

The Gospel of John, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: The Woman at the Well

John 4:1–42

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

John 4:1–42 is one of the richest evangelistic narratives in Scripture, and it works on two levels at once. Doctrinally, it teaches profound truths about Christ and worship: Jesus offers living water that alone satisfies the soul, He reveals Himself plainly as the Messiah, He redefines worship as a matter of spirit and truth rather than location, and the chapter climaxes with the title “Savior of the world.” The teacher should help students see how Jesus shifts worship away from sacred places toward a Person and a manner of heart, a shift that anticipates New Covenant worship.

At the same time, this is a deeply pastoral and formational story. Jesus crosses every barrier to reach a broken, hiding woman, exposes her sin without rejecting her, satisfies a thirst no relationship had filled, and sends her out as the first evangelist in the Gospel. The teacher should let students feel both the searching exposure (Jesus knows our hidden lives) and the astonishing welcome (He knows and stays). This story heals the fear of being fully known and stirs the heart to share the good news.

So aim at both: a clearer understanding of Christ, living water, and true worship, and a heart that has come to the well to drink and then runs to bring others. The disciple we are forming is both satisfied in Christ and eager to point others to Him.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus tells the woman that the water He gives “will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (v. 14). What is this “living water,” and how is it different from everything else people use to try to satisfy their souls?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus uses the setting, a well, to move from physical thirst to spiritual thirst. “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again” (vv. 13–14). The living water is the soul-satisfying life that Christ alone provides, ultimately the life of the Spirit He gives to those who come to Him (compare 7:37–39).

Contrast living water with the world’s wells. Every other source of satisfaction, pleasure, success, relationships, achievement, leaves us thirsty again. They may quench for a moment, but

the thirst returns. Living water is different in kind; it becomes “a spring welling up to eternal life,” an inner source rather than an external supply we must keep returning to.

Connect this to the deep human longing. Augustine’s famous line, that our hearts are restless until they rest in God, captures what Jesus is offering. The woman’s restless searching is everyone’s story in some form. Only God can satisfy the thirst God-shaped souls were made to feel.

Apply it personally. Help students name the difference between sipping from broken cisterns and drinking from the spring of Christ. The invitation is not to try harder to be satisfied but to come to the One who alone satisfies, and to keep coming, letting that inner spring rise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living water as the soul-satisfying life Christ gives, including the gift of the Spirit (John 4:14; 7:37–39).
- The inability of any created thing to finally satisfy the soul (Jeremiah 2:13).
- The human heart made for God and restless without Him.
- Christ as an inner spring rather than an external, temporary supply.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the living water Jesus offers, and how is it different?
- Why do the world’s wells always leave us thirsty again?
- What does it mean to keep coming to Christ to drink?

Question 2

Student Question:

The woman had sought satisfaction in a series of relationships, yet remained empty (vv. 16–18). What are the “wells” you most often return to for satisfaction, and what has been the result?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the woman’s history: five husbands and a present relationship outside marriage (vv. 16–18). Whatever the mix of sorrow and sin in her story, she had been seeking in relationships a satisfaction they could not give, and she remained empty.

Help students identify their own recurring “wells” without shaming them. The point is not only sexual or relational; we all have places we habitually return to for comfort and identity, work, approval, food, entertainment, control, achievement, even ministry. These are often good things asked to do a God-sized job.

Invite honest reflection on the results. The mark of a broken cistern is that it never finally satisfies; we keep going back, and the emptiness keeps returning. Naming the pattern, and its fruitlessness, is the beginning of turning to the true spring.

Then point them to Christ as the alternative. The answer to a misplaced thirst is not merely to stop drinking from the wrong well but to drink deeply from the right one. Ask each student to name one well they keep returning to and one way they will bring that thirst to Christ this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The pattern of seeking satisfaction in things that cannot satisfy.
- Good things made ultimate as a form of idolatry.
- The fruitlessness of broken cisterns as evidence we were made for God.
- Turning thirst toward Christ rather than merely suppressing it.

Discussion Prompts

- What “wells” do you most often return to for satisfaction?
- What has been the actual result of returning to them?
- How could you bring that thirst to Christ this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus told the woman, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (v. 24). What does it mean to worship in spirit and in truth, and why does true worship depend on both?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus gives one of the most important statements on worship in all of Scripture: “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (v. 24). Both elements matter, and both must be present.

Define worshipping “in spirit.” This is worship that engages the heart, the inner person, not merely outward forms or physical location. It is sincere, heartfelt, and Spirit-enabled, the opposite of going through religious motions while the heart is far away (compare Isaiah 29:13).

Define worshipping “in truth.” This is worship that accords with the truth God has revealed, worship of the true God as He actually is, in the way He has appointed, not according to our own preferences or inventions. True worship is shaped by God’s revelation, not by human imagination.

Show why both are needed. Worship that is all heart but not according to truth becomes sincere error; worship that is all correct form but no heart becomes dead ritual, the very thing Jesus

condemned. God seeks worshippers who bring both a true heart and the truth, engaged hearts offering worship on God's terms. Apply this to the students' own worship, both gathered and personal.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship in spirit and truth as the standard for true worship (John 4:24).
- Worship engaging the heart, not merely outward form or location.
- Worship shaped by God's revealed truth, not human preference.
- The dangers of both empty ritual and sincere error.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to worship in spirit, and in truth?
- Why does true worship require both, not just one?
- Where does your own worship most need renewal, in heart or in truth?

Question 4

Student Question:

When Jesus gently named the woman's hidden life, she was fully known and yet not rejected (vv. 16–19). What in your life do you most fear being seen, and how does the way Jesus treated this woman speak to that fear?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the tender turning point of the story. Jesus names the woman's hidden life, "you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband" (v. 18), and yet He does not reject her. He keeps offering her living water. She is fully known and fully welcomed.

Help students feel the universality of the fear of being seen. Almost everyone carries something they hope no one ever discovers, a sin, a shame, a secret, a part of their story they have buried. We arrange our lives, like the woman coming at noon, to avoid being fully known.

Show how Jesus heals that fear. He does not pretend the woman's life is fine; He names the truth. But naming it does not end the relationship; it deepens it. To be fully known and still not rejected is the very thing the human heart longs for and fears it can never have. Jesus offers exactly that.

Apply it personally and hopefully. The same Jesus knows each student completely, the hidden parts included, and still draws near with living water. This is the safety in which real change becomes possible. Ask each student what they most fear being seen, and invite them to bring it into the open before the Christ who already knows and still stays.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ's complete knowledge of us, including our hidden lives.
- Being fully known and not rejected as the heart's deep longing.
- Truth-telling and welcome held together in Jesus.
- The safety of Christ's knowledge as the ground for real change.

Discussion Prompts

- What in your life do you most fear being seen?
- How does the way Jesus treated this woman speak to that fear?
- What would it mean to bring your hidden thing to the Christ who already knows?

Question 5

Student Question:

The woman raised the old dispute about the right place to worship, and Jesus pointed beyond it: "the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (vv. 20–23). How does Jesus shift worship from a place to a Person and a manner, and what does this teach about worship under the New Covenant?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The woman tries to divert the conversation to an old controversy: should people worship on Mount Gerizim (the Samaritan site) or in Jerusalem? Jesus does not take the bait. Instead He announces a new era: "the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (v. 23).

Draw out the shift Jesus makes. Worship is moving away from being tied to a sacred place, whether Gerizim or Jerusalem, and toward a Person (the Father, made known through the Son) and a manner (spirit and truth). The question is no longer where but how and to whom.

Connect this to New Covenant worship. Under the Old Covenant, worship centered on the temple in Jerusalem. With Christ, the temple system is fulfilled, and God's people worship Him everywhere, in the Spirit, gathered as the church on the Lord's Day and offering their whole lives to Him. Place is no longer the point; the heart and the truth are.

Apply it to the students. This frees worship from being merely a location we visit and roots it in a relationship and a manner of life. It also guards against thinking worship is confined to a building or an hour. Wherever the people of God gather in spirit and truth, and wherever a believer's heart is lifted to the Father through Christ, there is true worship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The shift from worship tied to a place to worship centered on the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:21–24).
- The fulfillment of the temple system in Christ.
- New Covenant worship as relational and heart-engaged, not location-bound.
- Worship as a manner of life, not merely a place we visit.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Jesus move worship from a place to a Person and a manner?
- What does this teach about worship under the New Covenant?
- How might this reshape the way you think about worship in daily life?

Question 6

Student Question:

The woman left her water jar and ran to tell others, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did” (vv. 28–29). What does her eagerness to tell others reveal about what happens when we truly meet Christ, and how does your own eagerness compare?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The woman’s response to meeting Jesus is immediate and uncontrollable. She “left her water jar” (the very thing she came for) and ran back to town, saying, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” (vv. 28–29). The encounter turned the town’s outcast into its evangelist.

Help students see what her eagerness reveals. When someone truly meets Christ and is known and loved by Him, the natural overflow is to tell others. She did not wait to become a theologian; she simply pointed to her own experience and invited people to come and see. Real encounter produces real witness.

Notice her humility and honesty. She does not hide her past; she leads with it: “told me all that I ever did.” The very thing she had been hiding becomes the testimony she shares. Grace had so freed her that her shame became her story.

Turn it toward the students gently. Compare your own eagerness to hers. Often our witness is muted because our sense of having met Christ has grown dim. The cure is not guilt but a fresh encounter. Ask each student where their eagerness has cooled and what it would look like to invite someone to “come and see” this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Genuine encounter with Christ overflowing in witness.
- Personal testimony as a powerful, accessible form of evangelism.
- Grace turning our shame into testimony.

- Renewed encounter as the cure for cooled eagerness.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the woman's eagerness reveal about meeting Christ?
- How does your own eagerness to tell others compare?
- Whom could you invite to "come and see" Jesus this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

When the woman wondered about the Messiah, Jesus said, "I who speak to you am he" (v. 26). Why is it significant that Jesus made this clear self-revelation to a Samaritan woman of poor reputation, and what does it tell us about who the gospel is for?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson. To this Samaritan woman of ruined reputation, Jesus makes one of His plainest self-revelations in all the Gospels: "I who speak to you am he" (v. 26). He openly declares Himself the Messiah, and the words echo the divine name, "I am."

Stress the significance of the recipient. Jesus largely avoided open messianic claims among the crowds in Judea, yet He reveals Himself plainly here, to a Samaritan (a despised people), a woman (whom a rabbi would not normally teach), and a known sinner. The first person to whom Jesus openly declares His messiahship is the kind of person His society wrote off entirely.

Draw out what this teaches about the reach of the gospel. The good news is not for the respectable and the insider only. It crosses every barrier of race, gender, status, and morality. Jesus deliberately steps over every line His culture drew, demonstrating that the Savior came for the outsider and the outcast as surely as for anyone.

Apply it to the church's heart and the students' own. If Jesus crossed these barriers, then a church shaped by Him cannot draw the lines its culture draws. And no one listening should ever conclude they are too far gone, too sinful, or too marginal for Christ. The One who revealed Himself to the woman at the well reveals Himself still to all who will receive Him. Let students sit with the wideness of "the gospel is for people like her, and like me."

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus' plain self-revelation as the Messiah, echoing the divine "I am" (John 4:26).
- The gospel crossing barriers of race, gender, status, and morality.
- The Savior's deliberate reach toward the outsider and the outcast.
- No one beyond the reach of Christ's grace.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that Jesus revealed Himself to this particular woman?
- What does this teach about who the gospel is for?
- Who might you be tempted to think is beyond the reach of Christ?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus told His disciples, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me” and spoke of fields “white for harvest” (vv. 34–35). Where are the “fields” around you that are ready for harvest, and what keeps you from seeing them or laboring in them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

While the woman is in town, Jesus teaches His disciples about mission. “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (v. 34), and “look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest” (v. 35). He is energized by doing the Father’s will and urgent about the harvest of people ready to believe.

Help students grasp the harvest imagery. The Samaritans were even then streaming out of the town toward Jesus, a living picture of fields ripe and ready. Jesus wanted His disciples to see what they might have missed: people, including unlikely people, ready to receive the gospel right around them.

Apply the question of seeing. Often we do not labor in the harvest because we do not see it. We assume the people around us, our neighbors, coworkers, family, are uninterested, and so we never look up. Jesus calls us to lift our eyes and notice the readiness that is often closer than we think.

Then address what keeps us from laboring, fear, busyness, low expectations, or a heart that has lost the urgency Jesus felt. Invite each student to name one “field” near them, a person or group ready for the gospel, and one concrete way they might labor there this week. Doing the Father’s will, Jesus says, is the food that truly nourishes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doing the Father’s will as nourishing the soul (John 4:34).
- The harvest of people ready to believe, often nearer than we think.
- The call to lift our eyes and truly see the fields.
- Mission as participation in the work of God.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are the “fields” around you that may be ready for harvest?
- What keeps you from seeing or laboring in them?
- What is one way you could labor in the harvest this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

The Samaritans came to say, “we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world” (v. 42). How does this title, “Savior of the world,” deepen our understanding of who Jesus is and the reach of His salvation beyond any one nation or group?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The story climaxes with the townspeople’s confession: “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world” (v. 42). The title is breathtaking, especially on Samaritan lips.

Unfold “Savior of the world.” Salvation came to the Jews first, but it was never meant to stop there. From Samaritans, the half-breed outsiders the Jews despised, comes the confession that Jesus saves not one nation but the world. The gospel’s reach is universal.

Connect this to the chapter’s whole movement. Jesus crossed into Samaria, reached one woman, and through her a town came to faith, all foreshadowing the global mission to come. The Savior of the world begins gathering the world here, at a Samaritan well.

Apply it to the students’ vision of Christ and mission. Jesus is not a tribal deity or a local teacher; He is the Savior of the world, and that truth both enlarges our worship and widens our hearts. It means no people group is outside His saving purpose, and it calls the church to carry the good news beyond every boundary. Let students rejoice that the Savior of the world is also, personally, their Savior.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the Savior of the world, not of one nation only (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14).
- The universal reach of the gospel foreshadowed in Samaria.
- Salvation to the Jew first, and also to the world (Romans 1:16).
- A global vision of Christ that enlarges worship and mission.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the title “Savior of the world” deepen your view of Jesus?
- What does it mean that even Samaritans confessed Him this way?
- How should this truth shape the church’s heart for the world?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over this story, from the thirsty woman at noon to a whole town believing. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you, both to drink deeply of His living water and to point others to the well?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question asks students to hold together the two movements of the story: the thirsty woman who came to the well and drank, and the transformed woman who ran to bring her whole town. Both belong to a full response to Christ.

Help students see the order. First we drink. Before she could bring anyone, the woman had to meet Christ and receive His living water. Witness flows from being satisfied in Him, not from mere duty. A dry soul has little to offer; a satisfied soul overflows.

Then we point others to the well. Having drunk, the woman could not keep silent. The natural shape of grace is to be received and then shared. The two go together: drinking deeply and pointing others to the source.

Press for concrete formation. Ask each student to name one way Jesus is forming them to drink more deeply of His living water, and one way He is forming them to point someone else to the well. Close by reminding them that the same Jesus who sat by the well in the noonday heat to reach one hiding woman is still seeking worshippers, and still satisfying thirsty souls who come to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Drinking from Christ before pointing others to Him.
- Witness as the overflow of a satisfied soul.
- The unity of receiving grace and sharing it.
- Concrete formation in both satisfaction and mission.

Discussion Prompts

- What would it look like to drink more deeply of Christ's living water?
- How is Jesus forming you to point others to the well?
- Who is the one person you most want to bring to come and see?