

## Overview:

In this lesson, we are going to see two approaches to finding a secure identity: (1) Finding acceptance from others and (2) Finding acceptance in God. All of us struggle with insecurity on some level, and as we look at the woman at the well in John 4, we will see that prior to meeting Jesus, this woman was extremely insecure. Up to that point, it's clear that she was looking for one thing: acceptance from people, and her desire to be accepted by others had left her lonely, insecure, shamed by others, and never able to find security and satisfaction in any of her relationships. But then she met Jesus. Jesus allowed her to see that there's no person that will be able to provide her with the deep sense of acceptance and love that she was looking for. That can only be found in God through the gospel. In him, we are both fully known and fully loved.

The goal of this lesson is to understand how the gospel protects us from trying to find our identity through the acceptance of others. Through Christ, we can be honest about our failures while still being confident in God's love for us. The gospel teaches us that the One who knows us the best, accepts us the most, so we don't have to keep striving for the acceptance of others. That is the path to a secure identity, and it only comes through the gospel.

### 1. Jesus doesn't let the world's identities stand in the way of offering us a new identity

#### Read it:

*John 4:5-7 - "So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."*

**Transition:** There are some significant cultural norms that we need to understand here if we're going to really appreciate this story.

#### Discuss it:

Does anybody know the significance of this woman being from Samaria?

- **Leader note:** The Jewish people (to which Jesus belonged) had a long history of hatred for the Samaritans because hundreds of years before, a foreign army had taken over Samaria and had a huge affect on the culture. The people of Samaria had worshipped other gods, had intermarried with people from different religions and cultures, and even in Jesus' day they didn't take Scripture seriously. In other words, The Southern Jews saw the Samaritan Jews as posers. They lived in Israel, but they weren't truly Jewish. They saw them as sell-outs and cheap versions of the Jewish religion.
- John even notes this in verse 9 - "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans."

Does anybody know what the relationship between men and women were like during this time period and culture?

- Leader note: Women did not have as much social standing as men did at this time. Additionally, the fact that this woman was a Samaritan woman would have made it even more surprising that a Jewish man would speak to her.
- You see in verse 9 that the woman herself is surprised that Jesus spoke to her and requested a drink. “The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?’”

Here’s the last question about the cultural norms: What time does it say Jesus and the woman are at the well? What’s the significance of the time?

- Leader note: Verse 6 says, “It was about the 6th hour.”
- According to how the Jews counted time, this would have been around noon, which was a strange time for a woman to come draw water. It was typical for women to come in the morning or in the evening when the heat was not as intense.
- Additionally, we see that the woman is alone, which was also uncommon. Women tended to travel in groups to get water. So not only is the woman there by herself, but she appears to intentionally be at the well at a time when no one else will be there.

**Transition:** In spite of all of these cultural factors, Jesus doesn’t let them get in the way of the gospel. Her social status as a woman, her ethnicity as a Samaritan, her differing religious views, her apparent shame and social isolation - none of that stops Jesus from speaking to her about the gospel.

#### **Read it:**

*John 4:10-15 - “Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I give him will never never be thirsty again. The water that I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.’”*

#### **Discuss it:**

What is Jesus talking about when he says, “gift of God” and “living water?”

- Leader note: Jesus is talking about salvation, i.e. eternal life. In verse 10, he’s saying, “If you knew who I am, instead of me asking you for water, you would be asking me for salvation. “
- Notice the end of verse 10: Jesus stands ready to offer her this living water when she asks for it. This is very significant considering that she is a Samaritan woman. Again, Jesus doesn’t let that stop him from offering her the gift of salvation.

Does the woman catch on to what Jesus is talking about?

- Leader note: No, she doesn't. She thinks Jesus is actually talking about some special kind of water. She wants the water, but she doesn't understand what it is. And in verse 15, she reveals her motivation for wanting the water.

According to verse 15, what was her reason for wanting the water? What does her reason reveal about her deeper need?

- Leader note: Verse 15 says, The woman said to him, 'Sir give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.'"
- She doesn't want to keep coming to the well to draw water. But what does this reason reveal about her deeper need? As we're about to see in verses 16-18, this woman's life has been filled with sin. And the consistent routine of coming to draw water was a constant reminder of her shame and social isolation.
- She wanted to be able to stop coming to the well because she wanted to be able to forget the feelings of shame.

**Transition:** Now, what happens next is cringe-worthy. This woman has just revealed a deep wound in her heart. And while we tend to shy away from discussing deep wounds, Jesus dives right in.

## 2. Jesus graciously forces us to confront our misplaced identity

### Read it:

*John 4:16-18 - "Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here. The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.'"*

### Discuss it:

Why does Jesus call out her sin when she has already said that she wants the living water?

- Leader note: Because in order for Jesus to redefine us, we first have to have our eyes opened to our misplaced identity. He can't begin to heal the darkest areas of our heart until he exposes them.
- If Jesus had simply granted this woman's request without confronting her sin, here's what would have happened: she would have walked away from the well feeling great about this new living water. But when she got home to her boyfriend, when she thought about her failed marriages, when she saw the shaming stares of the people in the town, she would think that Jesus only made this offer on limited information. That if he really knew all that she had done, if he really knew who she was and how she was viewed by other people, he would have never made this offer.
- But when Jesus says, "Go, call your husband" here's what he's saying: I know you - all of you - and the offer still stands.

Beyond the issues of sexual sin and multiple marriages, what do all of these relationships reveal about this woman's search for identity? Where was she looking for self-worth?

- Leader note: This woman was looking to relationships to give her a sense of self-worth. She needed to know that someone loved her and accepted her, and she pursued that need through relationships.

### **Apply it:**

Where do you look for love and acceptance? What do you turn to for self-worth?

- Leader note: Responses could include: friendships, dating relationships, beauty, being the smartest kid at school, being the best at a sport or musical instrument, making my parents proud of me, etc.

Why are those things bad places to turn for love, acceptance, and worth?

- Leader note: Because they're unpredictable and unstable. You may not always be the prettiest, or the smartest, or the most popular. You may disappoint your parents. Also, your parents may disappoint you. Your friends may hurt you or abandon you. If you're banking on them for love and acceptance, then you will end up consistently wounded and let down. That's what had been happening to the Samaritan woman.

**Transition:** In verses 20-24, the woman tries to side-step Jesus' question about her past with a theological conversation, but Jesus is kind and patient with her. Even though she has not understood his offer of salvation and has misled him about her past, Jesus reveals his true identity to her, and it completely changes her.

## **3. Jesus redefines us, and it changes everything**

### **Read it:**

*John 4:25-26 - "The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.'" Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he.'"*

### **Discuss it:**

We'll see in a few verses that this is the statement that changes this woman. Why do you think that's the case?

- Leader note: One of the things that the book of John is well-known for are the famous "I AM" statements of Jesus. In John 8, Jesus makes this ground-breaking statement: "before Abraham was, I AM." And throughout the book of John, Jesus says things like, "I am bread of life. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the vine."
- The significance of these statements goes back to the book of Exodus. When God identified Himself to Moses, the name He gave was I AM who I AM. So that's how the Jews referred to God - I AM - that's what his name YHWH means. So when Jesus comes onto the scene and uses the same name, He's identifying Himself as God.
- Of all the I AM statements in the book of John, this is the first one. Which means of all the people in the world that you would expect the Messiah, God-in-the-flesh, to reveal himself to, the last person would be a woman from Samaria who's living in sin and shame.

- And yet, Jesus chooses her first. And when he says, “I am He.” It’s as if the whole conversation from beginning to end made sense to her. The water that he’s offering isn’t physical water. The Creator, Covenant God is offering her salvation and the forgiveness of sins.

Transition: Knowing that God has offered salvation to someone as undeserving as her completely changed everything about her. She finally had the acceptance and love that she had always been looking for.

### **Read it:**

*John 4:28-30 - So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”*

*Skip down to verses 39-42 - “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’”*

### **Discuss it:**

How is the woman in these verses different from the one earlier in the story?

- **Leader note:** She no longer cares what others think about her. Her encounter with Jesus has removed her shame and has made her less worried about what others think. Because she has acceptance from Christ himself, she is less concerned about being rejected by others. We don’t get to hear it in the story, but I assume her meeting with Jesus would have impacted her romantic relationships in a similar way. Coming to know the love of Christ would keep her from searching for acceptance in destructive ways.

### **Apply it:**

How does the gospel redefine us so that we are no longer dependent on the approval of others?

- The gospel offers us two things that no other human relationship can offer. It allows us to be both fully known and fully loved. In human relationships we feel like we have to choose. If we want to be truly “loved” and “accepted” then we can’t be fully known, because if we are fully known, we are afraid we would be rejected. We think that if someone knew all of our baggage, all of our insecurities, all of our weaknesses and faults, then they could never love us. And sadly, many people have experienced this in relationships. We are accepted as long as we don’t place too heavy of a burden on the relationship. But that forces us to conceal the difficult parts of who we are and only be loved for the good parts of who we are, not the bad. What we are seeking is acceptance for all of who we are, and that’s just what we have in the gospel.
- We may be able to conceal the bad parts of who we are from people, but we cannot hide them from God. He knows us more deeply and intimately than we know ourselves. He knows our sin struggles. He knows our insecurities, failures, and shortcomings. And

how did he respond to them? Romans 5:8 says that, “God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection is proof of this amazing reality: you are more sinful than you know, but you are more loved than you can imagine. In Christ, we are fully known and fully loved. This doesn’t mean that God approves of our sin. It means that God loves us in spite of our sin and lovingly leads us out of it.

- Once we have realized the extent of God’s love and acceptance of us, we are free to stop searching for it from others.

### **Pray**

- Pray that God would help you identify areas of your life where you have misplaced your identity.
- Thank God for sending Jesus as proof of his love for us.
- Pray that God would help us rest in his love and approval instead of living for the approval of others.