



Chapter 7

Sharing the Good News with Others

John 4:4-46

UNDERSTANDING

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DISCUSSION

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UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read John 4:4-46

The Big Picture

Jesus gives us a model for evangelization in His conversation with the woman at the well.

In this chapter, we're going to look at a passage in John's Gospel from the perspective of evangelization. Some of your students may have heard of evangelization, but practically, why and how should we evangelize? This passage teaches us about the human condition, the answer Jesus has to our deepest questions, and our responsibility to share Him with others.

Taking the Initiative (John 4:4-9)

The passage begins with Jesus having to "pass through Samaria" on His way to Galilee (Jn 4:4). Jesus' journey to this place is noteworthy: Because of their history with one another, Jews and Samaritans did not get along and avoided each other at all costs (v. 9). Originally, there were twelve tribes of Israel. The ten northern tribes, later known

as the Samaritans, rebelled and broke away from the two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, later known as the Jews. Eventually, the Assyrian empire conquered the ten northern tribes and forced them to intermarry with five other nations (2 Kgs 17:24). This brought about a separation from the southern tribes—both culturally and religiously, as the foreign nations introduced their foreign gods. Despite this history, Jesus dares to travel into the Samaritans' country to have a conversation with a particular woman. We too are called to be daring in sharing the gospel, no matter the situation.

The cultural background of the woman makes Jesus' actions even bolder. First, in Jesus' culture, men do not strike up conversations with unknown women. Then, the text tells us that the woman is getting water at the sixth hour, or noon. In Palestine, this would have been one of the hottest times of the day. Almost everyone in the city would do this chore early to avoid the mid-day heat. Instead of avoiding the heat, the woman chooses to avoid everyone else in the city. We'll see why in a minute, but this is just another reason for Jesus to stay away from this woman. It is important to see what Jesus is willing to risk to share the gospel with this woman.

Meeting People Where They Are (John 4:10-15)

Jesus begins the conversation by relating to something the woman can understand: water. Jesus takes this simple concept and uses it to show man's thirst for something more. It catches the woman's attention, and she asks to learn more (Jn 4: 15). Jesus' method calls us to reflect on how we share God's love. Are we willing to make our message relevant and accessible to our listeners? How do we change our language and approach when speaking to those who are not living out the Faith?

Application to Jesus

Many people seek to fill legitimate needs in illegitimate ways. We need to be able to show them the love that truly satisfies.

A True Husband (John 4:16–26)

Jesus then seems to do something very odd: He asks the woman to go get her husband (Jn 4:16). After she responds, Jesus reveals her past history with five different husbands. This detail is symbolic of the history of the Samaritans, who intermarried with the five foreign nations. These nations introduced their own gods, the main one being Baal, which in Hebrew means “husband.” These ten tribes intermarried with the five nations, accepting their gods and spurning their relationship with their *true* husband, God.

Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites’ worship of foreign gods is compared to adultery. Maybe the clearest example is the prophet Hosea: When Hosea prophesizes to the ten northern tribes, God asks him to marry a prostitute who continues her unfaithfulness after their marriage. He does this to symbolize the actions of the ten northern tribes (Hos 2:14–23).

God’s point is this: He is the only one that can fill our need for love, yet we continue to chase other things to fill this void. Jesus embodies this message: He comes as the true bridegroom to this Samaritan woman and to the world, as He provides living water that truly satisfies. Our desire to reach others would soar if we owned this reality: Jesus is the answer to the longing of everyone’s heart.

Conversion (John 4:27-30)

Throughout the conversation, the woman's view of Jesus progresses. First, she calls him "sir" (Jn 4:11), then "prophet" (v. 19), then "Messiah" (v. 29). In her excitement, she leaves her jar and runs into the city to tell others about Jesus. Some have pointed out that the jar symbolizes her formal life that did not satisfy her. She leaves it behind now that she has a higher purpose. Have we left our own past behind, in light of the gospel? Do we call others to do the same?

Testimony and Conversion (John 4:31-42)

St. John Chrysostom noted, "The Apostles, when they were called, left their nets; this woman leaves her water jar and proclaims the gospel, calling not just one person but influencing the whole city." Through the woman's testimony, many Samaritans come to believe in Jesus.

Just think about who this woman was. This same woman was shunned by her community, and yet she has the courage to tell them this good news. The change in her life is so significant that those who ostracized her are willing to listen to her and believe what she has to say. How much more will our friends and family be willing to hear how the Lord has changed our own lives! It is important to know how the Lord has changed our lives and to be able to express this to others. Testimonies are powerful!

All can learn something from the different stages of the woman's life. Have they had a conversion? Have they left their old lives behind? Are they willing to tell others about it? Find ways the members of your group can improve. Help them follow the courageous example of the woman at the well.

Application to Our Lives

Where do we find ourselves in the story? Jesus and the woman at the well both have many things to teach us about how to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

John 4:4-46

STEP 1: OPENER

Name some people you admire for the way they share their faith. What characteristics allow them to be so effective?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

In this passage, Jesus travels to Samaria. Jesus' journey to this place is noteworthy because of the history between the Jews and the Samaritans. Originally, there were twelve tribes of Israel: The ten northern tribes, later known as the Samaritans, rebelled and broke away from the two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, later known as the Jews. Eventually, the Assyrian empire conquered the ten northern tribes, forcing them to intermarry with five other nations (2 Kgs 17:24). This brought about a cultural and religious separation from the southern tribes, as the Samaritans incorporated the worship of foreign gods. Thus, the Jews and the Samaritans did not get along and avoided each other at all costs (Jn 4:9).

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Read John 4:4-42.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

1. What do Jesus' travels to Samaria say about His evangelization, given the history of the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans?

Answer: Jesus is willing to take risks to reach others with His message.

2. How should this story affect how we share Jesus with others?

Answer: We cannot stay in our comfort zones. At times, we will have to be bold and courageous in sharing the Faith.

3. Use the "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?" section to teach your study more background information about the Samaritan woman.

4. How does Jesus start the conversation with the Samaritan woman?

Answer: Jesus asks for a drink of water.

5. Why do you think Jesus starts the conversation this way?

Answer: Jesus wants to relate to the life of the woman.

6. How does Jesus use this natural example of water and take it to a higher level?

Answer: Jesus uses water to show the emptiness that each one of us has inside. This emptiness cannot be satisfied by anything natural here on earth but by Jesus alone.

7. What does John 4:16–18 say about the woman’s past marriage history?

Answer: The woman has had five husbands.

8. What is symbolic about the woman’s response, given the history of Samaria’s intermarriage with other tribes?

Answer: See the “True History” section of “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?”

9. The Old Testament often uses adultery as a symbol for Israel’s worship of foreign gods. Perhaps the most direct example is found in Hosea, when God asks the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute (Hos 3:1). Read Hosea 2:14–23. How does this human example give us a glimpse of God’s love for His people?

Answer: The courage and love it would take to overcome the repeated adultery of a loved one is astonishing. God continues to do this every day.

10. How does Jesus fulfill this prophecy?

Answer: Jesus is the true bridegroom who comes to make a new covenant with us and rescue us from our sin that led us astray.

11. What is the woman’s reaction to Jesus’ message?

Answer: The woman leaves her water jar and goes into the city to tell everyone about Jesus.

12. Read the quote from St. John Chrysostom from the “Testimony and Conversion” section of “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?” What do you think the relationship is between our own conversion and how we share Jesus with others?

Answer: The more our hearts turn toward God and accept His mercy, the more we should want to share this great gift with others.

13. Put yourself in the shoes of the woman. What is so remarkable about her willingness to share the gospel with others? What is so remarkable about their response?

Answer: She was ostracized by so many people in the city, and yet she is still willing to share the Good News. Not only is she willing to share, but the people in the city overcome their rejection of her and accept what she has to say (Jn 4:39).

14. See the last paragraph of the “Testimony and Conversion” section in “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?” How can the members of your group improve and follow the courageous example of the woman at the well?

Allow the group to discuss.

Article 6 – The Corporal Works of Mercy

In Matthew 25, Jesus speaks very clearly about the judgment of the world in the last days: “Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me’” (Mt 25:34–36). When the righteous ask when they did these things for our Lord, He responds, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).

While striking, this passage is part of a long tradition of charitable works to the less fortunate that stretches through the Old and New Testaments (for more, see Mt 25:31–46, Is 58:6–7; Heb 13:3, 1 Jn 3:17, Tob 4:5–11, Jas 2:15–16).

Through this tradition, the Church has developed what is commonly known as the Corporal Works of Mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, offering hospitality to the homeless, visiting the imprisoned, caring for the sick, and burying the dead.

While Jesus’ command and the list above are fairly straightforward, here is a list of 35 practical ways to act out the Corporal Works of Mercy.

Feed the Hungry.

- Make sandwiches and pass them out to the homeless.
- Keep granola bars in your car to pass out to people in need at stoplights.
- Pick up leftovers at a local grocery store, bakery, or restaurant and deliver them to a food bank or homeless shelter.

- Take a friend out to lunch, your treat.
- Keep a list of local food banks and soup kitchens on hand to pass out to those you encounter around your town who could use such services.
- Volunteer at a food bank.
- Serve at a soup kitchen.
- Prepare and take a meal to someone in your community who is seriously ill or welcoming home a newborn.
- Help out at a Knights of Columbus pancake breakfast.
- Give to or host a food drive.

Give Drink to the Thirsty.

- Pass out water bottles to the homeless.
- Have a “donations only” lemonade stand and use the proceeds to help a worthy cause.
- Pay for the coffee of the person behind you at a coffee shop.
- Take a cold glass of water to a neighbor doing yard work.
- Donate baby formula to a local pregnancy help center.
- Work a drink station at a local charity race.

Clothe the Naked.

- Go through your closet and give away what you don't need.
- Host a clothing drive and donate the items.
- Knit, crochet, or sew baby blankets for your local pregnancy help center.
- Knit, crochet, or sew scarves, hats, and gloves for your local homeless shelter.

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- Score some sweet deals at garage sales and send the items to a foreign mission site.

Shelter the Homeless.

- Attend a FOCUS mission and help build homes
- Volunteer to do manual labor to help in the upkeep of a homeless shelter.
- Chaperone a youth group mission trip with Catholic Heart Work Camp, Nazareth Farm, Bethlehem Farm, and help maintain existing homes and keep those in need in their homes.
- Keep a list of local homeless shelters on hand to pass out to those you meet on the street.
- Become a mentor to a foster child.
- Send a care package with special treats to an orphanage.
- Help a family working towards adoption by hosting a fundraiser for them.
- Sponsor a child through the Catholic Foundation for Children and Aging (CFCA).
- Donate to or volunteer with programs such as Christ in the City to further their efforts in working with the homeless.

Visit the Sick.

- Volunteer at a hospital.
- Volunteer to call Bingo at a nursing home.
- Send flowers or a card to someone you know who is in the hospital.
- Attend a FOCUS mission, such as the trip to Kolkata, to serve the those who are ill (Start planning for next summer!).

- Take the Eucharist to the homebound in your community.
- Visit a seriously or terminally ill member of your parish.
- Sponsor an elderly person through the Catholic Foundation for Children and Aging (CFCA).

Visit the Imprisoned.

- Lead a bible study at a local prison. •Help with a communion service or Mass at a prison.
- Donate bibles and/or spiritual reading materials to a prison.
- Mentor a teen at a juvenile correction center.

Bury the Dead.

- Attend wakes and/or funerals of those you knew.
- Volunteer with a hospice program.
- Supply a dish for a funeral luncheon.
- Help a widow or widower in need with yard work or errands.
- Visit the cemetery and pray for the dead.
- Donate to ministries that offer free Catholic burials to those who are unable to afford one.
- Pray at an abortion clinic for the lives lost to abortion.
- Attend services for an inmate who was executed.

Ideas adapted from FOCUS blog article, *50 Corporal Works of Mercy Ideas for Your Summer Bucket List* by Lisa Cotter