

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

August 16-22, 2020

Sermon Series: The Fine Art of Disagreement

Week Four: "A Case Study"

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week's Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday's sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for the day when all of Your people may know the joy, peace, and harmony of Your Kingdom. Grant unto us this day the power to live within Your Kingdom. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Sermon Series Theme:

Our culture today faces disagreements with great energy - not all of it positive. Some disagreements tear down other people as arguments become name calling and finger pointing. Is it possible to have a difference with someone and love them? We Christians are called to it. Let's learn the fine art of disagreement.

This Week's Sermon Theme:

Wouldn't it be great to have a case study from the Bible on how to put into action what we've been talking about? Oh wait, there is! The master of the craft, Jesus Himself, is our teacher in His interactions with the woman at Jacob's well.

Sunday Scripture Reading: John 4:4-26 (A group member should read the passages aloud).

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

What region was Jesus traveling through in this week's story? (4:4-5)

Where does Jesus stop for a rest? (4:6)

Who joins Jesus, what does He say to her, and where are the disciples during this exchange? (4:7-8)

What surprises the woman about Jesus? (4:9)

What does Jesus offer the woman? (4:10)

Why is the woman skeptical of Jesus' offer? (4:11-12)

How does Jesus describe His offer the second time, and how does the woman respond this time? (4:13-15)

What surprising command does Jesus give the woman in response, and how does she respond? (4:16-17)

What does Jesus know about the woman? (4:18)

What does the woman think this implies about Jesus, and what issue does this identification of Jesus compel the woman to raise with Him? (4:19-20)

What does Jesus claim about Samaritan versus Jewish worship? (4:22)

What claim does Jesus make about true worship from that moment forward? (4:23-24)

Does the woman accept Jesus' teaching? Who does she believe will have the definitive answer? (4:25)

How does Jesus finally identify Himself to the woman? (4:26)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Encourage participants to simply ask any questions they have about the passage. The questions below are only suggestions, representative of the kinds of questions that might be asked. The goal is not necessarily to provide answers, but to ask questions of the text! Open discussion about the questions raised below, or by the class, is encouraged.

We might wonder why such a big deal is made about the region of Samaria.

We might also wonder if it is significant that it was "the sixth hour" when this happened.

We are told that Jews do not associate with Samaritans, but we probably wonder why that animosity existed.

We might wonder why Jesus didn't address the issue of the animosity between their ethnicities, but simply told her this was an opportunity to receive "living water."

We might also wonder what the words "living water" meant to someone in that day, before that phrase was widely used as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit and faith in Christ.

At the same time, we probably wonder at the woman's skepticism over Jesus' offer – what does she think Jesus is offering her?

Almost certainly, we wonder why Jesus abruptly changed the subject and told the woman to go get her husband.

We might wonder what kind of woman would have had five husbands and lived with a man not her husband in that time.

We might wonder why, when Jesus' awareness of her circumstances led the woman to believe He was a prophet, the first thing she wanted to ask was where the right place to worship was!

We might also wonder why Jesus affirms the authenticity of Jewish worship over Samaritan worship, but does not go so far as to say, “Jews worship in the right place and Samaritans do not.”

Finally, we might wonder why the woman was convinced the Messiah would be the one to “explain everything to us.” What all did she include in “everything”?

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

See also: 1 Kings 16:23-24; 2 Kings 17; John 4:39-42; Genesis 48:22; Deuteronomy 12:1-14; Deuteronomy 27; Deuteronomy 18:15-18

The story of Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well is immersed in the context of the great animosity that existed between Jews and Samaritans. One of the earliest kings of the northern kingdom of Israel, after the united kingdom of David and Solomon had been divided by civil war, was named Omri. Omri bought a hill from a man named Shemer and named the capital city he established there after him – “Samaria.” (See 1 Kings 16:23-24). 2 Kings 17 tells how Samaria was later captured by the Assyrians (in 721 BC), with the Israelites deported and replaced by foreigners who worshipped other gods. When these foreigners were subjected to attacks by wild animals, priests were returned to Samaria to teach the people to worship God as a way to appease Him and protect the people. They worshipped at the “high places” around Samaria that had been set up as a rival religious system to the one in Jerusalem at the time the kingdom had been first divided. Eventually, the entire region took the name of the city at its center – Samaria. The animosity in Jesus’ day can be traced back to the Samaritans’ origins as a mixed race of Jews and imported Assyrians, and their corrupted worship practices. Even so, the Samaritans viewed *themselves*, rather than the Jews in Jerusalem, as the true Israel, and the heirs of God’s promises. It did not help that under Roman governance, Samaria had no independent political existence – they were united with Judea under one Roman procurator, with Jerusalem, not Samaria, as its center.

Due to these animosities, Jews tried to avoid traveling through Samaria – but it was the shortest, and quickest route from the Jewish region of Galilee to Samaria’s north, and the capital city of Jerusalem to Samaria’s south. Our story says Jesus “had to” go through Samaria – whether that was because He was in a hurry, or because He was eager for the Samaritans to believe in Him as well as the Jews is not clear. Later verses in John 4 (see John 4:39-42) make it clear that this encounter with the woman at the well had far-reaching consequences in Samaria.

Jesus has stopped for a drink in the town of Sychar “near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph” (most likely a reference to Genesis 48:22). It is the “sixth hour” – around noon by the system of time which began at sunrise around 6 a.m. With His disciples gone buying food for a noontime meal, Jesus initiates a conversation with a local woman who was there to draw water, by asking her for a drink. The woman is shocked by the request. We tend to see this only as an expectation of ethnic prejudice, but her shock is due to the fact that it goes far deeper. Ritual purity was a the core of the Jewish religious system – and because a Samaritan did not follow the Jewish prescribed rules for cleansing through rituals with the Jewish priests and sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem, they lived in a state of perpetual uncleanness. Jewish women, especially, were unclean following their monthly cycles,

until cleansed through Jewish ritual. A Samaritan woman who had not done so was particularly unclean, and by Jewish purity laws, her uncleanness would be passed to any utensils she touched or used. For Jesus to ask her for a drink meant He, as a Jew, was completely ignoring this principle! It was astounding indeed!

Jesus' reply is that if she knew "the gift of God," He could offer the woman "living water." The "gift of God," in Jewish thought, was the Torah specifically, but the salvation it offered more generally. Jesus here equates that to an offer of "living water" – but the woman misunderstands, because "living water" was also a common expression for flowing, or spring, water, as opposed to the still water drawn from a well. Drawing upon the long history, she questions whether Jesus somehow knows where there is a spring nearby, even though Jacob found none, and dug this well eons ago! Furthermore, if this water was good enough for Jacob, and plentiful enough for his cattle, it's good enough for us!

Her misunderstanding causes Jesus to elaborate on His offer. Whereas the thirst-quenching effect of the well water will pass, the "water" He offers will actually create a spring within the one who drinks it, giving them a perpetual source of "water"! The woman still misses the metaphorical point – and rather crassly asks for the "magic water" that will make it so she doesn't have to do the drudgery of fetching well water every day! Because of her continuing misunderstanding, Jesus takes a new approach – He will speak to her as a prophet, revealing something about the woman that could only have been revealed to Jesus by God. She has had five husbands and is currently living with someone not her husband.

The reason for the many marriages is not given, nor is it pursued by Jesus. It is, of course, possible the woman had had five legal husbands who had died or divorced her, and that she was now living with a man who had not legally married her. Technically, it was not against the Law of Moses for a woman to be married five times – but most Jewish and Samaritan teachers in Jesus' day forbade more than two marriages, while some set the limit at three. Conceivably, the woman was living with the man outside of marriage because no one was willing to consecrate a sixth marriage, even if the previous five had ended in the man's death or legal divorce. It has often been inferred that the woman coming to the well in the heat of noon was atypical, and a sign of her being an outcast, unwelcome at the social gathering of women that usually accompanied water-gathering in the early morning or late evening. If so, from the Jewish perspective, the woman Jesus speaks with is an outcast among outcasts.

When the woman recognizes Jesus as a prophet, she raises the most burning issue between Jews and Samaritans in that time – the place where God should be worshipped. This was THE hot-button disagreement between Jews and Samaritans. In Deuteronomy 12:1-14, God commanded the people to worship Him "in the place that I will show you." Later, in Deuteronomy 27, God directs an altar to be built on Mount Ebal. He has the tribes gather to pronounce a blessing from Mount Gerizim and a curse from Mount Ebal. Interestingly, in the Samaritan version of Deuteronomy, God directs the altar to be built on Mount Gerizim. During the Persian period of Israel's history, the Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim in the fifth century BC, but this temple was destroyed on the second century BC by the Jewish leader John Hyrcanus. Even so, the mountain continued to be *the* holy place for Samaritan worship.

In the confrontation, Jesus champions neither Jerusalem nor Mount Gerizim. The woman's expectation would have been that Jesus, as a Jew, would argue for Jerusalem as the correct place to worship. Instead, Jesus speaks to the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God that "is coming and has now come" when worship of God will not be tied to any one place. Still, Jesus affirms that it is the Jews, not

the Samaritans, through whom God's salvation will come – a reference to Jesus' own role as the Messiah, the source of salvation. With the Messiah's salvation will come the outpouring of the Holy Spirit associated with the Kingdom of God, and the Spirit will be the source of true worship. Jesus' authoritative declaration about worship leads the woman to her final input – "The Messiah is coming and will explain everything to us." The Samaritan Messianic hope was not defined by the prophetic books, as for the Jews, but by the Pentateuch, especially Deuteronomy 18:15-18 – the raising up of a prophet like Moses. They believed the Messiah would restore true belief in God, and true worship of God, as a revealer of truth. Jesus wraps the discussion up with the revelation that He IS that Messiah.

In the ensuing passages, it becomes clear that in the end, the woman did, in fact, "drink the water." She takes the news of potentially finding the Messiah to her townspeople. The truth of the Messiah renders the biggest disagreement between Jews and Samaritans irrelevant. Don't miss the woman's progression in her recognition of who Jesus is. Her appraisal of Jesus goes from being that He is a thirsty man, to a Jew, to a teacher, to a prophet, and finally, to the Messiah. Her interaction with Jesus changes each step of the way. Christ is ultimately revealed to the woman in the way He speaks with her in the midst of the biggest disagreement of their time.

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

What do you think Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well tells us about Him?

What do you think, today, might be a hot-button religious issue equivalent to the ancient question of where to worship?

Who are some people that you have a hard time engaging with gentleness and respect?

What are some subjects that you have a hard time discussing with gentleness and respect?

What would it look like for people to call you a "friend of sinners" like Jesus?

What would it look like for us to be a church where we were known for being "friends of sinners"?

Who do you have in your life who you know is "for you," even though they might disagree with you?
How do you know that person (or those people) loves you?

Do you want to be like Jesus in your interaction with others?

Suggested Closing Prayer:

Holy God, thank You for giving us a story that can serve as a case study for how to disagree. Help us to emulate Jesus in all we say and do. Through the presence of Your Holy Spirit, help us to always engage others in a spirit of gentleness and respect. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Messiah. Amen.