

JESUS ENGAGES A *Samaritan* WOMAN

Watching the Master Communicator at Work



Relational Insights for Individuals and Groups

Doug Greenwold

Author of *Those Prodigal Sons*

Because Biblical Context Matters

Those of us who know the Bible well can suffer from knowing it well.

—*Alistair Begg*

The Gospel writers assumed their readers lived when, where and how they do. They have no need to explain what everyone knows. They just assumed you knew.

—*Randall Smith*

We have forgotten that we read the Bible as foreigners, as visitors who have traveled not only to a new geography, but to a new century.

We are literary tourists who are deeply in need of a guide.

—*Gary Burge*

The Bible is an Eastern book. We see it through the colored glasses of Western culture. Much is lost. We miss the subtleties of humor and many of the underlying assumptions. We do not understand the ingrained attitudes that illuminate a story or illustration.

Christ spoke to a Middle Eastern peasant people. Even most of the educated would have had their roots in that peasantry. What lies between the lines, what is felt and not spoken, is of deepest significance.

—*Kenneth Bailey*

Village life was so deeply ingrained and so clearly understood at every level of that society that the customs reflected in biblical narratives did not usually have to be explained with the narrative. Widely known attitudes did not need to be articulated. Longstanding social customs required no explanation. Nevertheless, these unspoken but culturally understood ideas gave color and meaning to Jesus' stories.

—*John MacArthur*

For us Jews studying the Bible is more important than obeying it, because if you don't understand it rightly you will obey it wrongly and your obedience will be disobedience.

—*Eugene Peterson as told in Eat This Book, 71*

The Bible does not yield its meaning to lazy people.

—*A. W. Pink*

The Christian who is careless in Bible reading is careless in Christian living.

—*Max Reich*

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Doug Greenwold

Author of

Zechariah and Elizabeth: Persistent Faith in a Faithful God

The Rest of the Story: A Closer Look at Familiar Passages

Making Disciples Jesus' Way: Wisdom We Have Missed

Encounters with Jesus: The Rest of Their Stories

The Paralytics Amazing Friends

Becoming a Judean Shepherd

That Good Samaritan

Those Prodigal Sons

First Edition October 2018

A Digging Deeper Faith Study

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Forward

A Digging Deeper Faith Study

In relationships, have you ever done or said the “right” thing at the wrong time? Or done the “wrong” thing at the right time? In hindsight, I seem to have an advanced degree in that regard!

While reading Luther’s preface to the book of Romans quite some time ago, I discovered his definition of a “righteous act.” Luther suggested that an act pleasing to God occurs when the right act/statement is done at the right time, in the right spirit, and for the right motivation. Now that is a humbling perspective!

We observe Jesus on the pages of the Gospels always speaking “righteous” words and doing “righteous” acts – the “right” thing at just the “right” time, in the “right” spirit, and for the “right” motivation. It doesn’t matter whether it is a Chief Priest or a tax collector; an esteemed Pharisee (Nicodemus) or a woman with an issue of blood (Luke 8); the president of a local synagogue (Jarius in Luke 8) or a no-name, rescued demoniac (Luke 8). Jesus interacts with each one in a “righteous” manner.

Luther’s definition of a “righteous” act strikes me that it is much easier to interact in a “righteous” manner with people who are more like me than with people who are not. First-century observant Jews were no different. They only viewed “people like me” as my “neighbor,” and therefore, worthy of “love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you are not like me, then I don’t have to view you as my neighbor or treat you in a “righteous” manner at all. In fact in first century observant Judaism, I can despise you and feel as if I am still honoring God. (You can understand why Jesus had to re-define “who is my neighbor” with the “Good Samaritan” parable.)

I can relate to that. It’s more difficult to act “righteous” toward those who are not like me.

Even more so to those who have offended me, or broken the “rules” of my sense of “right and wrong.” Jesus never had a double-standard for “righteousness.” He approached every person/situation by doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason and motivation. Oh, so much to learn from Him about engaging people, sustaining relationships and guiding those relationships into redemptive outcomes.

Are there people in your world that consistently irritate you? Those that are so off-putting you can feel your blood pressure rise each time you attempt to interact with them? Or maybe you have some people in your world that you feel have forfeited the right to grace. Maybe it’s the family “black sheep,” or perhaps a prodigal daughter or son, or maybe a wayward father or mother. Or is it that homeless person you pass everyday on the way to your subway stop?

In John 4 Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in a remarkable redemptive encounter. As that rendezvous unfolds, we learn this woman (whose name we do not know) has a very checkered past (and that puts it mildly!). Nevertheless, He approaches and interacts with her “righteously,” and gently brings her into the Kingdom. Placed into its original context, this remarkable event has much to teach us about how to effectively communicate with those “black sheep,” prodigals, and other marginalized people that God puts in our path and networks. Jesus’ “righteous” ways show us how to establish redemptive relationships in our family, our workplace, and our neighborhoods.

I pray that God’s Spirit will use this book to encourage and challenge you to be more intentional in your relationships so as to nurture redemptive change.

Doug Greenwold
Columbia, Maryland
August 2018

Introduction

I and the Father are one in essence. John 10:30

—Wuest NT¹

This Son perfectly mirrors God, and is stamped with God's nature. Hebrews 1:3

—The Message²

Anyone who has discerningly seen me has seen the Father with discernment. John 14:9b

—Wuest NT³

From the perspective of observant Jews (which included the disciples), the Samaritan woman John presents to us in “Chapter 4” would have qualified as a very despised woman in the Gospels. And like the equally despised demoniac in Luke 8, culturally viewed as a sub-, sub-, sub-human being, we don’t even know her name.



We do know this Samaritan woman had five husbands! That is remarkable for any culture; stunning for this one. Also note that there are no children accompanying her to the well. This suggests she was most likely barren (and therefore “theologically” known as a woman that God obviously doesn’t like, or she would have children. Consequently, she is a shamed woman (even by Samaritans) who somehow intriguingly managed to be repeatedly married and divorced. It appears things deteriorated to the point of living with a man who is not her husband. And then one mid-day as she arrives alone at a historic well, she encounters Jesus who winsomely gives her dignity and value as He woos her toward the Kingdom of God. Creatively interacting with this woman, Jesus provides us many insights and implications to ponder when interacting with all sorts of people about spiritual realities.

Amazing Grace and Truth

Most of us are familiar with the song “Amazing Grace.” It really is an amazing Grace, a Grace dissimilar to anything we have ever experienced or even imagined. We may also be familiar with the Scripture, “*know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*”⁴ We have had encounters and confrontations with God’s Truth, a Truth that pierces and penetrates to the very sinew of our soul. It is a Truth that pulverizes all of the comfort zones and rationales we have erected to protect our self-serving interests

and tendencies. It is an objective, timeless Truth that challenges and convicts as it progressively transforms us.

I continue to be amazed at how the interrelationship of Grace and Truth is not only misunderstood, but misapplied in human relationships, often in debilitating ways. As a result, I am drawn back once again to Jesus' encounter with this Samaritan woman and the wisdom to be (re)discovered there. At one level we are very "familiar" with this encounter. But when we put the passage back into its first-century context, there is much for us to (re)discover for our individual and corporate benefit relating to establishing and nurturing redemptive relationships with others for God's glory.

Ground Zero

As a youngster, my dream did not include teaching the Scriptures. That all changed in 1980 when my wife and I began attending a church on the edge of a Midwestern university campus. Everyone, without exception, had to take a "*Spiritual Gifts Workshop*" to join this church. I had never heard of Spiritual Gifts (SG), but found out that they are not only biblical but foundational to Body Life.

Late on a Saturday afternoon during a SG workshop, Pastor Tom took a look at my SG profile based on the Wagner – Modified Houts Spiritual Gifts Questionnaire. It suggested that perhaps the SGs of Teaching, Knowledge and Wisdom might be part of what the Holy Spirit had entrusted to me. With that suggested profile in hand, Pastor Tom said, "Doug, in two weeks I want you to start teaching a Sunday school class for graduate students. I suggest you start with the Gospel of John. If you need any help, let me know."

Getting Some Help

Other than panic, what would you have done if that was your assignment? I did the only thing I could think of, which was to run down to my local Christian bookstore and ask, "Where's the commentary section?" When I found the "J's," I began to buy everything in sight with the "Gospel of John" on the spine. That didn't seem to provide sufficient security. So I ordered several more to have at least a dozen in my grasp. It seemed to me that if Jesus had twelve disciples, there should be some safety in having a dozen commentaries!

Cut and Paste

Limited experience in lesson preparation meant devouring those John commentaries and doing a cut-and-paste of what I discerned to be the best each had to offer. I had no idea at the time that there might be another way to dig into a passage. After several months, I began to realize that I was not in a hurry to get through a verse. I likened it to discovering a rose bud – staying with it until it fully opens, revealing all of its fragrance and beauty. Skipping along from one rose bud to another causes you to easily miss the always intended bouquet! As a result, in three years of teaching the Gospel of John we were half way through the fifth chapter! That's a lot of cut-and-pasting as well as rose sniffing! And that is when I first discovered Jesus' remarkable encounter with this Samaritan woman.

The Bible and the Land

In 1984 we relocated to Washington, DC, where I taught in a large, suburban, evangelical church. In a few years, I was chairing the church's Adult Education Committee, ensuring that SG Workshops were a core part of the curriculum!

1988 saw about 45 of us from that church traveling to Israel for a two-week study trip. After three days of walking the Land and being awestruck as to how much the Land (geography, history, culture, and literary and visual context) mattered, I experienced my Isaiah *woe-is-me* moment. How in the world did I miss this! Where had this Bible-**and**-the-Land perspective been? Why didn't someone tell me how much the Land mattered in biblical exegesis (discerning original meaning of a passage)! I began to wonder: Whatever caused us to view Greek and Hebrew word meanings to be 80% of context when in reality word meanings are just one of about 15 categories of biblical context that matter? During that epiphany moment, I so wished I could go back and re-teach eight years worth of lessons, including those three years teaching John!

Digging into Context

From that moment, I realized I had a lot of contextual catch up to do, which continues to this day. That first study trip to Israel made me committed to the importance of a panoramic and integrated view of biblical context. In subsequent years, I migrated through cultural context with the aid of Edersheim, Jeremias, Bailey; to geographical context, e.g., Monson, Notley; to visual context, e.g., PBT's *Above Israel*, low-level helicopter DVD video project, to name just a few resources to expand my paradigm of what it means to *correctly handle the word of truth*⁵ (which also seems to suggest there must be a goodly number of ways to incorrectly do that!).

It was on that first trip to Israel when I began to realize another way to teach the Scriptures than cutting and pasting from (Western) commentaries. I call this other process “contextual restora-

tion” of the passage – weaving back together what people who first heard those words would have understood them to mean. It never dawned on me in those early teaching days that the biblical writers assumed their readers lived when, where and how they did. Thus they had no need to explain what everyone around them knew to be true. However, 21 centuries later we no longer know what the biblical writers assumed the readers of their scrolls would know to be true. Consequently, this assumed context has to be restored, put back into place, and recreated from the clues the biblical writers give us in their narratives. Then we can “hear” the words (and understand them) as if we are standing alongside those who first heard them. Filling that gap by finding those missing contextual pieces is a large part of what Preserving Bible Times has been preoccupied with doing for the past dozen years.

Two Discoveries

Recently I ran across my 1979-1982 John 4 teaching notes. I took that as providential. This rediscovery caused me to realize that the authors of those dozen commentaries I had acquired did not exhibit any evidence that they had ever walked the Land (now one of my yardsticks for evaluating commentaries). Therefore, this revisiting of John 4 will fuse together my cut-and-paste commentary notes from the early 1980's with contextual restoration insights acquired over the last 25 years. I invite you to join me as we revisit Jesus' redemptive encounter with this Samaritan woman.

First Things First

John recorded his Gospel on a scroll since Gutenberg and his printing press were still 1400+ years away. It's much easier to hopscotch around in a book than with a scroll. So, John assumed

his readers would begin by reading the first words in what we know as Chapter 1 and continue straight through to the end of his scroll (our chapter 21). That means that John assumes we have read (and understand) Chapters 1, 2 and 3 before we get to Jesus' encounter with this Samaritan woman in Chapter 4. When reading Scripture, the past is always prologue for the present passage. That's why verse-by-verse expository preaching/teaching is powerful. Thus, beginning with Chapter 4, without the first three chapters of background narrative, allows for easily misunderstanding the story. Therefore, we must first review that background (context).

Right To the Point

In composing his Gospel, John is not concerned with the birth narrative of Jesus. Nor does he delve into Jesus' genealogy. John wants to immediately establish in the minds of his readers that the Jesus he is writing about is Eternal God. For John, Jesus puts a face on God. John makes this reality of Jesus' oneness with God clear in a number of different ways. In his marvelous introduction, John declares Jesus to be

- the pre-existent Word.
- not only present at Creation, but the agent of Creation.
- God coming to tabernacle (dwell) amongst us.

Furthermore,

- Jesus is the Light of the world. He enlightens everyone, even a Samaritan woman!
 - o He interprets God to us.
 - o He explains who God is (character, will, and nature), how God does things and what God cares about.

- He brought life into the world and He gives life – physical, spiritual and eternal.

John wants us to know that when you “see” Jesus, you “see” God. As theologically obvious as that is, it is remarkable how many followers of Jesus become disconnected from that reality in the emotional and relational aspects of their lives!

THE Question

If someone asked you, “*What is the most important thing about you?*” how would you answer? A.W. Tozer contends that the most important thing about a person is his or her view of God.⁶ That view shapes everything else about his or her life. A person's view of God determines whether he or she will draw close to God, or keep Him at a distance. His or her view will shape how each person understands God – as a benign Grandfather, a critical Father, a Santa Claus figure, a stern judge, a good buddy, a 911 rescue squad, or God as He reveals Himself in Scripture. The writer of Hebrews states that for a person to have faith, he or she *must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him* (emphasis added).⁷ While the first is true for any Christian, one can wonder at the degree to which the second proposition is truly believed, and then lived out.

Problems arise when we have a skewed biblical paradigm for our view of God. All too often we exhibit a faulty view of God rooted in a flawed understanding of God's character and nature. That's why John wants us to know that when we “see” Jesus in his scroll, we see God at work.

A Spiritual Disconnect

What if your view of God is flawed either through a theological misunderstanding or

because of an emotional disconnect rooted in past *sins of the fathers*?⁸ Unfortunately, *sins of the fathers* are very real. Women grow up with abusive fathers, absentee fathers, and emotionally distant fathers. Men grow up with stern, demanding, non-nurturing, performance driven fathers; absent fathers; or fathers who never praise them due to a misguided notion of keeping their kids humble. What effect might that have on your spirituality? Might we project these earthly father experiences onto our Heavenly Father? Doing so can cause a spiritual disconnect that plays itself out in different ways:

- We are drawn to the winsomeness we perceive in Jesus, but shy away from the “angry” (our mis-shaped perception of) God of the Old Testament.
- A person feels he/she consistently disappoints God; that in God’s eyes he/she doesn’t measure up; that somehow God doesn’t find him/her to be worthy enough, while Jesus always does.
- One sees God as the stern judge while Jesus is seen as a tender, inviting and accepting “brother.”

While we are often not conscious of these perceptions, and probably couldn’t articulate them if asked, nevertheless their very existence in our emotional and relational fabric shapes very different views of God and impacts the way we read the Bible, pray, and communicate God to others. We don’t want to be split-personality Christians (I hope that metaphor communicates!) instinctively drawn to Jesus while at the same time distancing ourselves from our Heavenly Father.

Know Me, Know My Father

We need to always remember John’s introductory thesis: when we see Jesus, we are being given glimpses into the very nature and character of God. We will remind ourselves of that repeatedly when we look at Jesus’ encounter with this Samaritan woman. We will closely observe how He reveals God to us. For example, when we see Jesus

- elevating a down-and-out person, we see God’s desire to do the same.
- being gracious, we get a glimpse into God’s graciousness.
- speak winsomely, we get a peek at the Father’s winsomeness.
- desire a relationship, we sense the Father’s relational desire as well.
- being tender hearted, we can feel the Father’s tender heart.
- creatively initiating, we get a peek into God’s creative initiative.
- showing Amazing Grace, we get another whiff of the Father’s Amazing Grace.
- exhibiting approachability, it points to the approachability of God.
- displaying a gentle spirit, we discern God’s gentle spirit.

It’s a simple point with profound implications for our spirituality. Getting a glimpse into Jesus’ nature brings us face-to-face with our Father’s nature. He perfectly mirrors God to us!

- One of the paramount attributes of a first-century disciple is emulation. If our view of God is flawed, could we be emulating the wrong thing(s)?

Notes and Sources

¹ Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961) 239.

² Eugene Petersen, *The Message* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1995) 541.

³ Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*, 249.

⁴ John 8:32

⁵ II Timothy 2:15

⁶ A.W. Tozer, *A Knowledge of the Holy* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1961) 9.

⁷ Hebrews 11:6, NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2016) 2156.

⁸ Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9

1

A Crisis of Wine and Joy

He makes...wine that gladdens human hearts.
–Psalm 104:14a&15a¹

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, buy, eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.
–Isaiah 55:1(NIV CBSB)

Setting the Stage

As mentioned in the Introduction, John assumes that we have read and digested his preceding three “chapters” before begin Chapter 4. In addition, for us to fully appreciate what unfolds in Jesus’ encounter with a Samaritan woman, we must reset some prior context.

Summarizing John 1



John wants his readers to know that Jesus is God; that when we see Jesus’ heart – compassion, grace, creative initiative – we also see God’s heart of compassion, grace and creative initiative. John further characterizes Jesus as the Light of the world (9). However, not all will receive that light – *His own did not receive Him* (11). Does that suggest anything about Nicodemus who we will meet in Chapter 3?

John emphasizes that we have seen His glory, *full of grace and truth* (14). From Jesus, and therefore from God, we all have received *grace upon grace* (16). (As we will see, even Samaritans will be recipients of His grace.)

John then includes John the Baptist’s testimony that Jesus is *God’s Chosen One* (34). The first chapter ends with Jesus referring to Himself as *the Son of Man*, an intentional Messianic reference (remez) back to Daniel 7.

Chapter 2 opens with Jesus arriving in Cana of Galilee for a wedding feast with some new disciples as the issue of joy (versus the joylessness of observant Judaism) comes to the center of John’s narrative.

A Long Time Favorite Passage

Jesus' first *sign* (miracle) of turning water into wine as recorded in John's second "chapter" has long been one of my favorites. I was a member of a fraternity when I was first drawn to Christ in my college days. Back then it struck me as really neat that Jesus "kept the party going." That was something a frat guy could relate to! Forty-five years later, the marriage feast at Cana is still one of my favorite passages, but for different reasons. Context is needed to take this tight rose bud of a passage (from a Western perspective) and allow its intricate petals to open up into full flower (from a Near Eastern perspective). John always assumed his readers would know and understand the background regarding marriage feasts: village issues of shame, honor and reciprocal hospitality; ritual purification; and the Hebrew significance of wine.

Compression

Our purpose is not to do a full blown treatment of John 2. Rather it is to see what helps set the stage for John 4. We will not have time to develop why Jesus might even be in Cana attending a wedding. However, we do need to observe that Jesus is welcomed at this wedding feast along with His disciples, suggesting that He and His mother Mary are more than just casual acquaintances of the host family. This suggests the possibility of reciprocal hospitality issues that may help us gain a greater appreciation of Jesus' "righteous" words and actions.

Wedding Feasts

Marriages are typically arranged in this culture. When two families settle on the marriage details, a betrothal contract is drawn up specifying the dowry and other financial considerations.² The completion of this contract means that the young man and girl are considered legally

married even though they will continue to live apart. Their marriage will not be consummated until the girl becomes a woman when she starts to menstruate (typically) around age thirteen (remember, procreation is the role of women in this culture). Then a multi-day marriage feast will be announced to friends and relatives. As part of managing and pacing the marriage feast festivities, a good (hired) steward will serve the best wine on the first day of the event when palates are the most discerning. That leaves the less-than-best wine (often diluted with water to "stretch" it) for the latter days of the celebration process when palates are dulled. (Use your own interpretation here!)

The Social Contract

This is the Middle East. That means the host has certain social obligations with regard to his clan and the community (often one and the same) concerning the marriage feast, one of which is reciprocal hospitality. For example, if last year I invited you to my son's marriage feast, fed you lavishly and provided you with all the wine you cared to drink, it is expected that you will (and must) do the same for me when I attend your son's marriage feast. Failure to respond in kind comes with severe social consequences:

- The marriage would forever be branded a disgrace; the host family shamed; and the newly married couple would carry a social stigma of shame with them for the rest of their days, as would their children and their children's children. Who would ever want to arrange a marriage with any of their offspring!
- Whatever joy was being toasted, experienced and celebrated during the feast up to this point would be immediately transformed to anger, scorn and derision.

- Some commentators suggest that those other families who had previously hosted this family at their respective marriage feasts would have grounds for what we would term a lawsuit for damages if they were not treated in kind.³ That's how severe a breach of the reciprocal hospitality code this would be.
- Any steward associated with such a marriage feast disaster would never work another wedding in that community (and perhaps region) again.

Wine and Joy

Marriage feasts were intended to be joyous occasions; and in the Hebrew worldview, wine was the personification of joy. The Old Testament Scriptures also speak to wine being the symbol of joy. Therefore to run out of wine is to run out of joy, both literally and figuratively. Putting yourself in this wedding couple's place, how would you like to be known for the rest of your life as the only couple in the village's long institutional memory whose marriage celebration ended up in a joyless state!

Those Ritual Purification Vessels

Ritual purification was a way of life in observant Judaism. The Pharisees and their rabbis had created an elaborate set of rules regarding what constituted ritual purity and impurity (the most extensive Division of the Mishnah is *TOROROTH* – “cleannesses”). Pertaining to this marriage feast, these ritual purification jars would be placed near the entrance to the room where the celebration was to be centered. As guests arrived, each would be ritually purified before eating by having a prescribed amount of water taken from one of the jars and poured over the guest's hands.⁴

Pouring was essential as the water needs to be “moving” in order to serve the purpose of ritu-

ally “carrying away” your impurities. This moving water, technically called “living water,” is foundational to the complex hydraulic systems embodied in many of the much larger ritual purification bath systems (*mikvot* and *mikve*)⁵ in the synagogues and in the Temple to carry away all the impurities of those who immersed. The whole notion of ceremonial efficaciousness of “moving” or *living* water factors into the significance and meaning of the *sign* Jesus performs here in Cana and is also an important part of Jesus' discussion concerning *living* water in John 4 with the Samaritan woman at the well.

An Abundance of Fine Wine!

Note that we are given the capacity of these jars – each holding from *twenty to thirty gallons* – and are told by John that Jesus instructed that they be *filled to the brim*. Therefore the collective capacity of these jars lies somewhere between 120–180 gallons. Let's assume 150 gallons as an average. By way of comparison, the standard-sized wine bottle used today contains 750 ml. To keep things simple between metric and English measurements, calculate 750 ml to be $\frac{3}{4}$ of a quart. That means that Jesus is going to create 800 bottles of fine wine for use in the latter stages of this wedding feast! Ever been to a wedding reception where the host brought out 800 bottles of vintage wine toward the end of the evening? With such specificity, John wants us to appreciate the enormity of the amount of fine wine that Jesus created. This was a very different kind of experience to these new disciples of Jesus, accustomed to the ascetic nature of John the Immerser (Baptist).

Straight to the Point!

John knows his early Jewish readers would understand this entire context; so without these details, observes that when the *wine was gone*,

Jesus' mother said to Him, "They have no more wine" (NIV CBSB) Mary has just informed Jesus of the looming social crisis. Judging by the response of the steward in verses 9-10, he is not aware of this crisis and presumably neither is the host, the wedding couple, nor most of the guests. Jesus responds by saying, "*Woman, why do you involve me?... my hour has not yet come.*"

Jesus' Response to His Mother

Much has been made of Jesus' response to the information that Mary gave Him. Some see it as "put down," or as a declaration of His (now) independence from her direction since He is thirty and a full-fledged adult. Others have pointed out that the Jewish idiom being used here seems to suggest something akin to "what is that to you and me"⁶ and that *woman* is a term of respect. All these interpretations seem inadequate in harmonizing Jesus' words with His resultant actions.

Approaching Jesus' statement from the contextual perspective of Middle Eastern social reciprocity may help illuminate His (seemingly) puzzling response. Mary may simply be informing Jesus of a fact – there is now a wine (and therefore joy) crisis at this marriage feast and this host is a friend of the family. She was not so much making a demand of Jesus as a reminder of His/their mandatory reciprocal hospitality obligations. It is reasonable to assume that in bringing this information to Jesus, Mary knows He can intervene to make a difference. She can still recall the Angel Gabriel's message to her as well as Simeon's words in the Temple. She remembers the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple going toe-to-toe with the finest religious minds of the day.⁷ She knows He is the Lord's Messiah and has the capacity to remedy the situation to prevent these friends (maybe they are extended family) suffering public shame for the rest of their days.

It is also reasonable to assume that Mary is very much aware that Jesus has just publicly initiated His messianic ministry; because He was baptized, now has disciples, and therefore might be ready to perform a miracle or two to make His presence quickly known. Note that Mary is not seemingly rebuffed nor deterred by Jesus' (tongue in cheek? with a smile on His face?) response to her. Rather, she seems to assume that, of course, He will do something about this sudden crisis of shame for these dear friends who have (most likely) extended us hospitality in the past. This mandatory reciprocal hospitality theme is picked up by Jesus in the parable of the "Midnight Visitor" where if you have the capacity to meet a crisis of hospitality, you must respond or be shamed.⁸ Thus she confidently says to the servants, and I like the way that Wuest translates her words, *whatever he says to you, do it with dispatch.*⁹ It's as if she is saying to these servants, "Time is of the essence here. This crisis could become public at any moment. So quickly do whatever He tells you to do."

Redefining Purity

The water in those purification jars was meant to achieve ritual purity over and over again. Jesus symbolically converts that water into wine (His blood) to signify that the shedding of His blood will result in total and complete purity once and forever for those who make the decision to "follow Me."¹⁰ Thereby, Jesus is totally redefining purity, and by extension, righteousness. He is signaling the ritual purification system and the procedural Temple sacrificial system will soon be obsolete. In the reference to my *hour has not yet come*, John is using *hour* in a technical sense meaning the period of Jesus' passion, death, resurrection and ascension,¹¹ suggesting that while it is not yet the time to *publicly* perform the shedding of His blood for the remission of sins,

He is willing to privately (behind the scenes) intervene and perform a miracle that will signify what He will accomplish on that future day in Jerusalem when His hour has indeed come. That's why John calls this first miracle a *sign*. Like a highway sign, it points to something beyond itself further down the road.

Those Servants

Note that the servants were obedient to Jesus' command. They did what they were told. Then some of them were singled out by Jesus to draw out this new crimson liquid now brimming in these ritual purification jars and take it to the steward. Remember, at that moment those servants chosen to bring this reddish liquid to the steward are not sure what it is. What if the steward doesn't like what they brought? How would they explain this? When we don't have total knowledge of the eventual outcome in God's economy of a "crisis," there is often a risk associated with following Jesus' commands. Only later, after the steward had pronounced this to be the *best* wine, would it have dawned on these servants that they had been participants in a paradigm-changing miracle.

Too Much Wine?

Some commentators from the past seem to have struggled with the amount of choice wine that Jesus creates in this first of John's *signs*. To them, 150 gallons (800 bottle equivalent) seems too excessive and therefore inappropriate for any such party. So they conclude that John must be using hyperbole to indicate the amount of fine wine created by Jesus. In their eyes, He wouldn't literally do that, would He?

Let's think about that. If the wine was to (in part) represent the weight and import of His forthcoming Calvary sacrifice, why would He or we want to try and minimize the amount of wine

needed to represent that? Furthermore, if that fine wine also represents joy, how much wine would be adequate enough to represent a future *joy unspeakable*?¹² The very excessive amount of the wine created by Jesus is exactly the point that John wants to underscore! When the joy of heaven invades your soul, even a Samaritan soul, that joy is intended to flood your soul so that your cup overflows.

Revealing His Glory

To further re-enforce this Calvary/joy perspective, John tells us in verse 11 that Jesus gave this first sign *through which he revealed his glory*. That is very helpful in keeping us pointed in the right direction. From the Hebrew perspective, when God reveals His glory He is accurately representing and portraying "who He is, what He cares about, and how He does things."¹³ In Hebrews 1:3, we see the functional Hebrew understanding of glorifying God when it is said of Jesus that He *is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being*. Jesus glorifies God by perfectly portraying, revealing and representing Him.

So when John says Jesus did this to reveal His glory, Jesus is revealing to us in this sign exactly what He is going to do and why. In that sense, John's *sign* is like a portrait of what is to come as well as a compass to ensure we are always pointed in the right direction with our understanding of what Christ has accomplished, and why. Jesus is going to shed His blood efficaciously for the remission of sins so that purity can be more than a ritualistic condition. Rather, this new purity is an eternal condition of His disciples that welcomes them into His Father's everlasting presence as part of a new creation. At the wedding feast in Cana, Jesus chose to reveal and portray all this with this *sign* at the very beginning of His ministry. Like a Perfect Storm, this

is the Perfect Crisis that will allow Jesus to disclose His present and future glory. With this *sign*, Jesus launches His ministry with the “It is finished”¹⁴ end in view. In so doing, He provides us with a wonderful “completion” motif!

Parenthetically, let’s raise this issue – how far can His joy extend? Even to a despised Samaritan woman?

They Believed

John wants us to know that as a result of what these brand new disciples have just experienced, *they believed in Him*. The disciples likely would have understood this as a sign of the advent of the messianic age with Jesus being the Lord’s Messiah because of the OT prophecy that “the joy of the final days is an abundance of wine (Amos 9:13-14, Hosea 14:7, Jeremiah 31:12).”¹⁵ Remembering the restoration promised in Joel 2:24 when *the vats overflow with fresh wine*

would have re-enforced this perspective; although it will take some time for these disciples to fully fathom what that realization means.

A New Standard

Thanks to Jesus’ intervention, a new standard for marriage feast hospitality has just been (unknowingly) set in Cana by this host family. The bar has now been raised so high that no other family in the village will ever be able to reach it (800 bottles of fine wine saved for last). Jesus rescues the host family from the brink of a lifetime of shame; and, in so doing, now places them in a distinctive position of honor for the rest of their days that no other family will ever be able to emulate. That is yet another refrain of the Gospel message – unless Jesus comes into your life, your joy will never be complete and it certainly won’t be overflowing!

Reflections to Journal and Share

- This is a spectacular first sign. And wouldn’t you expect that of Jesus’ first miracle? The kind of miracle that would not only initiate His ministry but would also bookend it with what the Cross will accomplish as well as the ultimate “completion” – great joy!

- When do you think this Samaritan woman we are about to meet in John 4 last experienced great joy? Maybe never. But her “fullness of time” is about to come.

- Have you ever thought about thanking Jesus for the times He protected you from shame (like this young couple) by miraculously intervening in your life in ways you never knew about?
- Seen any miracles lately? That may depend on how close to Jesus you have been as a servant? It's usually true that if you want to be a participant in miracles, stay close to Jesus with a servant's heart.
- This first miracle is rich in gospel themes. There will come a day when humanity will realize it has a crisis. That it cannot clean itself regardless how much it tries. That no amount of good works, religious acts and ritualistic procedures can make one acceptable to a Holy God. It is only when we avail ourselves of the efficacious blood of Jesus, being cleansed by it that we become (w)holy righteous in His Father's sight.
- Do we need to resolve again to accurately reveal and portray "who God is, what God cares about, and how He does things" to a watching world? To be a disciple who always points to Him and not to yourself; e.g., your abilities, capacities, gifts and talents? Only life in the Spirit, continually abiding in the Vine, will empower such a resolution.

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- Jesus rescued and sustained the joy of a marriage feast that was about to turn ugly. At this point in your life, how is your joy doing? Is it solely rooted in Jesus? Is it overflowing? Or might it have gone stale or even dry? If so, what might need to be done, e.g., faced and dealt with?

Notes and Sources

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³ *The NET Bible*, First Edition (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), 2024 (footnote).

⁴ Mishnah: *Yadaim* 1:1.

⁵ James C. Martin et. al., *Exploring Bible Times: The Gospels in Context*, 86.

⁶ *The NET Bible*, 2024 (footnote).

⁷ Luke 2:41-49.

⁸ For a fuller contextual treatment of this mandatory hospitality theme in the “Midnight Visitor” parable in Luke 11: 5-8, see Doug Greenwold, *Encounters with Jesus: The Rest of Their Stories*, Chapter 12, “Pray Confidently or Persistently” (Columbia, MD: Bible-in-Context Ministries, 2007), 101-108.

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¹⁰ Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John I-XII*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 99.

¹¹ For the fuller contextual treatment of what it means to follow Jesus as a disciple, see Doug Greenwold’s “Follow Me” Reflection #908, September 2008, Preserving Bible Times.

¹² 1 Peter 1:8

¹³ A favorite phrase of Dr. James C. Martin, Co-Founder of Preserving Bible Times.

¹⁴ John 19:30

¹⁵ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 105.

2

A Spiritually Dead Leadership

He came to that which was his own but his own did not receive him.
—(John 1:11)

*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean;
I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols.
I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees
and be careful to keep my laws.*
—(Ezekiel 36:25-27)

Continuity

From his opening verses in Chapter 1, John is insistent that his readers know that Jesus is God. All the signs he incorporates in the book *have been written that [we] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing [we] may have life in His name* (20:31). Therefore, there is no mistake in John's choosing which events to show that Jesus' heart is a replica of God's heart.



Next John recounts Jesus' arrival in Cana of Galilee for a wedding feast and the pointing to a joyless Israel with His miracle of turning ritual purification water into the best of wines. On the heels of that celebration, Jesus cleanses the Temple to symbolize the obsolescence of the sacrificial system that His perfect sacrifice will achieve. Then John introduces us to Nicodemus, a highly esteemed, consummate, religious somebody to establish a counterpoint to a culturally despised nobody we are about to meet in Chapter 4.

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. (3:1)

The Best of the Best

A simple introduction to a person who represents the crème de la crème of first-century Jewish religious society. He is the epitome of a Jew's Jew – an esteemed Pharisee well respected for his learning, knowledge, piety, righteousness, ethics, morality; you name it. He knows the Scriptures well, having memorized great portions of it (if not all of it) and is steeped in the wisdom of the sages. He is a well regarded teacher of God's Word, most

likely holding forth in the Royal Stoa on Temple Mount. Furthermore, he is a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest religious court in the land. Tradition suggests he comes from one of the three wealthiest Jerusalem families. In John's carefully constructed narrative, he is a highly regarded Jewish "insider" and the complete antithesis to a loathed, "outcast" Samaritan woman.

Fascinatingly, this Jew's Jew seems to prefer to be known by his Greek name – Nicodemus. That suggests he is educated in the ways of the Greeks, comfortable with Greek philosophy, social mores and language. Maybe he even prefers the Hellenistic way of doing things. All things considered, Nicodemus could be seen as the Renaissance man of Israel, the best possible representative of the Jerusalem religious aristocracy we could ever hope to meet.

The "Federal" Man

We need to see Nicodemus as a "federal" man. That's a theological term for one who is the best possible representative of others. In the same sense that Adam was a federal man, the best possible person to represent all of us in Eden; and Barabbas was the best possible person to represent us during Passion Week; Nicodemus is the best possible "religious" person to have an encounter with Jesus. If anyone would "get it," if anyone could resonate with who Jesus is and what He is about, it would be Nicodemus.

He came to Jesus by night and said, Rabbi (3:2a)

First Two Questions

Those familiar with Preserving Bible Times' preferred way of contextually engaging God's Word know the first two questions we like to ask of any passage: 1) Where are we?, and 2) What's happened before that bears on this encounter?

As to the first question, we are in the greater Jerusalem area before the beheading of John the Baptist (John is still immersing in 3:23). Perhaps Jesus has been staying with Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany. Since Nicodemus sought Jesus out; that begs the question, how did Nicodemus even know where to find Him?

To answer the second question, we need to ponder: Why is Nicodemus seeking Jesus out? What might he want to know from Jesus? What raised his curiosity? Furthermore, how does he view/see Jesus? And is any of Nicodemus' interest related to the fact that Jesus is a cousin of John the Immerser (Baptist)?

Another *Hasidim* Pharisee Rabbi from the North

In observant Judaism, all Pharisees are not the same. The southern Pharisees differ from the northern Pharisees. Additionally, there are added distinctions within both groups. In the North, there is the tradition of a small group of miracle-working Pharisee Rabbis called the *Hasidim*¹—the righteous ones. Throughout Jewish history, the *Hasidim* were well-known for their prayer-warrior nature and performing miracles; e.g., healings, for the benefit of the community. They were the Mother Teresa's of their day who were truly loved by the poor. My hunch is that Nicodemus viewed Jesus as the latest in a long line of *Hasidim* miracle-working Pharisee Rabbis from the North, which could have just added to his intrigue.

John the Immerse and "Repent"

My own fascination with Nicodemus centers in the extent to which he was familiar with John the Immerser (Baptist). John's ministry of protest against the religious establishment and his message of repentance would have reverberated throughout the Temple precincts. John would

certainly have been on the Establishment's radar screen, especially for gaining popularity with the masses as the defacto High Priest of Israel. Thus, it is reasonable to assume Nicodemus was very familiar with John and his perplexing "repent" message. To appreciate this contextual backdrop, we need to understand why John's primary repentance message was so confrontational in this first-century setting.

John's Message

To Western evangelicals, the word "repent" usually means something akin to falling on your knees, telling God you are sorry for what you have done, and that you will now be heading in another direction. While that is included in the first-century Hebrew understanding of repentance, there is more to it than that.

A first-century Jew would have understood repentance as "fundamentally changing the way one sees and understands everything."² To put it into our 21st-century vocabulary, first-century "repentance" means to "change your worldview and all the paradigms that come with it." It embodies a "turning from" one way of understanding things and "turning to" a new, very different way of seeing and understanding things. This kind of repentance involves "a transformation of the entire person."³

In its Hebrew roots, *repent* also carries with it the understanding of being restored as in, "He restores my soul (Psalm 23:3).⁴ It encompasses being brought back, suggestive of a lost lamb being put back on the right path. Fusing these various Hebrew aspects of repentance, it can be understood as having your faulty (spiritual) eyesight corrected back to 20/20 vision as well as your heart defibrillated so you can clearly discern "who God is, what God cares about, and how God does things."⁵

The irony of John's message of "repentance" is that it fell on deaf ears for those in leadership. These observant Jews felt no need to repent because they had become prisoners of their "forgiveness" paradigm. In their three-fold sin management system, being "right with God" came from: 1) exercising scrupulous behavior, 2) going to the ritual purification baths when ceremonially unclean, and 3) participating in the prescribed Temple offerings and sacrifices. It was the religious "system" that imputed "forgiveness" and "righteousness" to you; and having done those three things, you had no need to repent of anything. You were "right with God" by definition; all of which may explain Nicodemus' intrigue with Jesus. Maybe Jesus could explain why in the world does your cousin John feel the need to declare that people like me need to "repent" of anything? If anyone is "righteous," I am!

John's Real Message

With this context in place, we can see that challenging his religious culture to repent, John was in effect declaring to the religious leadership that "while you may have a 'system' that you think is covering your sins, I am here to tell you it is fundamentally not dealing with them from God's perspective. You need to radically change your understanding. It is not the nature of your behavior but the moral condition of your heart that ultimately matters to God. And unless your sins are dealt with from Heaven's perspective, you will never be right with God and judgment will inevitably come." Not a popular message to be sure and one that (most in) leadership ignored. But it did resonate with many of the common folk who knew something was not religiously right in this land. And those implications may have caught the ear (and mind) of Nicodemus. Maybe *Yeshua*, John's cousin, can

shed some light; maybe he can connect the dots on just what in the world John has been ranting about?

Messiah?

Might Nicodemus have wondered whether this *Yeshua* is God's long awaited Messiah? If he was, even though it doesn't seem to be the case, the Scripture says that the Jewish expectation for Messiah was for an earthly ruler who would bring peace, prosperity and social justice (Isaiah 61:4-7) to the land. Nicodemus might have questioned: Just how do You propose to do that? We read that Jesus quickly addresses Nicodemus' real issue. You (and Israel) don't need a new political/military ruler. You need a new heart! That's the prerequisite for life in My "in breaking" Kingdom.

Regarding a Nightly Visit

Much has been made of Nicodemus coming to visit Jesus at night. Some suggest that Nicodemus was being cautious, not wanting to be publically seen with Jesus during the day. Others suggest that he wanted to be alone with Jesus for whatever reason. Maybe. On the other hand, Nicodemus might just have had a full day dealing with Sanhedrin matters and/or teaching at the Royal Stoa. Or maybe Jesus had a busy day. Nevertheless, the symbolism of night is significant. There is a spiritual darkness in the land which is centered in the religious establishment. And so it must have delighted Jesus when a crème de la crème representative of religious leadership, our federal man Nicodemus, came calling one night.

We know that you are a teacher come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him. (3:2b&c)

Opening Acknowledgements

Nicodemus' opening comments reveal how he sees Jesus – a Rabbi from God in the same sense

that the prophets "come from God." He also reveals that it is the miracles that Jesus has been performing that authenticate God's anointing of him, like the signs that Moses and the prophets performed attested to their authenticity. But he does not see Jesus as God's Messiah, as the fulfillment of all those messianic prophecies that Nicodemus long ago memorized and could still recite at a moment's notice.

Jesus replied, Very truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again. (3:3)

Straight to the Point

Jesus immediately sizes up Nicodemus' spiritual condition. He can't see (discern) the Kingdom of God even when it is standing directly in front of him. He is spiritually blind because he is spiritually dead. And with that diagnosis, Jesus gives him the only possible remedy that can change his current condition: you must be born again (born from above). The only way Nicodemus seems to understand Jesus' words is through his true natural (non-spiritual) way – obstetrics. As one commentator observed, of all the miracles Jesus did, He never took an old man and converted him into a baby again!⁶ Nicodemus is perplexed by Jesus' assertion.

"How can anyone be born when they are old," Nicodemus asked, "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" (3:4)

No Comprehend

We are going to truncate the rest of this encounter. As fascinating as it would be to further unpack this passage, we want to make a singular observation that helps set the stage for why Jesus now will go to Samaria. Suffice it to say, that night Nicodemus didn't get it – the natural person will never see, let alone under-

stand and embrace the Kingdom of God. As Jesus observed, *flesh can only give birth to flesh* (3:6a). No amount of education, scientific training, reason, Greek philosophy, or logic, will ever reveal to you the Kingdom of God because it is a spiritual Kingdom, and only *the Spirit gives birth to spirit* (3:6b). Unless you are (re)born from above by the power of God's Spirit, you won't see it and certainly won't get it! It's inexplicable to human wisdom. Much like the wind, we know the reality that it indeed does blow; but how it spontaneously and unpredictably blows and where it blows is a mystery to our human understanding.

Perplexed by Jesus' statements, Nicodemus blurts out *how can this be?* (3:9) to which Jesus incredulously replies, *You are Israel's teacher and you do*

not understand these things (3:10)? Nicodemus, it is right there in God's Word that you have memorized from your youth. How did you miss it? Don't you remember that through Ezekiel (36:25-27) God stated that Israel's religious leadership is blinded. The Jerusalem Aristocracy is spiritually dead. As a counterpoint, where is there a place in this land that spiritual life can be fostered? And thus Jesus *had to go through Samaria* (a Divine Mandate that resonates with the Abrahamic Covenant – be a blessing to all peoples), which means we are getting closer (finally!) to meeting the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (place matters!); because in God's Economy her *fullness of time* in God's seeking, initiating Grace is about to come!

Reflections to Journal and Share

- What is your understanding of “repentance”? Does it include remaking your worldview and all of the paradigms that come with it; e.g. success, accomplishment, significance, prestige, importance?
- How would you contrast a devout “religious” person with a Spirit-filled, Spirit-led follower of Jesus?
- From a corporate perspective, what might be some areas that John and Jesus would call us to “repent” from today (fundamentally change the way you see and understand things)? Might it be from our
 - o Increasingly entertainment driven “worship” music formats that foster passive observance rather than active engagement in worship?
 - o Blurred understandings of what it means to be a disciple (not a convert or a “believer”)?
 - o Microwave approach (let's do it on power 10 for two minutes) for studying the Scriptures?

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- o Narcissistic, self-serving notions of prayer?
- o Anemic notions of what constitutes robust Adult Christian Education?
- o Disconnect between “knowing,” “doing,” and “being”?
- o An over dependence on “small groups” to accomplish discipling and Christian Education when their strength (at best) is fostering fellowship?
- o Growing emphasis on “therapeutic consumerism” in church programming at the expense of sound teaching on Knowing God, His Word and His Kingdom.
- o Focusing too much on spiritual maturity while neglecting emotional and relational maturity. (Can you really have one without the others?)
- From a personal perspective, what might be some areas that John and Jesus would ask you to fundamentally change the way you see and understand the journey of faith?
- What thought(s) challenge you in this Reflection?
 - o What is God’s Spirit whispering to you?
 - o What action is He prompting you to take?

Notes and Sources

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³ *Ibid.*, 670.

⁴ Kenneth Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003) 66-67.

⁵ A favorite phrase of Dr. James C. Martin, Co-founder of Preserving Bible Times

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3

Context and Covenants

Continuity

WWe have been contextually over-viewing the first three “chapters” of John’s Gospel in preparation for Jesus’ encounter with a woman at Jacob’s well in Samaria. These opening chapters have created themes and motifs that give shape to his fourth chapter. So let’s zoom out from ground level for a moment and observe what has been happening at 5000 feet in John’s narrative flow:



- John 1:9, 26A Blinded Priesthood
- 2:3A Joyless Nation
- 2:14A Desecrated Temple
- 3:7A Spiritually Dead Sanhedrin
- 3:32A Rejected Testimony

This backdrop reveals John’s stark contrast between the “federal” consummate Jewish “religious” man we met in Chapter 3 and a “prodigal” Samaritan woman we are about to meet in Chapter 4.

<u>John 3 - a Man</u>	<u>John 4 – a Woman</u>
Nicodemus (N) is his name	Unknown name
One of the Elites of Israel	Lowest social rank possible
Favored Jew	Despised Samaritan
High reputation	Anything but (being gracious!)
N sought out Jesus	Jesus seeks her out
N came by night	Woman comes at mid-day
Ye must be born again	Presentation of the “Gift of God”

The Usual Questions!

When establishing our contextual restoration approach, the initial questions we like to ask of a passage are:

Where Are We?

In Samaria, so who are these Samaritans?

At Jacob's well at Sychar – location significance?

What's Happened Here Before?

A covenant was made and another covenant reaffirmed here – is that pertinent?

Joseph was buried here. What might that suggest?

What Cultural Clues are We Given?

What is this reference to five prior husbands all about? How is that possible?

Is there a well/water protocol in the Near East that bears on this passage?

Those Samaritans

Characterizing the Jewish/Samaritan, religious/social dynamic of the First Century is not simple. Judaism has always been diverse in that no rabbi ever speaks for all the other rabbis. When I regularly visited Israel in the 1990's, my Tel Aviv hosts would always remind me that *whenever three Jews get together, there are always four opinions!* As this significant understatement illustrates, according to the late Shmuel Safrai, probably the 20th Century's foremost expert on Second Temple Judaism, "the oral law was not fully uniform."¹

The animosity between Samaritans and Jews had deep roots. When the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC, Jews in Manasseh and Ephraim began to intermarry with soldiers of the Assyrian army. This led to a

"mixed" race (called Samaritans) that continued to hold many of the tenants of the Hebrew religion, albeit with certain corrupting twists offensive to observant Jews.

The Samaritans held that their Temple on top of Mt. Gerizim was THE place God specified for sacrifice, not the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. They held that only the first five books of the Bible were inspired, not the Wisdom literature, the Writings, and the Prophetic literature that comprised the rest of the Jewish Bible. Nearer the time of Jesus, a band of Samaritans scattered human bones in the Jerusalem Temple during Passover— a desecration to every Jew.² It suffices to say there was considerable animosity/distaste/scorn between Jews and Samaritans.

Jacob's Well

The well at Sychar is found in the valley between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal approximately a quarter mile from the ancient city of Shechem. Hopefully, that rings a bell. In Genesis 12:6, Shechem is the site where God established the covenant with Abraham (Abram in Genesis 12:7). Shechem also harkens back to the Mosaic Covenant. It was at Shechem that Joshua gathered this embryonic nation shortly after entering the Promised Land following the battles of Jericho and Ai (and a few other skirmishes) to reiterate the Mosaic Covenant (Joshua 24:1-27).

These events raise the question: Is there something about Jesus encountering this Samaritan woman in this particular place that resonates with the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants? Or maybe even with the Davidic Covenant? We shouldn't be surprised if it does!

A Covenant Making God

Covenant is an over-arching theme that permeates and unifies the Scripture. Jehovah is a

covenant-making and a covenant-keeping God. Hence, everything that God does is based on His covenants. Therefore, Jesus likewise is about covenant(s) in the Gospels. After all, Isaiah tells us He is the covenant.³ He comes to rescue, restore and redeem the covenants that God has previously made, which is a great way to view and understand the Gospels from 5,000 feet.

The Problem

Over the centuries, God's purposes for His covenants were corrupted (the Adversary is always at work trying to thwart and distort God's plans and ways). Various distortions of these covenants were evident in the Pharisaic "theology" of observant Judaism in the First Century. Consequently, there was much that Jesus needed to rescue and restore to harmonize them with God's original purpose. This included the restoration of God's intent for the covenants He made with Abraham, Moses and David.

Abrahamic Covenant⁴

- The **Land** was always intended to be the platform for the nation of Israel to represent the One True God to the world. (Some commentators argue it still is.) If the nation obeyed, they would experience perpetual provision and protection in the land.

- The **Descendants** were to accurately represent and portray (the Hebrew understanding of what it means to *glorify*) the One True God in the land. They were to be inclusive in their thinking and welcome any and all peoples into the land to learn about the One True God.

- The **Blessing** that God promised Abraham was that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him.

By the time of Jesus, the Abrahamic Covenant had become corrupted. Subsequently,

- Jewish understanding of the purpose of the **Land** had evolved into exclusivity thinking – it was meant just for them. This fostered an isolation mentality rooted in a need for security.

Change was needed.

- Many Jews became so compromised with Greco-Roman culture, and others so committed to behavioral legalism, that neither were **Descendants** capable of accurately representing (glorifying) the One True God in the land.

Intervention was required.

- The intent of the **Blessing** became corrupted into an "us versus them" mentality based on a wrongful understanding of what it means to be righteous, i.e., "right with God." Furthermore, observant Judaism had developed a genetic entitlement paradigm. As Abraham's biological seed, they were convinced only they were the chosen ones. Thus, they wrongly concluded that no matter what they did, they would always be seen as acceptable in God's eyes.

That also needed to be addressed.

Mosaic Covenant⁵

After freeing the Israelites from Egypt, God, in a marvelous manifestation of His amazing grace, gave them His Law to protect the nation in the land – to forever keep them free from slavery and bondage. By keeping the Law, the nation would not only stay free, but would always identify with God and His ways. In so doing, they would reveal God's character and nature to others whom God would bring to this land.

By the time of Jesus, the Mosaic Covenant had degenerated into behavioral legalism, which included an elaborate ritual purification and sacrificial system for people to get "right with God." This corrupted state re-enforced a false assumption – that people's behavior, coupled with the mechanics of sacrifice and ritual purifi-

cation, made them acceptable to God. **That “religious” paradigm needed to go.**

Davidic Covenant⁶

■ **Worship** was always intended in God’s design to be a communion of the heart, resulting in authentic worship “*in the Spirit and in truth.*”⁷

■ God’s design for the world was for a perpetual **Kingdom** of heart and mind where God’s Will and Ways would always prevail. It would be a Kingdom that would be manifested in all peoples living fruitfully and abundantly under God’s authority. His reign would encompass the world and all its cultures, including everything in those cultures; e.g. music, art, politics, literature, science, philosophy and the performing arts, as well as the marketplace, the home, the neighborhood and the church. Every aspect was meant to perfectly reflect (glorify) “who God is, how God does things, and what God cares about.”⁸ And in the future, a literal kingdom with Christ sitting on David’s throne will be realized.

By the time of Jesus,

■ The Temple had become an institution with complex **Worship** rituals overseen by a corrupt leadership. Not only were they extorting the people, but they were oblivious to God’s mandates for demonstrating compassion and mercy.⁹ **Change was needed.**

■ The notion of **Kingdom** did not include Jehovah, but had come to mean a political kingdom of kings and armies, which would make things right for Israel. **A renewed understanding was required.**

Viewing Jesus’ ministry from an elevation of 5,000 feet exposes some things that were not so obvious at ground level. Now it’s clearer to see one of the over-arching themes that dominate

the Gospels – Jesus **rescuing, restoring and redeeming** the covenants. This perspective keeps our interpretative focus of micro-contextual themes (in any given passage) pointed in the right direction.

Jesus at Work Restoring the Covenants

This covenantal motif is an umbrella that transcends all of the Gospels. Contextually, it unifies everything we see Jesus doing and saying. For example,

■ When Jesus calls disciples to “*follow Me,*”¹⁰ He is rescuing/restoring/redeeming (what we will call 3 R-ing) the Abrahamic Covenant by establishing a new type of descendent in the Land who will reflect the Will/Ways of God.

Nicodemus is Exhibit A of why a new kind of descendent is needed in this Land.

■ When Jesus says, “*I am in the Father and the Father is in me,*”¹¹ He is 3R-ing the Land by accurately revealing and portraying God in the Land, and thus redeeming a portion of the Abrahamic Covenant.

■ When He shares His thoughts and heart in what we call the “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus is instituting a new community and giving it a very different paradigm. As He does so, He is 3R-ing the Davidic covenant of the Kingdom by bringing with Him the in-breaking Kingdom of God where God will rule, not in a political way with armies, but will sovereignly reign in the hearts and minds of His people.

■ When Jesus affirms “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself,*”¹² He is 3R-ing both the law (Mosaic Covenant) as well as their understanding of the Kingdom (Davidic Covenant).

■ When Jesus gets in the boat with His disciples late one afternoon in Capernaum and takes them to “the other side,”¹³ the Decapolis, He is 3R-ing the Abrahamic Covenant and affirming (again) that Abraham’s seed will be a blessing to all peoples.

■ When Jesus dialogues with the Samaritan woman in John 4 about where to worship God, He declares a new way to worship “*in the Spirit and in truth*.” This is part of 3R-ing Worship, part of the Davidic Covenant. And when Jesus purges the Temple of animal sellers and money changers (John 2), He is signaling a rescue and restoration of the Davidic Covenant where future worship will involve a new Temple of the Holy Spirit; and animal sacrifices will no longer be needed because of His impending Sacrifice.

Viewing the unfolding of the Gospels from 5,000 feet reveals just how pervasive covenant restoration is in the Gospels, and Jesus’ role in it as the “New” Covenant.

“New” and “Old” Covenants

It helps to realize that when “New” is used as an adjective for covenant in the Scriptures, it does not mean it replaces the “old” in the same sense that we would throw away our old, tread-bare, worn out tires and replace them with new ones. Instead, “new” means the fulfillment of, or the fuller manifestation of the “old.” Remember, the Abrahamic covenant does not become obsolete just because we use the word “new” to describe Jesus as the New Covenant. Rather, using “new” in that context means Jesus comes to fulfill, to

more fully manifest, to bring to completion, the Abrahamic Covenant.

A Final Note

Covenant in the Scriptures is a large (and rewarding) subject. Books are written to attempt to adequately deal with this idea. Thus, this chapter may no doubt disappoint many with the inadequacy of the scope of its treatment. But there simply is not enough time and space to adequately delve into it more comprehensively. Rather, the focus of this chapter is to encourage you to leave ground level from time to time in your study of the Gospels and take a wider view on what Jesus was contextually doing. To the extent this chapter accomplished that, it achieved its purpose. And perhaps these limited contextual observations can serve to prime the pump in your life for a much deeper study of covenant – the wonderful reality that God is a covenant making and covenant keeping God. That’s why He sent His Only Son to be the “New” Covenant to **rescue, restore and redeem** that which was corrupted! This Samaritan woman is about to experience that reality.

That Samaritan Woman

Now we are ready to meet this Samaritan woman. She’s a woman who has had five husbands and is currently living with a man who is not her husband! How do you do that in this culture? There is something extraordinary going on here. Is she the female equivalent to the “Prodigal Son”? Stayed tuned...

Reflections to Journal and Share

- When was the last time you used the word covenant in your daily conversation with others?
When was the last time you heard the word covenant in a Sunday morning message?
If the answer is, “It’s been so long I can’t remember,” what might that suggest?
Might we be missing something significant 1) in our faith, 2) in our understanding of “who God is, what God cares about, and how God does things,” as well as 3) why Jesus came?

- Do we see ourselves as Covenant rescuers/restorers/redeemers working daily in concert with God’s Spirit to

- Be the new descendents in the land accurately revealing (glorifying) God and portraying “who God is, what God cares about, and how God does things” to a watching world?

4

Strategic Retreat to Samaria

Continuity

I



In the prior three chapters, we contextually reconstructed John's Gospel to prepare for Jesus' encounter with a woman at Jacob's well in Samaria. In like manner, let's dig deeper into John 4.

Then, when the Lord came to know that the Pharisees heard that Jesus was constantly making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus himself was not baptizing but His disciples were, He abruptly went away from Judea and went off again into Galilee.

—John 4:1&2 Wuest¹

What's Going On?

In almost every commentary on John 4, these two verses get very little attention. So let's put on scuba diving gear to go below the surface to try and find out what's happening between the lines.

- Why is it an issue that Jesus was perceived by the Pharisees as making more disciples than John?
- How should we understand the use of the English word *baptizing*?
- What might have caused Jesus to *abruptly* leave Judea?

These probing questions may help us understand why Jesus is already exhausted when He gets to Jacob's well at noon. We would expect Jesus to be exhausted by 8:00 PM from a full day of walking, but not by noontime. So what does this suggest? A bad night's sleep? Walking through the night because of some sense of urgency and getting no sleep at all? Or could emotional weariness (remember he's fully human while also being fully God) be contributing to His physical fatigue? For possible insights, let's revisit his cousin John.

Revisiting John the “Baptist”

John’s primary message was one of repentance. As we previously observed, to Western evangelicals, the word repent usually means something akin to falling on your knees, telling God you are sorry for what you have done, and that you will now be heading in another direction. A first-century Jew would have had a broader understanding of repentance as “fundamentally changing the way one sees and understands everything.”² Restated for today, repentance meant to “change your worldview and all the paradigms that come with it.”

John made it very evident he was pointing to Jesus as Messiah – John 1:26-27, 29-30, 32-33. The clincher is found in verse 34 where John says, *I have seen, and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One*. Then Jesus comes along on the Judean landscape, no doubt likewise calling for repentance as He announces the inauguration of a new Community – the Kingdom of God. Adding to the concern of the Jerusalem establishment about John’s message is that Jesus, despite being on the scene for less time than John, is now *gaining and baptizing more disciples than John*. To comprehend their concern, we need the first-century context for what we in the 21st Century West call *baptizing*.

It’s Immersion, not Baptism!

If somehow we could travel in a time machine back to a first-century Judean village and ask the villagers: “Where can we get baptized?” they would have no idea what we are talking about. And if we ask them: “Where can we find John the Baptist,” they would likewise glaze over. Never heard of him! The confusion lies in the use of terminology. The term they are familiar with is *immersion*, the placing of a person into

and then under *living* (a technical word meaning *moving*) water.

Furthermore, in our current Western evangelical context we have only one reason to “baptize” someone – either infant baptism or believer’s baptism, depending on your doctrinal perspective. When John immersed Jesus (John 1), was it because Jesus needed a believer’s baptism? Hardly! There were five reasons someone was immersed in this first-century, observant, Jewish religious culture.³

- Identification with a particular (doctrinal) teaching, e.g. repentance
- Ritual purification in the purification baths (*mikvah*)
- Gentile proselyte conversion
- Submission to rabbinic authority (what a disciple would do)
- Consecration into religious authority (what John participated in with Jesus)

The Written Gospels are the Tip of the Iceberg

You may never have paused to think about it, but in the Gospels we see Jesus in action for only about a cumulative of 30 days during His three-year, 1,000-day ministry. John was right when he observed:

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written. (John 21:26) NASB

It is not out of the question that Jesus may have taught for a month or two in Judea at the beginning of His ministry. We just have no record of it. If so, did He say new things every day?

Probably not. Rabbis were somewhat like today's politicians in that they had standard "stump" teaching messages that they customized for local audiences. Thus, it is not too much of a stretch to say that Jesus may well have repeatedly taught various versions of what we know as the Beatitudes, "Sermon on the Mount," as well as parables familiar to us.

Because the leadership of Temple, Inc. is totally corrupt and everyone knows it, it is easy to envision hundreds of people every day who want to be immersed to identify with and submit to Jesus' authoritative teaching about the Kingdom of God. Given the political backdrop of oppression and occupation of the land by the Romans, they were looking for a new kingdom (even though many were confused what that should look like).

"Jerusalem, We Have a Problem!"

There is that arresting line in the movie *Apollo 13* when Tom Hanks says, *Houston, we have a problem*. The emissaries of the Sanhedrin who have been following Jesus and sending regular reports back to Temple, Inc., may have one day reported, "*Jerusalem, we have a problem!*" This *Yeshua* is gaining more supporters every day, and more and more people are convinced he is the long-expected Messiah. In fact He calls Himself the *Son of Man* (a Messianic term from Daniel 7). Furthermore, he is talking about a new Kingdom which sounds more and more like political revolt. Something needs to be done quickly or this growing Kingdom of God movement might get out of hand! Getting wind of that Establishment perception might well be the reason that Jesus *abruptly* leaves Judea and heads north to Galilee via Samaria.

Strategic Retreat

It must have been an intriguing scene. Day after day Jesus is preaching, teaching and healing in Judea. And it's really going well! After a month or two – it would have taken time for the word to spread and the Jerusalem Establishment to take serious notice – hundreds of people are responding every day. His relatively new disciples are energized. Each is immersing dozens daily as these Judeans dedicate themselves to being disciples of Jesus or to identify themselves with aspects of His teachings. "What a great start to His ministry," those disciples may have mused.

Then one day Jesus says, "Quick, grab your bags; we're leaving Judea ASAP." Might they have wondered: "Why are we doing this? Things are going so well." *But Jesus knows His time has not yet come*. Now is not the time to be confrontational with the Jerusalem Establishment. Nor is it appropriate to introduce any competitive, rivalry perceptions into his cousin John the Immerser's (my contextual name for him!) ministry. In fact, it is time for a strategic withdrawal to Samaria where the Jerusalem Establishment has neither jurisdiction nor "reporters" on the scene.

Now, it was necessary in the nature of the case for Him to be going through Samaria. He comes therefore to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near a small plot of ground which Jacob gave his son Joseph. Now there was in that place a spring, the one which had belonged to Jacob. (John 4:4-5)
Wuest

Samaria or the Decapolis?

There is a common misperception that Jews did not travel through Samaria except in the most extraordinary of circumstances. That misunderstanding suggests that to avoid entering Samaria,

Jews going from Jerusalem to Capernaum would first travel east down the Wadi Qilt to Jericho, then cross over the Jordan (Trans Jordan) before heading north through Perea. What is overlooked in this logic is that travelers must go through the Decapolis – the Land of Evil to an Observant Jew – to get back to the west side of the Jordan and into the Galilee District.

Consequently, it was not that unusual for a Jew to travel through Samaria on the Central Ridge Route when on a N/S journey.

There are also some logistical issues that need to be factored into this travel misperception. In the first-century world you travel by foot – typically 16-18 miles per day. Jerusalem to Capernaum is almost 100 miles north/south when taking the Central Ridge route through Samaria right past Jacob's well. That makes it at least five (and typically six) full days of walking. Thus, if you wanted to avoid Samaria by walking one day east from Jerusalem passing through Jericho to cross the Jordan, you have added one more day of walking before you even begin heading north.

This seven-day journey presents a problem to an observant Jew because travel must be accomplished between Sabbaths, which means no more than six days for walking.

Thus, I would suggest that the nature of the must or necessary reason Jesus has to go through Samaria is much more of a Divine Mandate in nature than it is a travel route issue. This no-name Samaritan woman is about to become a part of the Abrahamic Covenant. She just doesn't know it yet!

Then Jesus, having become wearied to the point of exhaustion by reason of His journey, was sitting thus at the spring. The hour was about the sixth. (John 4:6) Wuest

As previously observed, one of the first contextual issues that should jump into our mind when reading this verse is: Why is Jesus exhausted by noon? Noon is far too early in the day for Jews to be exhausted from a normal traveling distance of walking. There must be other reasons. Whatever tensions were being created, whatever issues were starting to coalesce because of Jesus' disciples immersing more people than John, may have had an emotional impact upon Jesus.

A Glimpse into His Future

We all have experienced that dealing with emotional issues can drain us of energy more quickly than a day's worth of walking. And maybe such emotional tensions caused Jesus not to sleep much the night before. A reasonable understanding of the issues going on between the lines in verses 1 and 2 provides a possible rationale as to why Jesus is already exhausted when the day is not even a third over.

When Jesus assesses that *his time had not yet come* and therefore strategic retreat is in order, He may well have been staring His Destiny in the face; a reminder that in less than three years He will be abandoned by these new disciples and will painfully die on a shameful Cross. Might that glimpse into His earthly future have already evoked some *let this cup pass from Me* thoughts and feelings? Seeing His week of Passion in the distance could have profoundly stirred the human emotions of His soul. And those thoughts may have ruminated in his mind as He and His disciples suddenly head north on the central ridge route toward Samaria. If any of this comes close to being true, it is not difficult to envision why Jesus could be fatigued when He arrives at Jacob's well at noon time. Is that the reason? I don't know. But it could very well have been a contributing factor.

It suffices to say that whatever dynamic(s) happened in Jerusalem in the early days of His ministry seems to have created a Divine mandate that He must now go to Samaria. There is less than three years left to accomplish so much to redeem the Abrahamic Covenant that invites all people groups into the Kingdom of God. So let's bring some (despised) Samaritan "outcasts" into that Kingdom.

Divinity and Humanity.

To increase our comprehension of what it meant for Jesus to be fully human and fully divine, we approach Holy ground that is way beyond our ability to fully grasp. I would suggest that our default mode usually seems to be one of over-emphasizing the Divinity of Christ while at the same time underplaying/understating His humanity. In so doing, we may overlook the emotional reality of being human, and miss what is going on between the lines of tension/conflict passages like this one.

Revisiting "Where Are We?"

Joseph was revered by the Samaritans as referenced in the text. His grave site lies a short distance from the well where this encounter takes place. In a small land with centuries of history, Gospel events intentionally tend to take place where prior events occurred. That's why the past is often the prologue to understanding the present passage's biblical exegesis (discerning the originally intended meaning). So we need to briefly revisit Joseph.

Consider Joseph from a 5,000 ft. perspective. It's fair to say his life did not turn out as he hoped and dreamed it would. In fact there were times he might have even considered its unfolding to be a nightmare; e.g., abandoned in a cistern by his brothers after receiving the

birthright from his father Jacob, transported to a foreign land (Egypt), unfairly accused of making improper sexual advances to Potiphar's wife, imprisoned, etc. But none of this was outside God's Providence as He eventually promoted Joseph to a prominent position in the Egyptian kingdom during a prolonged period of Near Eastern starvation. That allowed him to preserve a family/clan/nation from which Messiah would come.

Might the location of Joseph's grave near Jacob's well where Jesus is now resting suggest that a parallel (Joseph) story might be about to unfold? That we might encounter another person (should we call her Josephine!) for whom life did not turn out as she hoped and dreamed it would? That we just might meet another person who would similarly be used by God as an agent to "save" her village? That's why always asking: *Where are we?* and *What's happened before?* are helpful in digging into the back-story of a passage.

Finally at the Well!

Finally, we are ready to watch the exhausted Master Evangelist at work. The object of His focus is a woman who has had five husbands and is currently living with a man who is not her husband. What is that all about? How can a woman in this culture have had five husbands? What might that say about her, and about how others in the village viewed her? And why are we told this Samaritan woman is now living with a man who is not her husband? What might that suggest about his view of her and her perceived status (or lack thereof) in her village? Before we watch Jesus winsomely at work in surprising ways to bring a woman with a PhD in humiliation and rejection into the Kingdom of God, we need to know more about her.

Reflections to Journal and Share

- If biblical geography matters in understanding many passages, what are the implications of that for your personal Bible study?

- It is a rare seminary curriculum that offers a course in Biblical Geography and Biblical Culture along with its courses of Greek and Hebrew. What does that suggest about our Western approach to equipping pastors to discern the original meaning of passages?

Part of the answer to that question signifies why Integrated Contextual Exegesis matters. It weaves together the geographical, cultural, historical, literary and visual context of a passage to recreate the original scene, bringing to light the original meaning that the Holy Spirit intends.

- Is the notion of “strategic retreat” part of our thinking, especially when things seem to be going well? Has that ever presented itself in your personal or corporate ministry?

Or do you think that “full speed ahead” is the only option when everything’s going well?

- As you read Scripture, do you tend to overemphasize Jesus’ Divinity and under emphasize His humanity, or vice versa? Why might that be? What might that cause you to be missing or fully appreciating?

Notes and Sources

1 Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 1961).

2 Joel Green, et. al., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992) 669.

3 James C. Martin, *Exploring Bible Times* (Amarillo, TX: Bible World Seminars, 2003) 86-90.

5

Removing Barriers with Amazing Grace

Then Jesus having become wearied to the point of exhaustion by reason of his journey, was sitting thus at the spring.

— (John 4:6b) Wuest¹

The Master at Work

Jesus is exhausted, but He doesn't consider it a reason to avoid beginning the making disciple's process in the life of an "outsider." As we all know, the leading of the Spirit does not always come at times when we are rested. Here is an example of the convergence of exhaustion with Kingdom opportunity.



Suspending the Boycott!

Those of you who have read *Making Disciples Jesus' Way: Wisdom We Have Missed*² or attended one of our weekend conferences on this subject know that we prefer to avoid using the words *evangelism* and *discipleship*. To the Hebrew mind, *making disciples* was a seamless reality, a continuous process of discipling people into conversion and progressing to teach followers of Jesus Christ to obey all that He commanded.

On the other hand, the Western mind with its proclivity to analyze and dissect viewed *making disciples* as something that needed to be separated into two parts. The result created two new words – *evangelism* and *discipleship* – non-biblical words that cannot be found in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. In so doing, the Western mind separated what was always intended to be seamless. Furthermore, when you create new words, you are free to give them your own definition. This was indeed done, and we have been living with detrimental consequences of that separation ever since. That's why PBT tries to avoid using those two words. We're making an exception here so we can contrast how Jesus engages this Samaritan woman with our typical Western "evangelism" practices.

The hour was about the sixth. There comes a woman of Samaria to draw water. (4:6c-7a Wuest)

Go Where Sinners Go!

What is so obvious is easily missed. If you want to bring the “Good News” to “sinners,” you need to go where “sinners” go when “sinners” go there. Waiting in the narthex of a church for “sinners” to walk in because they are curious about the church’s stained glass windows (or to hear the church’s praise band) is an exercise in futility. However, if you want to bring the “Good News” to college students for example, you need to hang out where college students hang out. Same idea is true for young professionals and international students. It’s necessary to intentionally seek people out when and where they tend to congregate.

Know Your Audience

I am always fascinated at how well Jesus understands/reads His targeted audience. This John 4 encounter is Exhibit A. Jesus knows how unusual it is for a woman to come alone to draw water at noontime. In a Near Eastern communal society, a woman doesn’t do things alone unless she purposely wants to be alone. Furthermore, she wouldn’t draw water during the hotter times of the day. It also would be obvious that this woman is not accompanied by any children (barren?). Nor is she accompanied by her husband for protection. All of these are clues that this woman is trying to avoid interaction with others. Jesus also knows this Samaritan woman has had five husbands and she is not married to the man she is currently living with. His knowledge of this will become evident to her in verse 18.

How Could This Be?

I have yet to read a commentary that adequately addresses this five-husband issue. A few make passing comments about possible deaths and/or divorces. I suspect it is because this outcome is a

real puzzler. How could such a thing possibly happen in this culture? The odds of five husbands all dying are far too remote. Same reasoning holds true for five divorces.

We do not know the “theology of divorce” for this first-century Samaritan religious culture. However, since the Samaritans embraced the same first five books of the Bible as observant Jews do, we can reasonably assume it parallels Jewish interpretation. Thus any man who divorces his wife must give her a writ of divorce which states the reason(s) for his divorcing of her. Any woman who has received a writ of divorce must show it to the future husband prospect so there are no surprises.

As previously alluded to, there is reason to conclude that this woman is barren. Infertility is a huge issue in Near Eastern culture and a valid reason for a man to divorce his wife. A woman’s role is to procreate. Failure to do so is a profound issue of shame. From an observant Jewish perspective in the First Century, infertility was obvious evidence that God doesn’t like you. I developed in *Zechariah and Elizabeth*³ why that is a heavy thought to live with day after day, year after year.

This raises the question of why would any man want to marry her if she is known to be barren? Was it possible that the other four husbands all died? Again, that seems highly improbable. Even allowing for two deaths, two other men, for whatever reason, agreed to marry her after her first divorce. I doubt this is because she is the first-century version of a “trophy wife” since the evidence would suggest she is anything but that. Could she have somehow hidden her barrenness from these two other husbands? This too is highly improbable in Near Eastern villages where there were no secrets.

While we cannot connect all the dots on her five prior husbands, we do know the sixth man in her life is willing to live with her (and use her) but not marry her. In fact he is not even willing to accompany her to this well to protect her for safety reasons. By his actions and inactions, this sixth man is basically declaring for all to see that this woman is not worth marrying, not worth protecting; and in fact, not worth much of anything at all except to be used.

Any way you decide to size up the situation, this woman may well have been at the top of the shame list in the first-century Guinness/Samaritan Book of Records. She may have accumulated so many layers of rejection, humiliation and guilt that she is now openly living in a state of beyond shame, which may explain why she is willing to live with a man who is not her husband. For the Samaritan world, I strongly suspect this is a particularly messy life history – one beyond the pale. And if you want to peek ahead, Jesus can even use all the messiness of her life to draw others to Himself (John 4:29-30). Amazing!

Jesus Knows!

None of this Samaritan woman's life is hidden from Jesus as He sizes up how best to initiate a relationship with her. He knows all about her unfulfilled longings, struggles, regrets and her many unanswered questions. He also knows her dashed dreams and all the internal wounds of rejection, humiliation and abandonment that are still hemorrhaging. He knows the pain of her past and all the snide remarks – spoken and unspoken – that have been directed at her. He also knows how, with each month's failed attempt at conception, her sense of inadequacy, unworthiness and powerlessness deepened. He knows the tears she has shed in the middle of the

night from being a lonely resident in her world of perpetual shame. He understands the bouts of soul-searching and self-doubt she has endured and her prolonged periods of discouragement that sometimes slipped into despair. He knows how difficult it can be for a soul to ache for something that seems so right, so good, yet never arrives. He knows what it is like for her when the last rays of hope fade away into the dark night of the soul.

Barrier Removal

Establishing relationships with people is contingent upon removing whatever barriers (actual or perceived) that exist and thwart dialogue. When we take a 5,000 foot elevated perspective on the Gospels, we see Jesus at work removing the religious and cultural barriers that prevent people from coming to Him. In this particular encounter, Jesus has to remove a mountain of prejudice between Jews and Samaritans as well as penetrate layers of low self-worth in this woman. He is in the barrier removal business as we should be. Sometimes we have to be really (Spirit led) creative when it comes to interpersonal barrier removal, so let's closely watch the Master Communicator as He interacts.

Appropriate Initiative

Knowing all of this woman's past as well as what it has done and is still doing to her, Jesus knows how not to initiate a dialogue with her. He knows the last thing she needs right now is to be called a "sinner." So the "repentance" theme often used by his cousin John the Baptizer is not an option as an "opener" here. Jesus knows she is a dry sponge desperately in need of the waters of Grace to saturate her arid soul. So He devises an intentionally gracious approach that will 1) surprise and disarm her, 2) elevate her (lift her up) and give her some

dignity, 3) be personal and private, 4) shatter cultural taboos and barriers, 5) encourage her to respond, and 6) prepare the way for discussing truth later. Jesus' approach is always personal, not a "one size fits all." He is not going to engage her at all like He did Nicodemus.

I Can't Do That?

One of the hallmark attributes of a disciple is that he or she emulates his or her rabbi. As we start to watch the Master Communicator quickly size up this situation, you might be inclined to react *I can't do that! I don't have the perfect knowledge of people that Jesus has. I can't anticipate the hurts, pains, guilt and shame of another.* And you're absolutely correct. That's why it's often not helpful to have a "canned" approach to evangelism. Rather, you may need to invest a year or two of "Grace Time" with another person, getting to know him or her so that the Holy Spirit can prompt you at just the right time(s) to make the appropriate remark, ask the relevant question, or to probe a crucial area in another's life. Most of the time, redemptive outcomes are rooted in relationships. In our microwave approach to just about everything today, we want to save someone on their Spring Break beach week in two minutes on power 10. It seems we don't have any more time than that to establish genuine connectedness.

Meanwhile, back to Jesus at the well as He speaks His opening words to this Samaritan woman.

Jesus says to her, Give me a drink, for His disciples had gone off into the city in order that they might buy food in the market place. (4:7b-8 Wuest)

Taking the Initiative

If someone is coming to a well at mid-day, a perfectly natural subject to bring up is water.

That is not a contrived topic. It fits the context of the situation. (If you're wondering what a disingenuous, contrived opening interaction might look like, consider this: "*Shalom. It's a sunny day isn't it? And speaking of the sun, do you know the Son of God?*")

There is more to Jesus' opening request than meets the Western eye. In the Near East during the First Century, men do not have private interactions with women. The culture forbids it. In addition, there is a tradition in the Middle East that any request for water must be responded to. Water is scarce and having access to water is often the difference between life and death. Thus, when Jesus asks give me a drink, He is making a request that He knows mandates a response. Furthermore, Jesus is breaking a cultural taboo by asking for help from a woman. Therefore in his surprisingly short opening request, Jesus breaks through centuries of racial animosity barriers as well as a barrier that subordinates women. As disciples of Jesus, we need to lean on the Holy Spirit, asking Him to give us the necessary wisdom for simple, yet creative openers that will likewise remove barriers and lead to redemptive dialogue with others.

Note also that Jesus sends his disciples off into the city (presumably **Shechem**) to buy bread. So much for the traditional notion that Jews won't have any interactions with Samaritans, e.g., won't eat their food. It strikes me that Jesus knows that if the disciples were to hang around the well watching this interaction unfold, they would be an impediment to this redemptive interaction – yes, that's what unseasoned disciples can sometimes be. Their looks of shock and amazement may well have served as a wet blanket on the willingness of this woman to dialogue with and then divulge her reality to Jesus.

How Can This Be?

The Samaritan woman then says to Him, How is it that you being a Jew, are asking a drink from me, being a woman of Samaria, for Jews do not associate (do not use things) with Samaritans. (4:9 Wuest)

This particular sentence has been weakly handled in many Bible translations. Leon Morris points out that the verb being used is an unusual one and is only found here in the Greek New Testament. It is a compound verb that literally means use with.⁷⁴ It does not mean *associate with*. Therefore the question for this passage is: what does a Jew not use with Samaritans? And the answer in this specific contextual setting is clear: the same drinking cup/vessel. Remember, this is a Jewish world preoccupied with issues of ritual impurity. The Samaritan woman knows that no Jew will share a drinking vessel with her; for by doing so, a Jew would become ritually defiled. But what she doesn't know (yet) is that this is no ordinary Jew! This is *Yeshua*, God's Rescuer, and He is not going to let religious custom interfere with establishing a redemptive relationship.

Jesus is redefining and making obsolete traditional understandings of issues of ritual purity. Sharing a drinking vessel with a Samaritan woman (as well as other issues of ritual impurity) can no longer be viewed as a barrier to redemptive relationships. In fact if you go up again to 5,000 feet and look down on the Gospels, Jesus is doing something to make Himself ritually unclean in just about every chapter. Yet we find no record of Him ever going to a ritual purification bath! Welcome to the paradigm-changing and paradigm-expanding world of Jesus.

Amazing Initiating Grace!

Isn't it amazing what Jesus did with four simple words – *give me a drink* – four Grace-infused words packed with barrier removal efficacy! He took the initiative and both surprised and disarmed this woman. He lowered Himself by asking her to serve Him, thereby affording her some dignity which helped put her at ease. He ignored long-standing taboos regarding privately interacting with women as well as (cup) contact ritual purity. He also put her in a position where she had to respond to Him. Now a dialogue can start to unfold. Mission accomplished. Her *fullness of time* has come.

What Jesus Doesn't Do

Before leaving this chapter, let's reflect upon what Jesus did not do when initiating a dialogue with this woman. He didn't

- Arrive with a Deuteronomy scroll in hand so He could (figuratively speaking) repeatedly beat her over the head with it using Scripture verses regarding sin like an assault weapon.
- Start by pressing a Scriptural tract into her hand to prove she is a "sinner" going to Hell unless she first repents. Then having delivered that grenade, retreat to a posture of self-satisfied smugness feeling *There, I did my job. I confronted her with the Truth. And then self-proclaim himself to be the well done thou good and faithful servant.*
- Lay out in detail at the beginning everything He knew about her, e.g., her five husbands.
- Start out by scolding her for her "bad choices," e.g. living with a man who is not her husband.

- Do you consciously think in terms of “barrier removal” when it comes to establishing redemptive relationships?

- Agree or disagree: If you assumed every person you met was lonely, discouraged, internally feeling the weight of guilt and shame, is still dealing with unresolved past issues of abandonment, rejection and humiliation, you would be right 90% of the time. Since we live in a fallen world, maybe we do automatically know a lot about every person we meet as soon as we meet them!

Notes and Sources

1 Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961).

2 Doug Greenwold, *Making Disciples Jesus' Way: Wisdom We Have Missed* (Columbia, MD: Bible-in-Context Ministries, 2012).

3 Doug Greenwold. *Zechariah and Elizabeth: Persistent Faith in a Faithful God* (Columbia, MD: Bible-in-Context Ministries, 2005).

4 Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John*, Volume 1: *The Word Became Flesh, John 1-5* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986) 125.

6

The Wisdom of Grace before Truth

The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the father, full of grace and truth.
— John 1:14 (emphasis added)

There's a Pattern!

When engaging the outcasts who have been marginalized by the religious world of observant Judaism in the first century, Jesus consistently leads with His amazing Grace before bringing His penetrating Truth. In case you missed this pattern, closely watch Jesus at work healing a leper, forgiving/healing the paralytic, calling Levi, rescuing the demoniac, and numerous others. In John 4 we see Him doing it again as He creatively and disarmingly exercises Grace before Truth with an outcast Samaritan woman at Jacob's well.



Counter Point

Not everyone in the Kingdom of God believes (and practices) Grace before Truth. Recently, I naively joined one of those web-based Global Pastor's Forum discussion groups pondering the role of God's sovereignty in salvation. I should have known better! In watching (and sometimes experiencing) the give and take (or the lack thereof) between several dozen pastors, para-church leaders and "knowledgeable" lay people trying to debate this subject on line, I found that a significant number of participants were dyed-in-the-wool "truth tellers" (TT). The TTers are those who are so consumed with bringing their version of the "truth" to another that they have no time for grace when interacting with others. Thus, if you see things differently from TTers, they will quickly dismiss you as being *uninformed* and *misguided*; and if that doesn't work, even *ignorant* and *stupid*. I was appalled at this behavior and found myself wishing I could ban all TTers from evangelism!

A Second Counter Point

I recently read a book entitled *The Great Evangelical Recession: Six Factors that will Crash the American Church...and How to Prepare*.¹ The author paints a picture based on dozens of studies and surveys of an American evangelical church that 1) is smaller in size than most realize, 2) is steadily shrinking, 3) is losing two out of three of its youth to “no faith” by age 29 (with most not returning), 4) requires big bucks to sustain itself, which are steadily drying up, and 5) is woefully weak at evangelism and making disciples.

What particularly arrested my attention was the two out of three evangelical millennials who walk away from the faith by age 29 never to return. There are multiple reasons for that outcome, but wonder if TTers play a significant role in alienating Kingdom kids from the church? Might we be in desperate need of rediscovering how Jesus effectively interacts with people as He brings them into in the Kingdom of God? I think you know my answer!

Sequence Matters

In reflecting on the fullness of Jesus Christ, John records that the disciples saw the glory of the Godhead in Jesus Christ *full of grace and truth*.² Note he did not invert that sequence and write *full of truth and grace*. If every word in Scripture is inspired, it logically follows that the sequence of these words is likewise inspired. This pastoral reality is at the heart of this chapter.

E. Stanley Jones, a missionary to India for the better part of half a century, once observed that when Truth precedes Grace, relational damage inevitably results.³ Consequently, without preceding Grace, Truth injures people leaving them “wounded and bleeding” often with profound feelings of humiliation and rejection. Put another way, Grace is the anesthetic that

allows the scalpel of Truth to operate. It is when preceding Grace is in place that we become open to hearing the Truth about ourselves. When we know that someone really cares about us because we have repeatedly experienced his or her Grace in our lives, we will be much more willing and able to listen to the tough things he or she might have to say. Years ago Young Life had a motto that captured the essence of this dynamic – *Earn the right to bring the truth*.

Healthy Relationships

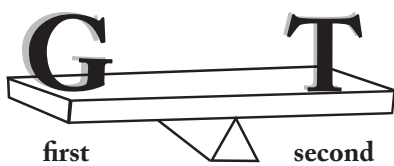
This sequencing of **G**race before **T**ruth is essential DNA for all healthy relationships. It is a pattern deeply embedded in the interpersonal dynamics of Jesus. It was manifested not only in how He remade the disciples, but was used for interacting with all kinds of marginalized people in a wide variety of circumstances. **G**race before **T**ruth is one of those unchanging “laws of gravity” at work in fruitful relationships. And like gravity, if you choose to defy it, you do so at your own peril for surely you will end up injuring others.

Balance is the Key

The graphic that follows portrays the intended interrelationship between **G**race and **T**ruth as we see Jesus living this pattern out in His relationships with the Twelve, as well as with lepers, tax collectors, people of ill repute, and people with disabilities. Jesus’ winsome interactions with these invisible people never contained any criticism, condemnation, or judgment. He was always tender and gracious towards those He invited to become citizens in His new Community of Heaven. It was this consistent pattern of **G**race before **T**ruth that magnetically drew people to Him. However, if you were part of the religious establishment who spurned His myriad acts of **G**race, you would eventually be

confronted by the Truth of your situation, e.g., Matthew 23:13-33.

In trying to capture this Grace-before-Truth dynamic, I chose to make use of a familiar childhood icon – the teeter-totter. Anyone who has been on one end of a successful teeter-totter experience knows how important proper weight distribution is if appropriate balancing is going to sustain teeter-tottering. The key to using this Grace and Truth teeter-totter graphic is to understand that the first relational priority always starts on the left with Grace, and then progresses to the second priority, Truth, as indicated on the right hand side. It is intentional that the G and the T are of equal size. This symbolizes equal amounts of both Grace and Truth being experienced over time in healthy relationships and in that sequence.



Healthy Relationships

Tilting Tendencies

By the very process of describing spiritually and emotionally healthy relationships as embracing equal amounts of Grace and Truth at its core (with Grace preceding Truth), we can now describe various unbalanced conditions alive and well in the fallenness of the human condition:

- Bringing too much Truth too quickly into a relationship.
- Leading with Grace – at least got that part right – but never getting past Grace to bring the Truth that is so desperately needed if people are going to be remade into the image of Christ.

- Starting with token Grace, but not investing enough Grace time for it to take root and become effective so that the Truth can not only be heard, but become a transforming Truth.

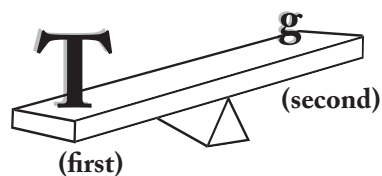
Each of these tilting tendencies toward one ditch or the other is observable in marriages, families, friendships, churches and ministries. As a result, we often have out-of-balance Grace and Truth dynamics operating between husbands and wives, parents and children, managers and subordinates, disciplinators and disciples; and yes, in evangelizing activities and efforts.

Two Distortions

We all know people who tend to be either predominately Truth Tellers or Grace Givers. Furthermore, each of us, in the fallenness of our human condition, tends to predominately lean toward one or the other. That's partly why healthy relationships are so difficult to establish, let alone maintain. It takes hard work in the best of relationships to stay balanced during stressful times and lean against our instinctive tendencies to automatically veer toward our preferred Truth Teller or Grace Giver ditch.

The Chronic Truth Teller

There are people who always seem ready, willing, and able to put the emphasis on quickly dispensing strong doses of Truth, or at least his or her version of the "Truth," as part of their evangelizing dogma. The following graphic tries to capture the essence of the injurious pattern lived out by wound-inflicting Truth Tellers:



Chronic Truth Teller

TTers are quickly identified because they tend to be

- People with a harsh, condescending, critical spirit that tends to focus like a heat-seeking missile on the one thing they feel is wrong or problematic in your approach, which then entitles them to dismiss (and not deal with) everything else you've previously said that is true.
- They are impenetrable when it comes to logic and reason. Like politicians on the evening news, they have their "talking points" that they will not depart from even when you point out the inconsistency and contradictory nature of their positions. They are unteachable as they hunker down in their fortress paradigm.
- They tend to cite Scripture verses to defend their views but they are often incapable of explaining why that particular verse buttresses their position. When you point out the way(s) a particular verse was mishandled, they will ignore your point and quickly launch another Bible verse at you to deflect your penetrating point. They firmly believe that if they can quote Scripture as a response (even if they are wrongly handling the word of truth), they have convincingly made their point and the case is closed! You cannot reason with them.

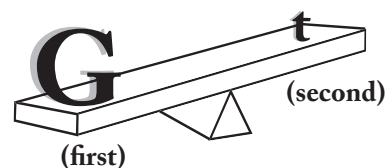
In church venues, TTers tend to reveal themselves as

- Someone in a Sunday school class who can't wait to pounce on the teacher and correct him or her in front of the whole class for the slightest error or misstatement. Or the corollary, the person who uses the chance to ask a question in a public setting as an opportunity to make an extended statement of what he or she thinks about something to imply why you are "wrong."

- People who take great pride in "telling it like it is," or "letting the chips fall where they may," and in so doing try to make a virtue out of their vice. In so doing they function as the equivalent of hit-and-run drivers in relationships.
- Advice-giving, I've-got-your-answer people who like to quickly spoon out simplistic black and white answers to fix/solve the complex gray issues in the lives of others. Often times they interrupt you with their "solutions" before you have even finished describing your problem! For them, Truth becomes embodied in the rapid, pat application of a formula at the expense of taking time to graciously discern the subtle issues that might be at work in another's life.
- People who are not very good at listening to others. While partially "listening" with one ear, they are already silently rehearsing their next response.

The Chronic Grace Giver

A full development of the chronic Grace Giver is outside the scope of this chapter. It suffices to say that this type of person has the sequencing right in that he or she always leads with an initiating emphasis on **Grace**, or his or her (often misguided) notions of what each thinks **Grace** is. However, he or she never seems to be able to get beyond that posture to deal with the Truthful reality of a situation. These chronic Grace Givers are typified by the following graphic:



Chronic Grace Giver

Practical Wisdom

Watching the dynamics of **Grace** and **Truth** at work in healthy relationships suggests some practical wisdom we can benefit from, wisdom that those with Truth Teller tendencies usually miss.

Grace Time Takes Time

Intentionally investing in **Grace Time** in a relationship with another person (or organization) usually takes a lot longer than we might think or want. We live in a fast-paced world. We want things to be done quickly and well. But trusting relationships are not amenable to a microwave approach, as if we can spend two minutes on Power 10 and force-feed effective **Grace Time**. Rather **Grace Time** benefits most from the slow bake process and can often take months and years. The biggest temptation in any relationship, evangelism and discipling alike, is to be in a hurry, to gloss over the need for **Grace Time** investment in order to earn the right to be heard in the life of another.

Grace Time Is More Than Nice Words

Words don't always communicate what they were intended to say. The disingenuous use of "nice" words is epidemic today, even in the church. All too often we say things we don't really mean. All of us are familiar with people whose "nice" words and flowery phrases are empty and don't meet the criteria of meaningful **Grace Time**. Genuine words are lived out in actions. They are appropriate to the situation, and credible. Importantly, they are also consistent with our behavior. Noble thoughts don't qualify as **Grace Time**. The ancient Chinese long ago observed that a thousand noble thoughts are not the equal of one humble deed. As a result, **Grace Time** encompasses doing gracious things for people – a note, a call, a gift, a visit. It is love, care, and concern in action.

Don't Presume on Prior Grace Time

The Bible reminds us that God's mercies are fresh and new each day. Based on the way each of us lived yesterday, that fresh-and-new mercy reality needs to be true! In a similar manner, the same can be said about **Grace Time**. The fact that two people enjoyed some meaningful **Grace time** a week ago does not mean that one of them is entitled to rush in and suddenly confront the other with **Truth time** today. Relationships work best when **Grace Time** is repeatedly established early in each encounter. Bringing the "Truth in love" assumes that prior **Grace** is in place, and that **Grace Time** has been meaningfully experienced by the other.

Everyone Has a Tilting Tendency

It is the reality of the human condition that we seldom function in a consistently balanced **Grace-before-Truth** manner in our relationships. Most of us seem to be set in motion with an inherent tendency to be more of either a **Grace Giver** or a **Truth Teller**. As a result, we have to consciously work toward leaning in the opposite direction, away from the ditch that we naturally gravitate towards. Fortunately for the follower of Jesus Christ, one of the many helpful roles of the Holy Spirit is to prompt, correct, and teach us how to remain balanced in our relationships.

Every Ministry Has a Tilting Tendency

Since people are always involved in churches and ministries, the dynamic of those organizations tends to take upon itself the nature - **Truth Teller** or **Grace Giver** - of the person (s) designing the program(s), leading the organization, or providing the mentoring. Thus, it is important that each person in ministry be aware of and consciously work at leaning in the opposing direction of his or her inherent **Grace** or **Truth** tilting tendencies.

Balancing Grace and Truth

Under the continual guidance and prompting of the Holy Spirit, we can live balanced lives leading with **Grace** before bringing the “**Truth** in love.”⁴ People who operate this way are not so soft that they have no substance, yet not so hard that they injure people. They function in a balanced **Grace-before-Truth** mode, maintaining a tender heart, while not losing sight of the objective – the long-term spiritual maturity of another. In so doing, they often exemplify the following:

- As parents, spouses, leaders and teachers, they will first meaningfully compliment a person before bringing up an item for constructive criticism.
- They seldom use the word “why,” a negative word, which tends to function as a conversational closeout that typically puts people on the defensive, e.g., “Why did you do that?” Their vocabulary is much more punctuated with “what” and “when” type questions. Instead of asking, “Why did you do that?” they are much more liable to gently ask, “What caused you to consider doing it that way?”
- When they lead a ministry or are developing a relationship, they are very intentional about investing in substantial **Grace Time** with others before they will even think of venturing into **Truth** time territory. They understand the need to earn the right to be heard before effectively bringing the **Truth** into a relationship.
- In organizations, these balanced people just seem to have a knack that allows them to create empowered teams and enthusiastic committees that are productive as well as nurturing.

Hard Work

Changing **Truth Teller** tendencies is difficult. But it can be done. With the help of the Holy Spirit and the encouragement of good friends you invite into your life to help you break these **Truth Teller** tendencies, sufficient **Grace** will come your way. But the key questions are 1) can you see the reality of which ditch you tend to veer towards when interacting with others, and 2) do you really want to change that pattern?

The Teeter-Totter is not a Rigid Formula.

The existence of the Teeter-Totter framework, helpful though it may be, is no substitute for spending **Abide** time communing with the Father, the Son and the Spirit in a posture of meditative, listening prayer. That posture best allows the God Head to prompt us, remind us, teach us, and guide us into the discernment of those **Grace** and **Truth** dynamics that make for healthy relationships. When that **Abide** time with the Father is missing, and we go forth in our own insufficient strength and wisdom, we often end up functioning as clanging cymbals⁵ in our relationships, no matter how hard we might try to draw upon the insights afforded by the **G/T** Teeter-Totter dynamic. Therefore, resist the notion to make the teeter-totter into a rigid formula.

Emotional and Spiritual Immaturity

Peter Scazzero, in his book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, observes that “Christian spirituality, without an integration of emotional health, can be deadly – to yourself, your relationship with God, and the people around you.”⁶ For Scazzero, “It is not possible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.”⁷ **Truth Tellers** are the poster “child” for that reality.

Avoiding dealing with the emotional immaturity of believers is a common omission in many of today's approaches to discipling. That's why Truth Tellers continue to inflict injury on others in the Kingdom and no one seems to intervene. As Scazzero aptly observes,

The spirituality of most current discipleship models often only adds an additional protective layer against people growing up emotionally. Because people are having real, and helpful spiritual experiences in certain areas of their lives – such as worship, prayer, Bible studies, and fellowship – they mistakenly believe they are doing fine, even if their relational life and interior world is not in order. This apparent “progress” then provides a spiritual reason for not doing the hard work of maturing.⁸

One of the shortcomings of the typical Evangelical “teaching” emphasis on Bible

knowledge is its failure to acknowledge and address the believer's need for emotional maturity as well. You can know your Bible well as many Truth Tellers do and still be wrestling with debilitating emotional baggage. You can know your doctrine and dogma cold and still be relationally frozen by replaying “old tapes” that keep a person emotionally handcuffed. On Sunday morning, you can look like everything is “fine” on the outside, but still be painfully hemorrhaging on the inside from unresolved issues of abandonment, humiliation and rejection (what Christian psychiatrist Dr. David Allen calls “The Bermuda Triangle of the Soul”).⁹ This (often) one-dimensional “teaching” approach in pursuit of the “Great Commission” can easily lead to the “Great Omission” of emotional healing in the rescue and restoration of others.

Reflections to Journal and Share

- Does the **Grace-and-Truth** Teeter-Totter make sense to you? Can you recall instances when that reality was operating in your life?

- Which insights and what challenges particularly resonate with you?

- Have you ever been hurt by a **Truth Teller**? What did that do to you? How long did it take you to get past it?

- Are you naturally more of a **T**ruth Teller or a **G**race Giver? What does that suggest? What might that mean for your relationships in the family and with peers at work, church, and in the community?
- Henri Nouwen once observed, *Only in the context of grace can we face our sin.*¹⁰ True for you?
- Is there anything about how you tend to function in relationships that you would like to change? If so, how do you propose to go about effecting those changes? What might the role of others be in this change process?
- Do **T**ruth Tellers get healed in your fellowship or are they just tolerated as they continue to injure others?
- If you are a **T**ruth Teller, are you willing to declare a moratorium in how you interact with people until you can start to rebalance your **G**race-and-**T**ruth teeter-totter?

Notes and Sources

1 John S. Dickerson, *The Great Evangelical Recession: 6 Factors that will Crash the American Church...and How to Prepare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013).

2 John 1:14

3 E. Stanley Jones, *The Word Became Flesh, Festival Edition*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979) 34-39.

4 Ephesians 4:15

5 1 Corinthians 13:1

6 Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006) 7.

7 Ibid, 17.

8 Ibid, 15.

9 Dr. David Allen, Handout from The Eleuthera Institute, Arlington, Virginia. Dr. Allen, a Christian psychotherapist and author of *In Search of the Heart* has developed what he calls the “Bermuda Triangle of the Soul.” His clinical experience suggests that the three sides of his Bermuda Triangle - abandonment, rejection, and humiliation - speak to the human condition of every person. The only question is to what degree. Contained within that prison triangle are the issues of guilt and shame in what Dr. Allen calls “The Hurt Trail.”

10 Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, (Minneapolis, MN: The Seabury Press, 1981) 30.

7

Responding to Amazing Grace

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;
—Isaiah 55:1a

Barrier Removal with Initiating Grace

Establishing relationships with people is contingent upon removing barriers (actual or perceived) that thwart dialogue. Jesus' first words to this unnamed Samaritan woman are stunningly simple; yet culturally penetrating as He says, *Give me some water to drink.* With these words Jesus both surprises and disarms her. He lowers Himself (and thereby elevates her) by asking her to serve Him, which affords her a measure of dignity that puts her more at ease. He ignored long-standing taboos of interacting privately with women as well as (cup) contact ritual purity. He also put her in a position where she had to respond to Him. (When water is requested in the Near East, it must be provided.) Now a dialogue begins. Her *fullness of time* is unfolding.



So the Samaritan woman said to him, *“How can you – a Jew – ask me, a Samaritan woman, for water to drink?”* (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.) (John 4:9 NET¹)

Her Response

The Samaritan woman's response to Jesus' remarkable Grace-infused words is in the category of I-can't-believe-what-I-just heard. She is amazed that a Jewish man evident by His dress would even speak to a Samaritan woman, let alone ask her for a drink. But beyond that, she is stunned that a Jew would willingly share a drinking cup with a Samaritan. Luke's parenthetical observation “for Jews use nothing in common with

Samaritans” is to be understood in this context. No observant Jew would ever consider sharing a drinking vessel with a Samaritan. To do so would cause ritual uncleanness, necessitating a cleansing protocol in a ritual purification bath (*mikve*, *mikveh*, *mikvah*). And she is absolutely correct. No observant Jew would ever do that. But, as she is about to find out, she is interacting with no ordinary Jew. He is extraordinary in who He is, what He cares about and how He chooses to do things!

Purity and Impurity

Issues of purity and impurity are a major issue in first-century Judaism. The largest tractate (section) of the *Mishnah* (written version of the oral tradition) chronicled issues of ritual purity and impurity. There were many ways you could become ritually unclean. You could inadvertently get too close to a leper (within six feet), or inadvertently have your shadow fall over an unclean object. But the crux of the situation is that no one in this observant Jewish culture would ever intentionally become ritually unclean! No one but *Yeshua* that is; His very name means *the Lord rescues*. And if you are the Lord’s Rescuer, you will do whatever it takes to accomplish that purpose, including intentionally becoming ritually unclean!

Purification Baths

When we enter the world of first-century observant Judaism, we enter the world of the Rabbis. The Rabbis created elaborate ritual immersion protocols for the *mikve* baths. This included the number of days you immerse, the number of times per day you immerse, and the time intervals between each immersion. The Rabbis also declared that the water in a *mikve* must be *moving* water (flowing into and out of the

bath) to carry away your impurities. If the bath water was stagnant, then you would be immersing yourself in all the impurities that others left behind.

This moving water requirement has intriguing implications. Hydrology (water engineering) of ritual purification baths was not trivial. A source of water had to be found, then channeled (often from miles away) to the bath site. If you have visited Israel, you know how scarce water is in many parts of the country. The *mikve* had to be situated and constructed so that water would flow out of it by gravity. In addition the Rabbi gave this moving water (that which carries away your ritual impurities) a technical name – *living water* – a term that is about to present itself in the text.

Relational Wisdom

Two salient attributes of first-century disciples are submission to the authority of their rabbi and emulation of his ways (behavior). As disciples of Jesus, we find much practical wisdom to emulate in the initial phase of this encounter as we watch the Master at work.

- Jesus’ pastoral heart for restoring people, which is rooted in His view of the worth of every person, causes Him to extend dignity to this woman by recognizing and interacting with her. He sees her as a person, not a project. Unlike a baseball “closer,” she is not just another statistical “save.”
- He creates a safe environment for her to feel accepted. He facilitates this by sending His newly minted disciples to town for bread. Had they stayed to view this rescue scene, their dropped jaws may well have been an impediment to the winsome environment Jesus was creating to engage her.

- Jesus exhibits no elitism, smugness, superiority or moral condemnation.
- He exhibits both patience and perseverance when she doesn't "get it."
- He doesn't try to force her into His Jewish paradigm or into any particular theological system.

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to be emulators of Him in our relationships ... go and do likewise.

Creative Dialogue

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.*" (John 4:10)

When you initiate dialogue with another, it is helpful to provide some conversational "hooks" for him or her to respond to. Notice the intriguing "hook" questions embedded in Jesus' initial response:

- *If you knew ...* what don't I know? ... what did I miss? ... who is he?
- *The gift of God ...* what gift? ... no one ever brings me gifts ... might I be entitled to whatever that gift is?
- *Have given you living water ...* Is there moving water near this well that I don't know about?

This Samaritan woman decides to pursue the *living water* hook. The text records:

Sir, the woman said, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock? (John 4:11&12)

Like Nicodemus' perception with "*you must be born again*" (prior chapter), she understands *living water* in a pragmatic sense to mean moving water, rather than the technical (religious) understanding of carrying away your impurities (sins) that Jesus is referencing. Jesus offered her some "hooks" and she responded to them in an earthly way. Jesus was broadcasting on FM; she was receiving on AM. Her response is understandable. She has been walking to this well for years and knows that there are no streams of water in the surrounding area. If there were, Jacob would never have had to dig this (now very) deep well in the first place.

Jesus answered, "*Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring (artesian well) of water welling up to eternal life.*" (John 4:13&14, parenthesis added)

Lost in the limitations of the English language are two different meanings for *drinks* in this passage. In the first instance, Jesus uses a present tense verb to depict continuous action – a kind of drinking that goes on and on² because it only temporarily quenches your thirst. However in verse 14, the second use of the verb *drinks* is in the aorist subjunctive form meaning *whoever has drunk once and for all*.³

While the woman had come to a well; Jesus invites her to a spring.⁴ He adeptly changes the focus from well water to that of an artesian spring to parallel the two different definitions used for *drinks*. The contrast is between the material and the spiritual. With a well like Jacob's, you have to keep coming back again and again for water. However, with one who *has*

drunk once and for all (and now has the Holy Spirit indwelling), a powerful life-in-the-Spirit reality keeps irrepressibly surging up with a vitality that keeps overflowing.

Those of you who have visited the site of Dan in the northern part of Israel can envision those gurgling, sometimes violent surging waters (Mt Hermon snow melt) coming out of the ground from artesian springs that give rise to the head waters of the Jordan River. It's a great visual for this text.

The woman said to him, “*Sir, give me this water, so that I won't get thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.* (John 4:15)

Clearly this woman has not yet fathomed what Jesus is saying. So she humors him; goes along with this amusing discussion in a tongue-in-cheek manner. Jesus promptly shift gears and brings “truth” into the discussion. Grace time (Chapter 6) morphs into truth time.

Implications

A few years ago I was at dinner with a Director of Adult Christian Education (ACE) of a large evangelical church. When we got around to discussing curriculum, I asked what he thought were the two foundational courses that should anchor every ACE curriculum. He replied “*Knowing God*” and “*Foundations of Theology.*” When he asked me which two courses I would choose, I agreed with “*Knowing God,*” but named “*The Art of Dialogue*” as my second choice. He laughed. I was dead serious! If people don't know how to dialogue, how does evangelism work? Without meaningful dialogue, can we even make disciples?

Dialogue goes beyond conversation. Dialogue assumes you listen carefully, frame your responses accordingly, and ask good (probing) questions to discern underlying assumptions to open up others to explore what they really think and feel. I sometimes wonder if dialogue has died in our text/tweet culture (**Dialogue Rest in Peace – DRIP**). These days we seem to be a very **DRIPPY** one-way, truncated messaging culture! We “communicate” without looking the other person in the eye, reading their body language, and sensing the emotional nuances in their words and tone. (Can you imagine Jesus “converting” this Samaritan woman via text messaging from Capernaum!) At the national level, the political process is certainly **DRIP, DRIP, DRIP** as posturing politicians sling their talking point messages back and forth past each other. Seldom is it message sent, message received, message understood, message thoughtfully responded to. Watching the Master Communicator work at Jacob's well should underscore the obvious – dialogue not only matters, it is essential to the whole life-long process of making disciples. But what if 80% of those who sit in our pews are stunted when it comes to viable inter-personal communications skills? What if 90% of the people in our classrooms don't know how to effectively listen – all they do is superficially hear? What if 95% of those in small groups don't know how to frame good probing questions of others? That was part of the logic behind my choice of “*The Art of Dialogue*” as a foundational course. Would you agree, or disagree, and why?

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- If disciples of Jesus are those who submit to and emulate Him, how is your submission/emulation index doing when it comes to engaging others? Where might improvement(s) be needed?

Notes and Sources

1 *The NET Bible*, First Edition (Biblical Studies Press, 2005) 2032.

2 Morris, Leon, *Reflections on the Gospel of John, Volume 1: The Word Was Made Flesh, John 1-5* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986) 134.

3 Ibid.

4 Boice, James Montgomery, *The Gospel of John: Volume 1, "The Coming of the Light," John 1-4, An Expository Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, Third Printing, 2002) 280.

8

Authentic Worship Defined

It's who you are and the way you live that counts before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself— Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.
— (John 4:23-24) The Message¹

Jesus MD (Master of Dialogue)



Our current twitter/texting, narcissistic culture is fast losing its ability to communicate – sending self-absorbed, truncated, out-bound messages is not necessarily effective interaction. As a result, dialogue and the art of listening are becoming conspicuously absent. And if discipling others is relationally (and dialogue) intensive, what does this erosion in our ability to communicate do to our task of “making *disciples*”?²



Jesus is a master of dialogue. He also sees deeply into every human heart, nothing hidden from His gaze. Note how Jesus graciously, yet truthfully handles a very sensitive marital subject. He knows this woman has five ex-husbands and that the man she is currently living with is not her husband. If He reveals this information, it will most likely end the interaction. Therefore, to keep the dialogue going, He issues an invitation that causes her to acknowledge her true situation. Jesus knows that her shame needs to be disclosed if the interaction is to be redemptive, because He is about to address worshiping in *spirit and truth*. (The Greek word for truth is *aletheia* which means “*the reality lying at the basis of appearance*.”³ In other words, it means being totally transparent – revealing the essence of who you are to God.)

Rather than confront her with what He knows about her situation, He graciously asks her to *go call your husband and come back*. The creatively framed request though impossible – she does not have a husband to bring – provides her the option of whether or not to disclose the true

nature of her position. Having gained her confidence with His initial gracious interactions with her, He is now pricking her conscience. Will she respond in *aletheia*? And encouragingly, she does! Note how Jesus affirms her truthfulness. The dialogue continues.

Did you notice that Jesus invited her to come back? He knew He would be touching a sensitive issue. He knew she would now most likely realize that He knows everything about her. At the same time, He wants to convey “*I care about you, and I really want to continue this dialogue with you.*” Therefore, He honors (elevates) her with this request to please return, encouraging the truth of her life to come forth (and for her to face it) and keeping the dialogue going. Notice Jesus’ wisdom as He practices the art of conversation. He did not pry or probe for any shameful details of her past, nor did He chide her for her sin(s).

Creative Conversation

When we are aware of information about persons that they do not know we have and we broach the subject, conversation often ceases. Many times it causes the other persons to “shut down.” But if we can frame our comments and questions obliquely enough while remaining in the general subject area, others are allowed to voluntarily be *aletheia* in what they disclose to us. Jesus uses this tactic to continue the dialogue.

The woman says to Him, Sir, as I am carefully observing you, I am coming to the place where I see that you are a prophet. —(John 4:19 Wuest⁴)

Jesus’ confirmation of this Samaritan woman’s five-husband history changes her initial appraisal of this Jew. While she first would have viewed him as a most unusual Jew, given his willingness to interact with her and to become “unclean” by drinking water from her cup, she now elevates her assessment of him to “*prophet*” status. This

is most likely due to the fact that He knows about her past. Given this new realization, how should she handle this *prophet* to prevent more unpleasant facts about her past to emerge?

Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither here at this mountain nor there in Jerusalem. You worship guessing in the dark; we Jews worship in the clear light of day. God’s way of salvation is made available through the Jews. But the time is coming – it has, in fact come – when what you’re called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter. —(John 4:20-22 *The Message*,⁵)

Change the Subject!

We can all relate to times when discussions suddenly got too personal, too close to something we did not want to discuss, deal with, or disclose. I think that is what happened to this Samaritan woman. Jesus just acknowledged that He knew about her five prior husbands and her current living situation. She now sees him as a *prophet*. But what else might he know about her that would be shameful to acknowledge? Only she knows how tawdry her past is. So better to change the subject quickly before anything else comes up that could be embarrassing. How best to change it? Bring up the continuing controversy between the Samaritans and the Jews over where to worship? That is what she elects to do.

Jesus recognizes the diversionary tactic and has no intention of being diverted into a conversational cul de sac. He promptly states that the real issue isn’t where you worship; it’s how you approach worship. Furthermore, with a “Scripture” comprised of just the first five books of the Bible, the Samaritans didn’t get it right. By excluding the prophetic literature, the Psalms, and more, they only had a partial

knowledge of God. Furthermore, they had corrupted worship by creating a man-made religion with illegitimate priests. The Jews understood correctly how to view and worship God. They alone have a unique place in God's redemptive history, not the Samaritans, for God's salvation will be sourced through the Jews. So He turns her attempted subject diversion into a discussion of authentic worship. More of the art of conversation at work.

It's who you are and the way you live that counts before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself – Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration. –(John 4:23-24 The Message)

In Spirit and Truth

We have just encountered two verses that are foundational in terms of defining and understanding worship. There are four key words we need to comprehend – *must*, *worship*, *spirit* and *truth*. But before we take our spade and dig, let's set the stage by making a few (unsettling?) observations:

- You can sit through a “worship” service, even be moved to tears, and still not have worshiped at all.
- You can sing in the choir, usher, be a greeter, and not engage in worship.
- You can recite the liturgy and miss worshipping.
- If you don't know who God really is, his attributes/character/nature, it is impossible to worship.

- If you are preoccupied with the issues of your daily life as you sit in a worship service and mechanically go through the motions, you are not worshipping.
- Worship doesn't require a “church” building.

Doing the Right Thing the Right Way

As I mentioned in the Forward of this book, Luther captured the essence of what he termed a “righteous” act – one pleasing to God – as one that 1) is the right act, 2) done at the right time, 3) in the right spirit, and 4) for the right motivation.⁶ In terms of this current passage, Jesus is reflecting that reality by saying it's important to do the right thing (worship) the right way.

Worship has nothing to do with place. It doesn't happen just because you sit in a sanctuary and mindlessly go through the rituals of worship. Genuine worship happens when two things are fused together – you worship in *spirit and truth*. That's what **must** happen. Those two dynamics **must** travel together like Siamese twins. You can't have one without the other if biblical worship is to be experienced. And if spirit **and** truth are not fused together, it isn't biblical worship!

To Worship is to Respond

At its core, worshipping God is adoringly responding to Him from the interior of who we are (our *spirit*) for 1) **Who He is** – His attributes, nature and character, 2) **What He cares about** – rescuing and restoring broken, marginalized, sin-imprisoned people, and 3) **How He does things** – surprisingly, graciously, lovingly, taking the initiative. Therefore, the very first question we ask of any passage we are studying, Sunday morning message we are listening to, book we are reading, class we are taking is, “What did we just

learn about God – *Who He is, What He Cares About and How He Does Things?*”

This leads us to what should be obvious – God’s Word is where we accurately learn (more) about God. And what we (accurately – **truthfully**) learn about God infuses our worship – our (truthful) response to Him. There is a flip side to this reality. The less we study Scripture, the less we accurately know God, the bigger risk we run that our response to God is misguided. And that’s a gentle way of putting it.

Any time we respond to God other than for who/how He is revealed in Scripture; i.e., responding to a caricature of God we have mistakenly/deliberately created, we are responding to an idolatrous view of God. As a result, when biblical illiteracy becomes more and more rampant in the Western Evangelical church, the more bona fide worship evades us and unknowing idolatry takes its place. Leviticus 4&5 reminds us that there is such a thing as unintentional, unknowing sin. That is why I believe “**Knowing God**” is the most important course taught in a church/fellowship/para-church ministry. When we have misguided views of God, everything else tends to get skewed, including our worship.

In Truth

Genuine worship is done in *Truth*. That brings us back to the word *aletheia*. As observed before, it means being totally transparent – full disclosure – revealing the essence of who you are before Him. In this context, *aletheia* cuts two ways. We need the truth about God – an accurate/correct/biblically sound view of God – if we are to authentically worship (respond) to Him in adoration. But equally important to genuine worship is having an accurate/sober (Romans 12:3) view of ourselves.

One of the basic maladies that afflicts us in our humanity is our tendency to have too high of a view of ourselves and too low a view of God. That’s a prescription for non-worship. In authentic worship, we come “*just as I am*” as the old hymn puts it. No pretending. We need to leave our “false selves” and self-deceiving pretensions behind and be totally and brutally honest. Don’t bring the kind of person you would like to be, but bring the person you are – the real you. As a friend of mine recently put it, “*Worship is a come-as-you-are celebration, not a masquerade ball.*”

When God’s Holiness is the measuring rod, you and I have much more in common with the Roman Emperor Nero than we do with Mother Teresa. Think about it. God knows everything about us. Graciously and gently He let this Samaritan woman realize that He knows **all** about her. So why would we bring our pretentious, disguised selves to worship; and, in so doing, deny the omniscience of God? The truth of the matter is: He knows everything about us and still likes/loves us! Embrace that and be totally honest about who you are in God’s sight when you come to worship.

Observation: Would you like to experience authentic worship with those who have a more realistic view of who they are before God? Then go to a prison worship service. No illusions there! You will find the experience most refreshing. That’s one reason I find it invigorating and recalibrating to teach in prison settings from time to time.

In Spirit

We **must** worship God in *spirit and truth*. There are two parts to our being – physical and spiritual. It’s the spiritual aspect of who we are that engages in worship. Since God’s nature is *Spirit*,

we need to respond to Him in our *spirits*. The sensory part of our physicality – our eyes and ears – has little to do with biblical worship per se. If our eyes wander from one stain glass window to another, those stain glass windows have nothing to do with worship unless they evoke within us adoration and praise of God. And when the choir’s anthem is particularly moving, but we find ourselves evaluating the professionalism of the soloists, or comparing this week’s performance to last week’s, we are not worshipping.

Sadly, as more and more “worship” services become increasingly entertainment/spectator oriented, the less actual worship takes place. Unless the elements of our “worship” services evoke adoration, praise and thanksgiving within us toward the Father, the Son, and (the self-effacing nature of) the Holy Spirit, these elements actually serve to inhibit our worship.

John gets to the heart of worship when he wrote that Jesus stated, *He who believes in me, just as the Scripture said, rivers out of his inmost being shall flow, of living water.*⁷ In worship we respond to God from our innermost being – our heart and mind. Worship has much less to do with outward expression than it does with our inward disposition/affections. We’ve already touched on the role of the mind in discerning the truth about God. It’s with our hearts, the source of our affections that we adoringly respond to God (with His *truth* in view). The result makes John 4

worship an affair of both the head and the heart in a balanced, integrated way.

Staying in Balance is a Challenge

Too much head and too little heart results in a lukewarm, passionless orthodoxy. Too much heart and too little head can easily result in misguided zeal and passion. In our (fallen) nature, we tend to veer toward the ditch on one side of the road (head) or the other (heart) depending on how each of us is “wired.” The challenge to Jesus’ definition of genuine worship – *in spirit and truth* – means each of us has to cultivate either more of *truth* or more of *spirit* (passion and affections) in what we bring to worship. It’s a flawed understanding to say, I’ll bring truth, you bring spirit, and together we will cover both bases.

Authentic Worship is Transforming!

Why does worshipping in *spirit and truth* matter? Because authentic worship is inherently transforming. You can’t adore and praise God in worship for His Sovereignty – celebrating His total control over all things, that He never makes a mistake, the way His Providence has faithfully kept and guided you – and then go home and worry and fret over the current issues in your life. Worship reminds us again of who God is, what God cares about, and how God does things. And that shapes not only how we live today, but how we anticipate the tomorrows of our lives.

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Full Disclosure – “I Am” (Messiah!)

The woman said, “I don’t know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we’ll get the whole story.”
“I am he,” said Jesus. “You don’t have to wait any longer or look any further.”
–(John 4:25-26) The Message¹

Revelation

I



In response to the Samaritan woman’s attempted diversion – where to worship God – Jesus counters with two assertions regarding worship. First, a time is soon coming when the issue of “where” to worship will no longer be a relevant question. In fact it will be obsolete. Furthermore, there is religious “worship” and then there is true/authentic worship – one that integrates in “spirit” and in “truth” – two huge thoughts for a culture whose strength is behavioral, not conceptual.

In response to these declarations, this unnamed woman may have begun to feel she was over her head unable to get her mind around such expansive thoughts. So, she may have reasoned, maybe it’s time for a “close out” statement to wrap up this encounter. She replies, *“I don’t know about that. I do know that Messiah is coming and when he arrives we’ll get the whole story.”*

Messianic Expectation

Our understanding of First Century Messianic expectation is clearer from a Jewish perspective than from a Samaritan’s. Many Jews were taught by their Rabbis to expect a political/military ruler who would set up his throne in the Temple and rule in such a way as to achieve 1) peace, 2) prosperity and 3) social justice. It’s not clear what the Samaritan expectation/understanding for Messiah was; although it may well have been less political. Most likely it was of One who would be a great prophet/teacher.

Keeping the Relationship Going

In case this Samaritan woman thought she might be ending her discussion with Jesus after her close-out observation about the coming Messiah and we'll then get the full story, Jesus arrests her thinking by revealing "*I am he.*" Can you get your mind around how stunning it must have been to hear that disclosure? (Remember, Jesus had not yet revealed Himself to the Jews.) She now has two choices: either reject this characterization of him or accept it and let that reality begin to sink into her mind and soul. Since she had already assessed Jesus to be a "prophet" (verse 19), she would have been preconditioned to accept what Jesus had just disclosed about himself.

While "*I am he*" is used in our English Bibles as Jesus' statement, the word "he" has been added for reading clarity. In the original text, Jesus just said "*I Am,*" the Old Testament equivalent name for "*LORD*" i.e., "*Jehovah.*"² We don't know how familiar this Samaritan woman was with the Torah when Jesus made His revelation. Might she have immediately recalled Exodus 3:14, God's great name for Himself – *I Am Who I Am*? Regardless, God penetrated her soul so she quickly realized to whom she was conversing. Now she was ready to run back to her village and share this incredible "Good News." But first we need to deal with the disciple's interruption.

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked. They couldn't believe he was talking with that kind of woman. No one said what they were all thinking, but their faces showed it. The woman took the hint and left. –(John 4: 7-28a)
The Message

What Just Happened?

New disciples can be spiritually dull, dense and undiscerning. These fairly new disciples of Jesus return from their food-gathering mission to find

Jesus not only privately talking to a Samaritan woman, but I suspect they also overheard his last statement "*I Am.*" They immediately might have wanted to ask: *What's going on here!?* From their observant Jewish cultural perspective, Jewish men don't interact alone with a woman, let alone a Samaritan woman! However, being disciples, they wouldn't dare challenge their rabbi over such behavior, even though their thoughts about the matter were likely displayed on their faces! Fortunately, they had been gone long enough to allow Jesus to establish a redemptive relationship with this woman.

The First Disciples' Religious Paradigms

Paradigms – the way we "see" and think about things – are significant barriers to spiritual growth in all of us. When Jesus called his brand new disciples, they were deeply mired in the observant Jewish worldview of their day together with all the religious paradigms that comprised it. Some of those paradigms that Jesus systematically tore down over time included:

- Cultural prejudices toward Gentiles and Samaritans.
- A belief that an earthly Messiah was necessary to overthrow Roman occupation.
- A ritualistic notion of prayer – the prescribed prayers for every daily function and task.
- A view of God that caused them to fear ever mentioning one of His names.
- A blessing notion that reasoned if you were pleasing God, you would materially prosper. Conversely, birth defects and barren wombs were indications of God's displeasure with you.
- A behavior-oriented mindset that held up the self-righteous Pharisees as the gold standard.

Jesus and His Kingdom Paradigm

Jesus came with a whole new Kingdom worldview that challenged and inverted all the religious paradigms of His day. In fact, transformation can be viewed as a new way of seeing things – replacing restrictive religious paradigms with new liberating spiritual ones. Some of the paradigms of Jesus’ radically new Kingdom of God that He nurtured in the Twelve included understanding:

- A “Father” paradigm that said it was acceptable to call God, Abba,³ what some have called the most radical verse in the Bible.
- A concern more about the nature of your heart than your behavior.⁴
- An emphasis that the “first shall be last and the last shall be first,” and that it is the humble heart of a servant that gives his Father pleasure.
- A teaching that we now call the Sermon on the Mount, which inverted many of the “religious” norms of that day. For example, an “*eye for an eye*” inverts to “*turn the other cheek*.”
- A heartfelt concern for Samaritans and Gentiles as always intended participants in the Abrahamic Covenant.
- An emphasis on a Kingdom of the heart and mind, not a political/military kingdom of this earth.

Shock Therapy and Jesus

Jesus’ methodology for re-forming the Twelve included strong doses of “shock therapy.” Day after day these new disciples were deliberately taken far outside their observant Jewish comfort zones and cultural paradigms as they followed Jesus and closely watched as He healed lepers, demon-possessed people, paralytics, and people with birth defects; all people who had been

culturally marginalized as outcasts.

Left to their own devices, the Twelve would have avoided these disconcerting and bewildering “detox” encounters at all cost, preferring to stay safely within their deeply embedded, observant Jewish comfort zones. The strategy of fostering Kingdom-reshaping encounters for the disciples to experience was a key methodology in Jesus’ strategy for remaking them into Kingdom citizens.

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town... –(John 4:28 a&b)

Sudden Exit

The momentary disruption of the intimacy of this scene by the arrival of disciples provides this woman an opportunity to depart and go back to her town. She doesn’t know it yet, and maybe never fully realized it, but she is about to become the first missionary of the New Testament!

As part of leaving this Jacob’s well scene, much has been made of the Samaritan woman leaving her water jar behind. Many commentators contend the water pot is something that would have slowed down her journey back to town, and thus be an impediment to the urgency of her task – informing others in the village that Messiah is here! The application that often arises with this perspective is akin to: What are the water pots in your life that are holding you back from having a greater sense of urgency in spreading the “Good News” to others?

There are other perspectives to consider. The woman initially came to obtain earthly water with her pot from a physical well. In the process she learned there was “*living water*” from Messiah’s spiritual “well” that had nothing to do with her pot. So she left her physical pot behind; not so much because it could be an encumbrance

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to running back to the village, as it was now irrelevant to the “*living water*” message she wanted to bring back to her village.

Or, one may consider the left-behind water pot as a tacit acknowledgement that she would be

returning shortly, hopefully with others to meet this Messiah. Then she could retrieve her pot, since “*living water*” does not obviate the need for daily, physical water.

Reflections to Journal and Share

- When in spiritual discussions with non-believers, there will most often come a time when the non-believer decides it’s time for a “close out” statement to end this encounter. Having a good provocative, arresting statement in your back pocket might encourage that non-believer to return at a later time, maybe even with another non-believing friend.

- In your “discipleship” journey, how much “*Do and Teach*” shock therapy have you experienced? And how much of the typical Western Evangelical “*Teach and Maybe Do*” programs have you encountered? How has each impacted you? For more context on this question, review Chapter 5, “*Do and Teach*,” in *Making Disciples Jesus’ Way*.⁵

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10 Food, Fields, Harvest and God's Will

In the meantime, His disciples kept on begging Him saying, Rabbi, eat. But He said to them, As for myself, I have food to eat concerning which you have no knowledge. Then the disciples kept on saying to one another, No one brought Him anything to eat, did he? Jesus said to them, My food is to be doing the will of Him who sent me and to carry His work to completion.
—(John 31-34) Wuest¹

What Happened?

AThe disciples left Jesus in a hungry, weary state. After obtaining food in a Samaritan village, they returned to find Jesus privately conversing with a Samaritan woman and obviously refreshed. Thinking earthly thoughts, they concluded that someone somehow must have provided Jesus with food, although it wasn't obvious how that could have happened. Continuing on with their earthly thinking, they begged/urged/pressed Him to eat. Jesus is functioning on spiritual FM while His disciples are tuned into earthly AM. Jesus' patience with their spiritual dullness is note worthy.



Time to Teach

What's an effective way to get AM (monaural) tuned people to realize that FM stereo is a better frequency? (Cut me some slack with this analogy!) Answer: Subject them to a paradigm challenging encounter and then teach them about what they just experienced. As a master teacher, Jesus makes a provocative statement to begin engaging the disciples with the spiritual realities of what has just happened. He does so by informing them, *I have food to eat concerning which you have no knowledge*. That should immediately raise two questions in their minds: What kind of food is Jesus talking about and why don't we know about it? Before they can process that statement, Jesus adds a "concise, yet remarkably comprehensive" statement² for them to consider:

My food is to be doing the will of Him who sent me and to carry His work to completion (added).

My Food is to be Doing

Jesus stresses doing. He did not emphasize contemplating, pondering, or thinking great thoughts about God's Will. (Remember this earlier quote: "*A thousand noble thoughts are not the equal to one humble deed.*") To Western thinking people, this is disarming because it is so easy to make faith an exercise in cognitive assent to a series of propositions as if agreeing with the tenants of the Apostles Creed is equal to living out the rigors of the journey of faith.

Not too long ago I ran across a fascinating and challenging comparison of the Sermon on the Mount with the book of James. Turns out both have roughly 110 verses and each contain 50+ *imperative* verbs. Biblical faith is an action faith, it does something, it is faith in motion; and no, that does not promote a works theology. It simply is a litmus test for "*born again*" faith in the same sense that apple trees produce apples and disciples make disciples.

The Will of Him Who Sent Me

If God had asked Adam as he was being expelled from the Garden of Eden, "*Adam, how do you think I am going to fix this mess that you and your wife created?*" never in a thousand years would Adam have guessed a baby born in a humble manger who grew up and lived a perfect life only to be crucified on a shameful Roman cross as God's required atonement. From a 30,000-foot perspective on God's Will, that's why Jesus came; to fix this sinful, fallen mess; to restore creation to its original condition (a New Heaven and a New Earth) where God is in harmony (again) with all aspects of His creation including the

(redeemed) people He created to have dominion over it.

Redeeming the Covenants

As developed in Chapter 3, Covenant is an overarching theme that both permeates the Scriptures and unifies all of it. Jehovah is a covenant making and a covenant keeping God. Hence, everything that God does is rooted in His Covenants.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Jesus is about rescuing, restoring and redeeming God's Covenants. Doing so is part and parcel of *doing the will of Him who sent me.*

In John 4, we see three aspects of the Covenants being progressively redeemed:

- When Jesus goes to Samaria to encounter this Samaritan woman, He is restoring and fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant which was always intended to be a blessing to all nations.
- When Jesus addresses where to worship God in John 4, He declares a new way to worship "in spirit and in truth." This is part of rescuing and restoring worship, part of the Davidic Covenant.
- When Jesus teaches the disciples about sowing and reaping, He is preparing new descendents for the Land and thus rescuing and restoring another aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Some Revealing Homework

If you would like to develop this covenant theme, pick a Gospel and work through it passage by passage, encounter by encounter, asking yourself which of the six aspects of the three referenced Covenants (Chapter 3) is Jesus actively and intentionally rescuing and restoring. Make a table with the names of the passages/encounters down

the left-hand side, and six columns across the top labeled “**Land, Descendants, Blessing, Law, Kingdom and Worship.**” Before long you will see just how pervasive this notion of covenant restoration is in the Gospels and Jesus’ role in it as the “New” Covenant as He is *doing the will of Him who sent me.*

More on Doing God’s Will

From a ground level perspective of Jesus *doing the will of Him who sent me*, we see Him implementing a new Kingdom with a radical new value system. It took a while before these disciples were detoxed from what observant Judaism had done to them; and then empowered to see, understand, and embrace this new Kingdom way of thinking/being/doing. The book of Acts reveals the results of their living out these new Kingdom paradigms.

Doing God’s Will from the Perspective of Eternity

Ever thought about Eternity, about how long forever is? Doing so changes your perspective on what really matters in the here and now. I once heard one-second of Eternity defined. It was an arresting thought! To get your arms around that notion, consider a one-mile cube of granite. Once every ten years a hummingbird flies by and stops for ten seconds to sharpen its beak on that cube. By the time this hummingbird has stopped enough times for ten seconds every ten years to sharpen its beak and completely render this cubic mile of granite flush with the ground, that would be one second of forever!

That begs a question: What are you and I involved in that will last one second of Eternity? By way of contrast, I’ve done marketing plans that were fortunate to last one year. I’ve devel-

oped strategic plans for organizations that seemed to last at most 2-3 years. I have two patents with my name on them. The U.S. Patent Office says they were good for 17 years. To recalibrate what really matters in the living of our lives and what truly is lasting, we need to nurture an eternal perspective on what it means to be *doing the will of Him who sent me.*

Who Will Be in Eternity?

Have you ever pondered who/what is going to be in Eternity? The Trinity will be there and you and I cannot impact that outcome. The WORD will be in Eternity; and again, you and I cannot affect that outcome. Same is true for the presence of the angels.

The only other participants in Eternity will be God’s people. And that’s where you and I can have an impact. Whenever we are used by the Holy Spirit to help bring a person into God’s Kingdom by “sowing” and/or “reaping,” or we invest in growing and maturing God’s people; e.g., making more fruitful disciples, we are making a mark for Eternity. And when all is said and done, those are the only two ways we can have an impact on Eternity.

So if you really want to be at the heart of doing God’s Will in the here and now, be part of making those two marks for Eternity! That’s what we see Jesus doing as He dialogues with this Samaritan woman. It firmly roots Him in the center of His Father’s will.

As you look around right now, wouldn’t you say that in about four months it will be time for the harvest? Well, I’m telling you to open your eyes and take a good look at what’s right in front of you. These Samaritan fields are ripe. It’s harvest time. The Harvester isn’t waiting. He’s taking

his pay, gathering in his grain that's ripe for eternal life. Now the Sower is arm in arm with the Harvester, triumphant. That's the truth of the saying, 'This one sows, that one harvests.' I sent you to the harvest field you never worked. Without lifting a finger, you have walked in on a field worked long and hard by others. –(John 4:35-38) The Message³

Doing God's Work in Partnership

While the woman was spreading the news of Jesus the Messiah, Jesus continues teaching the disciples about the nature of doing God's Will. It's an "arm in arm" partnership between the one who sows, the one who reaps and the Creator of Nature who owns the field and (super) naturally ripens the grain. In this partnership, sometimes there will be a time delay (four months) between sowing and harvesting. Other times sowing and reaping will seem to occur simultaneously.

In this text the woman did some rapid sowing, and now can (probably) be seen returning in the distance with others ready for reaping.

Fascinatingly, the issue for Jesus is not whether His disciples will sow or reap. Rather, the more basic question is one of where and when they (and we) will be doing one or the other or both. Of course His disciples will sow and reap! That's what disciples do because it's foundational to *doing the will of Him who sent me*.

In this discourse, the disciples receive a gentle rebuke from Jesus. Verse 2 John informs us that they have just left Judea where the disciples have been "hands on" daily baptizing (immersing) many who want to commit themselves to Jesus' authoritative teaching. They have just experienced reaping on a sustained and significant scale. And now they are in (despised) Samaria

not thinking about sowing and reaping at all. So Jesus chides them *I'm telling you to open your eyes and take a good look at what's right in front of you*.

To the disciples, Samaria was a most unlikely/unworthy/unattractive field. Can you relate to their misguided way of seeing things? Implicitly or explicitly, we can easily harbor a tendency to pick and choose the fields where we want to sow and reap rather than let the Spirit lead us. In my past, I would occasionally and whimsically muse, "*Lord, can I serve the country club set, particularly those who also have yachts who would invite me for a ride?*" Can you relate!

The Joy of Partnership

In this sowing/reaping partnership, the joy needs to be shared. Those who bless others are in turned blessed which gives them much to share. The reality is that while the person who is involved in reaping will obviously experience that joy; the one who sows has to faithfully anticipate it – and therein resides both a tension and a challenge.

Sowing involves taking a risk of stepping out to share Christ with others not knowing what the reaction and response might be. Often it hardly feels like joy at that moment! Yet this is exactly what Jesus is teaching here. Why? First, because in this partnership Jesus promises there will be a harvest – it's guaranteed. Secondly, whitening the fields is not up to you and me! So by all means don't assume that responsibility! Rather, relax as you sow and anticipate that future joy. After all, we are promised that *God can do anything, you know – far more than we can ever imagine or guess or request in our wildest dreams!*⁴ Thirdly, there is a joyful response of the soul in faithfully sowing simply because you are being obedient in doing so.

11

“Come and See”

Back in the village she told the people, “Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out. Do you think this could be the Messiah?”

And they went out to see for themselves.

—(John 4:28-29) The Message¹

Many of the Samaritans from that village committed themselves to him because of the woman’s witness: “He knew all about the things I did. He knows me inside and out!”

—(John 4:39) The Message

Therefore, when the Samaritans came to Him, they kept on begging Him to abide with them.

And he remained there two days.

—(John 4:40) Wuest²

And many more believed because of His word and kept on saying to the woman, No longer because of your talk are we believing, for we ourselves have heard of Him, and we know positively that this one is truly the Savior of the world.

—(John 4:41-42) Wuest

We Have Ignition!

T



This is a familiar phrase in America’s space program. It indicates the moment when the rocket engines have fired. Shortly thereafter the rocket achieves “lift off” from the launching pad as it slowly gathers upward speed heading on its space journey. In a spiritual sense, we have just observed “born again” ignition in this Samaritan woman. Her new journey in life is now underway. She has been infused with “living water” and is now a citizen in the inbreaking Kingdom of God. What will be her next course of action when she leaves her launching pad at the well?

The Evidence

Furthermore, what evidence supports that this unnamed Samaritan woman has just been “born again”? Note how she is obviously in a hurry to share the “Good News” that Messiah has come and is offering “living water.” She cares enough for her neighbors and their collective destiny that she doesn’t wait until the disciples complete their “interruption” for

her to resume her dialogue with Jesus. She has experienced enough to know who He truly is, propelling her to urgently share the “Good News” with her village.

A Quick Study

This Samaritan woman has learned from Jesus some aspects of the art of creative conversational engagement, particularly how to frame intriguing statements/questions to stimulate dialogue with others (Chapter 7). My sense is that as she hurriedly walked back to her village, she pondered the best way to invite the townspeople to “come and see” Jesus. Only the Spirit could have inspired the tactic she used.

Our Histories Matters

In formulating her come-and-see invitation, she draws upon her personal history which would have been known to the townspeople (there are no secrets in a Near Eastern village). The fact that it was probably a highly unusual history made her opening statement even more intriguing to her audience. Isn't it amazing how the Spirit can use our personal histories – checked or not – to arouse interest in Jesus! Have you ever thought about the fact that no one has your history but you? Others may share some similar aspects, but each one is unique in all its historical detail. And that means only you have the credibility to tell your story.

He Knows Me and Likes Me!

I find it inspiring that she framed her invitation with two intriguing “hook” statements. The first one grabs me with “*he knows me inside and out*” while the second one begs the question: *Do you think this could be the Messiah?* With the first, she plays to the common expectation Samaritans had about Messiah. She alluded to that expectation in verse 25 when she said that *I know that Messiah*

is coming and when he comes, he will explain everything to us. I appreciate the way that Eugene Petersen handles his interpretation of how the woman addresses her village: *Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out* (emphasis added). It's as if this woman is communicating to her village that not only does this person at the well know all about me, as amazing as that is, but he also likes me because he talks with me and doesn't condemn me! Given her background, those are two amazing thoughts in one sentence!

An Irresistible Combination

If this woman with no name would have only uttered the first sentence, her audience might conclude she had run across an intriguing clairvoyant at the well. But that might not have been compelling enough for them to want to check it out for themselves. If she had only made her second statement about Messiah, there would have been no proof/evidence given that suggests her intriguing statement might well be true. But her linking of total personal transparency with “could this be Messiah?” was for many an irresistible “come and see” invitation. In fact those were her opening words – *Come see. Way to inspire Holy Spirit!*

As part of reflecting on the creative engagement Jesus had with her, she shows she learned another lesson by posing the second statement as an intriguing question, not asserting it as a fact. And it worked. While Jesus is instructing the disciples that “fields are already white with harvest,” this “come and see” entourage from her village may well be visible in the distance; all because this first missionary of the New Testament framed two intriguing statements for her village to consider. Now we are on the verge of revival in this portion of Samaria.

Many of the Samaritans from that village committed themselves to him because of the woman's witness: "He knew all about the things I did. He knows me inside and out!" (John 4:39)
The Message

A Missing Scene

A fascinating scene is alluded to in verse 39 but no details are provided. How many of the villagers came out to see Jesus? Did the woman lead the way? Did she personally introduce each of those villagers to Jesus? How did Jesus creatively interact with them? Might He have expanded on the "well" and "living water" motifs? Might he have reviewed the several hundred year history of their village going all the way back to the time of Jacob digging this well? That would have certainly proved He knows all things. Did He talk about his new inbreaking Kingdom of God; sort of a Sermon at the Well? It would seem He performed no miracles. So many questions, so few insights.

We do know that whatever took place between Jesus and these villagers made a life-changing impact on them. The woman had declared *He knew all the things I did. He knows me inside and out!* Now they know that Jesus not only knows all about her, but knows all about each of them as well. And that is sufficient for many. They concluded on their own that He truly is Messiah and they are ready to commit their respective lives to Him. What a day at a historic well! Jacob would be pleased at this revival. His well has been used for hundreds of years to provide physical water. Today it was the site of dispensing "living water." And many more people have "born again" ignition!

Therefore, when the Samaritans came to Him, they kept on begging Him to abide with them.

And he remained there two days. (John 4:40)
Wuest

Come Stay with Us!

When you encounter Jesus, you never want to leave His presence. When you experience His love, acceptance, forgiveness, you just want to remain at His side/feet as long as you can. These new Samaritan converts were no different. I like the way Wuest interprets the verb tense of this verse, *they kept begging Him to abide with them.* Not just once did they implore Jesus to come abide with them, they kept it up, continuing to implore/beg/plead Him to stay with them. Can you relate to that? When was the last time you begged Jesus to be with you?

Another Missing Scene

All Jesus needs is an invitation. And so He accepted it and spent two days in their village. Another fascinating window of time without details. How big was the village? What excitement was generated with His arrival? How did the excitement spread? Where did He stay? What, where, and for how long did He teach each day? Might He have taught them many of the parables we find recorded elsewhere in the Gospels? Did He talk about the Cross? What was the "buzz" in the village at the end of the first day? Were the villagers able to sleep that first night, or did they spend most of the night processing Jesus' amazing words?

What was the Samaritan woman's role during these two days? Did she continue to roam through the village looking to invite people who had not yet come to hear Jesus? Or did she sit off to the side with a blessed smile on her face as person after person discovered who He is? Or could she have been front and center sitting at Jesus' feet during that time absorbing His

teaching like water being poured on a dry sponge? Again, many questions and only a couple of clues providing answers. Thanks to John, we do know the impact of whatever happened during those two redemptive days:

And many more believed because of His word and kept on saying to the woman, No longer because of your talk are we believing, for we ourselves have heard of Him, and we know positively that this one is truly the Savior of the world. (4:41-42) Wuest

Messiah and Savior

The Samaritan woman framed her invitation to the village with the intriguing question: *Do you think this could be Messiah?* But as this passage ends, many of the villagers are recognizing Jesus as *truly the Savior of the world*. How did they make the transition from their understanding of Messiah to that of personal Savior; from one who knows all things to one who can rescue me from my sins? It had to have been included in what Jesus taught over those two days. That means Jesus may have taught about sin, the purpose of the Temple sacrificial liturgy, and the need for the shedding of blood from a Perfect Pascal lamb.

Furthermore, might these Samaritans have been the first to hear about the Cross and His upcoming sacrifice He would be making for the atonement of their sins so that they could be reconciled with their heavenly Father? Whatever He taught was enough to convince them of their sin and their need for a Savior. Jesus was both the Savior of the world as well as their personal Savior. Mission accomplished because this unnamed Samaritan woman was willing to invite those she knew to “*come and see.*” And God honored her simple, faithful testimony.

An Insight into Discipling

There is a sequential process alluded to in this passage about the nature and character of discipling. The villagers realized that they started their faith journey by believing in her words but transitioned to Jesus because of their personal encounter with Him. There are times when we believe in something just because someone we esteem is convinced of it. While that’s a good thing, that focus shouldn’t last very long because of our own humanity and imperfect faith – don’t emulate us, emulate Him! The sooner we can encourage new believers to focus on Jesus, not on our feet of clay, the sooner and more durable the faith foundation is built.

12

Take Time to Remember

On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.
—Psalm 63:6

They remembered that God was their rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer.
—Psalm 78:35

May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you.
—Psalm 137:6

Remember the words I spoke to you: No servant is greater than his master.
—John 14:26

People are more to be reminded than taught.
—Unknown

Remember Me

A central theme of God throughout Scripture is “remember Me.” Remember who I am and what I do because of who I am. These two facets are tightly interwoven for a Redeemer redeems and a Love loves. Our faith is built on historical fact; i.e., the reality of His nature and the historical basis of His deeds. God not only continually exhorts His people to remember, but He gives them very tangible, visual Old Testament and New Testament reminders of Him; e.g., rainbows, Passover, unleavened bread, festivals, Sabbath, manna, morning and evening sacrifices, Scripture, communion, etc., all to remind them (on an ongoing basis) of some aspect of Himself.



The question is, why this constant stream of exhortation and tangible reminders from God in Scripture? Because God knows us, like this Samaritan woman, inside out, and knows how easily we forget. He knows how readily and quickly we can shift our eyes from the “hills from whence cometh our help” (Psalm 121:1) and refocus them self-centeredly in the valleys of our own lives.

Strong faith is built on constantly remembering God’s nature and deeds. Those revealed truths are crucial; for without faith rooted in retrospective

fact, there is no prospective hope. Consequently, it is necessary to become better historians of our own lives so we can see God at work within us. God's plan included giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit as our Reminder and Prompter to reveal God's nature and deeds.

While our circumstances continually change, the underlying issues in our lives often remain the same – transition, worry, fear. For that reason, we need to be inspired and empowered people who always remember who He is, what He cares about, and how He does things.

Take Time to Remember

As we leave this fascinating life-changing and paradigm-changing encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman, we have much to remember from our journey through John's first four chapters:

- When we see Jesus at work, we see God at work. When we get glimpses into the heart of Jesus, we get those same glimpses into the heart of God.
- When studying the Scriptures, context always matters! It's the difference between a tightly packed rosebud and a multi-layered, multi-petaled, multi-colored fragrant rose.
- The most important thing about you is your view/perception/understanding of God. Keep accurately refining, expanding, clarifying your view of God. It's the most vital aspect of your life.
- Continue to foster, nurture and protect the joy in our life. To keep it overflowing, make sure it is rooted solely in Jesus.
- There is a world of difference between being "religious" and being Spirit led, Spirit inspired and Spirit filled.
- Be committed to "repentance" – the continual remaking and refining of your worldview and all of its composite paradigms – success, achievement, significance, prestige, importance – with what truly matters.
- Think covenant restoration (six aspects of the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic Covenants) as you follow Jesus at work on the pages of the Gospels.
- Biblical geography matters. What happened in the past at a site is often the prelude for further understanding the present passage. As we discovered, this encounter is intentionally placed at Jacob's well, because what happened in the past provides another layer of contextual insight.
- If you want to be part of working with the Spirit to save sinners, you have to be willing to go where sinners go!
- Establishing redemptive relationships requires thoughtful, intentional social and cultural barrier removal.
- We have no idea how much fruit can (eventually) come from one brief conversation about the Lord.
- Don't forget the Grace/Truth teeter-totter. It's not an iron-clad formula, but a very useful guide. Be aware of your own tendencies; i.e., either Truth Teller or Grace Giver, and compensate accordingly.
- Remember how Jesus nurtured the environment for His encounter with this Samaritan woman. He gave her dignity; didn't view her as a project; created a safe environment that exhibited no elitism, smugness, superiority or moral condemnation. He exhibited both patience and perseverance when she was slow

on the uptake and didn't try to force her into His Jewish paradigm or into any particular theological system.

- When you know you will be meeting non-believers, take time beforehand to pray for the Spirit to guide and equip you with creative dialogue comments using effective "hooks."
- It's good to have an action plan to improve your conversational/listening/dialogue skills.
- Biblical worship is a continual fusion of Spirit and Truth.
- Take whatever time and effort is necessary to make sure you never lose an eternal perspective.
- Cultivate a view of yourself that includes being both a sower and a reaper.
- Biblical faith is an imperative verb, not just a good idea. "One thousand noble thoughts are not the equal to one humble deed."
- Sharing your own "once I was blind, but now

I see" journey with others is an effective way to attract them to Jesus.

- Ask the Spirit on a regular basis, how to make "come and see" a regular part of my reach-out life?
- Witnessing is foundational to your Kingdom job description.
- God can take the most humble, modest person with a checkered past and use him/her in fruitful sowing and reaping ways in His Kingdom. In fact, God specializes in taking ordinary people and accomplishing extraordinary things through them with His Spirit.
- Don't judge others by their appearances. In God's Economy, there are no hopeless causes, no useless efforts, and no unworthy people.
- We never know what seeds of Grace and Truth have already started to sprout in a person's heart because of the faithful sowing of others in the past.
- Feel free to add your own "remembering" insights.

Reflections to Journal and Share

- Which of these reminders speak the most to you right now, and why?

About the Author

Doug Greenwold is a long-time teacher of the Scriptures. He received his BS and MS degrees, as well as a MBA degree from the University of Michigan, where he also played basketball. For thirty-two years, Doug worked in general management and executive positions in Information Systems, Healthcare Services, and Life Sciences. He retired from the corporate world in 1999 to work with teaching ministries.

In 1978 Doug discovered he was called to teach the Scriptures, his true vocation. An ordained Elder in three denominations, Doug has been teaching the Bible, writing and leading retreats, conferences, and workshops for churches and para-church ministries ever since. In 1988, he first visited Israel on a study tour and realized the importance of integrating the context of the land with the biblical texts. Since then he has been an avid student and teacher of the Bible and the Land in its contextual setting.

Presently Doug is the Senior Teaching Fellow at Preserving Bible Times, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and presenting biblical truth through contextual restoration of the biblical record. Prior to that, he was a Teaching Associate at the C. S. Lewis Institute in Washington, D.C. Doug was also a Teaching Director with Community Bible Study and a Christian educator in the Washington, D.C. area.

Doug's first book, *Zechariah and Elizabeth: Persistent Faith in a Faithful God*, is a contextual revisiting of Luke's first chapter. This innovative book opens up this couple's remarkable journey of faith by telling "the rest of their story." His second book, *Making Disciples Jesus' Way: Wisdom We Have Missed* contextually examines what we have missed in our understanding of Jesus' "making disciples" pedagogy in the First Century and therefore overlooked in our Western notions of "discipleship" today.

Doug's third book *The Rest of the Story* takes familiar Bible passages and contextually restores

them so we can understand the implications of a passage as if we were Middle Eastern villagers. His fourth book *Encounters with Jesus: The Rest of Those Stories* examines Jesus' interactions with Simon Peter, the leper, the paralytic, the calling of Levi, the rescue of the demoniac, the woman with the issue of blood, and others in a way that restores the First Century contextual richness of these encounters.

Doug's fifth book *Becoming a Judean Shepherd* revisits the 23rd Psalm through the eyes of a 12-year old boy learning shepherding from his father in Judea in the First Century. His sixth book *That Good Samaritan* contextually explores who is my neighbor and what does it mean to be neighborly.

Doug's seventh book *Those Prodigal Sons* contextually digs into "the greatest short story ever told." His eighth book *The Paralytic's Amazing Friends* contextually revisits the forgiving and healing of the leper in Luke 5 from the perspective of the paralytic's four friends.

Doug is the creator of PBT's "Bible Alive" multimedia weekend seminar. He also leads PBT's multimedia seminars and conferences on "The Last Days of Jesus," "The Bible: Its Land and Culture," and "Making Disciples Jesus' Way."

Doug is a co-founder of the Institute of Biblical Context (IBC) whose mission is to bring biblical context from the margins to the mainstream of Western Evangelicalism. He is the architect of IBC's national summer conferences which bring together gifted teachers of biblical context from around the world for three days of sharing integrated contextual exegesis with the Kingdom.

Doug also has lead contextual immersion trips to Israel (*The Life and Land of Jesus*) and Italy (*Paul's Roman World*). He is a frequent interview guest on Christian radio and is the author of over 100 articles on aspects of biblical context.

Presently Doug and his wife Nancy live in Columbia, Maryland, in close proximity to their children and grandchildren.

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ABOUT BIBLICAL CONTEXT

For the words of Scripture to be fully transformational, they need to be heard and understood as the biblical writers intended them to be. The Bible writers conveyed very precise meanings through their words, idioms, sites, names and images used. They assumed their audience would know what they were describing, together with its intended meaning. To more fully appreciate that meaning, a passage's context needs to be restored in order for us to (re)discover the transformational impact originally intended by the Holy Spirit.

JESUS ENGAGES A SAMARITAN WOMAN

**A Compelling Encounter to Engage the Curious,
the Broken, the Skeptical and the Intelligent.**

Jesus Engages a Samaritan Woman delivers on the promise and relevance contextual studies extend to every follower of Jesus Christ. Doug's engaging exposition takes the reader from the "small screen" of our own familiarity to "an IMAX 3-D experience" of the mind and heart. His intent is not merely to educate or entertain us with cultural insights previously unfamiliar. The strength of this book is its call to do genuine soul work – to reflect deeply and thoughtfully on our life in Christ. If you do the work, this might be the most important Christian book you have will ever read.

—Mark Slomka, Senior Pastor, Faith Community Church, San Diego, Author *BizBreak*

This book contains two of my favorite and most enriching aspects of Jesus and the Scriptures: 1) Jesus' encounter with this Samaritan woman at the well and 2) Doug Greenwold's unique ability to dig into and unwrap for us the contextual and cultural backdrop of God's word. Doug's cultural and context teaching has revolutionized my understanding of the Scriptures, and along with that my understanding of Jesus. He can and will do the same for you. In this remarkable study Doug brings to vivid life Jesus' ability to look into our hearts, and expose our hurts, as well as our dysfunctional way of dealing with life, and yet to do so with his perfect grace and truth in a wonderfully redemptive way.

—Sam Hunter, 721 Ministries, Author of *The Putting Green Devotional*

Jesus had an astonishing ability to love broken people extravagantly without ever watering down his values and convictions. He accepted them where they were at and compellingly guided them towards wholeness. It's a hard balance to strike, and yet it's one Jesus expects of his followers. In this outstanding book, Doug does a masterful job of revealing Jesus' way of doing so by exploring his encounter with this Samaritan woman, filling in all of the contextual pieces, and providing clear and practical ways for loving people like Jesus did.

—Brad Gray, Founder of Walking The Text, Author *Make Your Mark*

In this book, Doug Greenwold offers a wonderful contextual look at the remarkable truths about grace and truth in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4. I have always appreciated Doug's commitment to Biblical context. This book may be his finest collection of powerful insights.

—Daryl Nuss, Executive Director/CEO, National Network of Youth Ministries

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