives more than relief for a moment. Through faith in him, God makes his people alive by the Spirit and begins to make their lives a source of blessing for others.

Between now and Thursday

Read John 4:1-30 and 39-42 three times. On the first reading, follow the conversation. On the second, underline what Jesus reveals about himself. On the third, notice the woman's movement from avoidance to witness. Use the guidance above to slow down and observe the passage rather than rushing toward an answer.

Read Isaiah 55:1-3 and Jeremiah 2:13 as Old Testament background for thirst, water, and God's invitation. Then read John 7:37-39 and notice how John connects the living water Jesus gives with the Holy Spirit.

This week's group challenge: Share your faith story with one person this week.

It can be brief: what life was like before you began trusting Jesus, how you came to see him, and what he is changing in you now. You do not need to have every answer. Simply point to Christ.

Closing reflection

Jesus, you know me completely and still invite me near. Forgive me for looking to lesser things to satisfy what only you can satisfy. Help me worship you with an honest heart, receive your living water, and tell someone else what you have done. Amen.

Pray this honestly