

JOHN 4:1-42

The Samaritan Woman: The One Who Knows Everything and Loves Anyway

Lesson at a glance

This is one of the longest one-on-one conversations Jesus has anywhere in the Gospels, and it is with a woman whose social, racial, religious, and moral profile made it the least likely conversation imaginable. The lesson walks through the scene at the well, the offer of living water, the painful moment when Jesus names her past, the conversation about worship in spirit and truth, the great I AM, and the village revival her testimony sparks. The thread is the heart of the Christ for the very people the religious world has stopped trying to reach.

Goals for this session

First, that each woman would feel known by the Lord Jesus, not as a generic religious feeling but specifically, by name, including the parts of her life she has not yet told another Christian.

Second, that the group would grasp the difference between conviction and condemnation, and would see in Jesus the model for naming sin without piling on shame.

Third, that each woman would understand worship in spirit and truth as the New Testament fills it out, and would value the assembly of the church more deeply.

Fourth, that the group would identify one person each is being sent back into the village for this week.

Preparing to lead

Read John 3 and John 4 in one sitting earlier in the week. The contrast between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman is part of the meaning. Then go through John 4:1 to 42 slowly with the lesson questions.

Read Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11; 14:15, 26 to 40; 16:1 to 2; Ephesians 5:19; and Colossians 3:16 in preparation for the worship discussion. The lesson cites these directly. The more familiar you are with them, the more confidently you will lead the conversation.

Pray for the women in your group, particularly any who carry shame from failed relationships, who feel unwelcome at the assembly, or who are afraid to share their faith.

Sensitive topics in this lesson

Failed marriages and complicated relationships (questions 10, the For Thought and Discussion box). The woman has had five husbands and is now with a sixth man. The lesson reads this with care, refusing to assume the worst about her without evidence. Some women in your group carry similar stories. Be gentle. Jesus is.

Conviction without condemnation (question 10). This is a subtle but important distinction. Convicted people repent; condemned people hide. Jesus convicted the woman without crushing her. The same care is required in our conversations with one another (Galatians 6:1 to 2).

True worship (questions 11 to 13). This is one of the most important New Testament passages on worship. Some women in the room have come from religious backgrounds that approach worship in ways the New Testament does not authorize. Lead patiently. Let Scripture do the teaching, not your opinions.

Evangelism fears (question 16, the For Thought and Discussion box). Many faithful Christian women feel inadequate to share the gospel. The Samaritan woman's example, twenty minutes a believer and already leading a revival, is meant to encourage. Do not let women dismiss themselves out of false humility.

Suggested 60- to 75-minute schedule

Five minutes: welcome.

Five minutes: open in prayer. Read John 4:7 to 14 aloud.

Five minutes: warm-up. Ask each woman to share the moment she first began to take Jesus seriously. Whose well was she at, and what did He say?

Thirty-five to forty minutes: discussion. Choose six or seven questions in advance.

Five to ten minutes: "Your response" reflection.

Five minutes: closing prayer.

Discussion priorities

Make sure these are among the questions you discuss: 7 (the thirst nothing else satisfies), 10 (conviction without condemnation), 12 (worship in spirit and truth), and 16 (her testimony).

Notes on key questions

Question 2. John says Jesus "had to" pass through Samaria. There is no geographical necessity in this. There is a divine appointment. The Lord rearranged the route of His own ministry for one Samaritan woman. He still does this for His daughters, one at a time, every day.

Question 4. Jesus opens the conversation by asking for help. This is a powerful evangelism principle. Asking for something opens the door faster than offering something. Women who feel evangelism is intimidating may find this single observation freeing.

Question 7. Every thirst we feel that nothing in the world can satisfy is a witness to the kind of being God made us. We were not made to be filled by what we can buy, achieve, or marry. We were made to be filled by Him. Some women in the room have spent years trying to drown that thirst in other water. Make space for honesty.

Question 10. Jesus names the truth about her life without humiliating her. The distinction between conviction and condemnation matters. Conviction says, "This is true, and there is a way forward." Condemnation says, "This is true, and you are finished." Romans 8:1 is the line. We have a calling to imitate this same posture in our own conversations.

Question 12. Worship in spirit and truth is the heart of the lesson theologically. The day of the temple is ending; the day of the church is beginning. Worship is no longer about the place; it is about the people, gathered as God has directed, worshiping in spirit (with the whole inner person) and in truth (according to His word). The commentary in the lesson sets out the New Testament pattern. If you have time and women are willing, read aloud through Acts 2:42 in the group to anchor the discussion.

Question 13. Jesus' open declaration to this Samaritan woman, "I who speak to you am he," is the boldest self-identification of Christ this early in John's Gospel. He saves it for her. What does that tell us about His heart? Linger here.

Question 16. Her testimony is simple: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" That is the gospel in twenty words, offered by a woman who has been a believer for twenty minutes. The bar for sharing Christ is lower than most Christians think. Use her example to encourage the women in your group.

Questions 18 to 20. Personal response. Give the women time to write. The question about whose well each woman is sitting at this week is particularly important. Ask each woman to leave with one specific name in mind.

About the Study Skill in this lesson

One Study Skill appears in Lesson 9: Tracing a Theme Through a Book. The example is the theme of water in the Gospel of John. Demonstrate it in the group hour by reading John 2:6 to 9, 3:5, 4:10, 7:37 to 39, and 19:34 in sequence. John is one of the most carefully constructed books in the Bible. Learning to trace its themes will deepen the women's reading of the rest of Scripture too.

A suggested closing prayer

Pray your own prayer. A sample, if you would like one:

"Father, thank You that the Lord Jesus does not avoid the people the world avoids. Thank You that He sat at this woman's well, in the heat of the day, and offered her living water she had not asked for. Thank You that He told her the truth about her life without crushing her. Thank You that He sent her back into her village with a testimony that brought many to believe. Help the women in this room to feel known by You tonight, and to be willing to walk back into our villages with a story to tell. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

Looking ahead to Lesson 10

Next week is Mary of Bethany, drawn from three scenes: Luke 10:38 to 42, John 11, and John 12:1 to 11. Encourage the women to read all three passages before they meet. Mary will be one of the gentler lessons of the study, and will be a welcome rest after the weight of the Samaritan woman's story.