



Faithful GOD
COVENANT People
a Good Soil series for small group study

**#11: Reaching Across Barriers:
Jesus encounters a Samaritan Woman**

Bible Reading: John 4:1-42

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES: Faithful God, Covenant People

This series is taking us on a journey through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, looking at God's purposes in calling human beings into a **covenant relationship**.

PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

Before the meeting please read the material carefully, and hold your group members in prayer. We are thinking about Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman, in **John 4**, in which he reveals his identity to her, and helps her reflect on who God's love and grace is for, and the nature of true worship. The notes over the page are useful for understanding the deeply held hostility between Jews and Samaritans will help the group to understand the significance of this important passage.

PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS (before the session)

We will be thinking about a conversation Jesus had with a woman from a slightly different religion to his own. Spend some time bringing to mind any people you know who are from a different Christian denomination from your own. *What have you learned about the similarities or differences in the way you both worship? If you have attended a service in a different church, what did you notice, how did you feel? Have you experienced worship in places other than in a church building? If so, how would describe it?*

We are all made in the image of God. Loving God and loving our neighbour are the two most important commandments. Our neighbours may not be Christian or follow any faith at all. *Have you spoken to followers of other faiths? If so, what common ground did you find? Have you visited a synagogue, mosque, gurdwara or temple? If so, how were you welcomed? If you have time, please read **John 4: 1-42**.*

STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
we thank you that you reveal that God's love reaches across every barrier that separates people. Forgive us when we judge others unfairly or exclude those who might be considered outsiders. Give us open hearts to receive the living water you offer and, guided by the Holy Spirit, grant us the courage to witness to others of God's love and saving grace for all. **Amen.**

FINDING OUR ROOTS – some questions to explore

In small groups, discuss these questions together, related to our Bible passage:

How do you think the Samaritan woman might have felt as she approached the well alone and noticed an unfamiliar Jewish man resting there? Have you ever had a conversation with a stranger that you felt apprehensive about at first, but in fact had a positive impact on you, changing your opinion or outlook? Do you sometimes speak of chance meetings as coincidences, or God-incidences?

If you feel comfortable, share some examples.

READING THE SCRIPTURES – with background information

In Jesus' day, Jews and Samaritans disliked one another intensely and avoided mixing. After the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians, many Jews were deported to Assyria and foreigners were brought in to settle the land they had occupied. Intermarriage resulted in a mixing of ethnicity and religion. The Samaritans were considered impure in the opinion of Jews living in the Southern Kingdom (Judah / Judea) or in Galilee (which was an outlying region to the north, heavily populated by Jewish believers).. The Samaritans had set up an alternative centre for worship on Mount Gerizim to parallel the temple at Jerusalem. Although their temple had been destroyed 150 years earlier, the Samaritans still venerated this site.

Read together the Bible passage: [John 4:1-42](#)

Jesus and his disciples were on their way home to Galilee from Jerusalem (in Judea). When travelling between the two, Jews would usually avoid travelling through Samaria. But Jesus took this shorter route. Jacob's Well was significant because Jacob was a common ancestor of both Jews and Samaritans.

In speaking first to this unnamed Samaritan woman, Jesus reached across many cultural, social and religious barriers of the time. He spoke to her about the pure '**living water**' that he could provide – which could quench spiritual thirst and lead to eternal life. Then, (to her astonishment) he identified himself as the long-awaited Messiah. The woman came looking for ordinary water, but Jesus revealed a deeper thirst: the need for God and spiritual renewal. (See also: [Jeremiah 2:12-13](#), [Psalm 36:7-9](#), [Psalm 42:1-2](#).)

This encounter teaches us that God's grace crosses boundaries, and prompts us to reflect Christ by welcoming the outsider, speaking truth with love, and trusting that no one is beyond God's reach.

DIGGING DEEPER – some questions for you to consider in your group:

*What **barriers** did Jesus break down when he spoke to the Samaritan woman? Are there similar barriers that exist in today's society? How do we show that all are welcome in our churches?*

There has been much speculation about the woman's past life, and why she came at noon and alone to the well, but only she and God would know the reasons behind the pain she may have suffered.

*How does Jesus reach out **across the boundaries**? How does he offer her grace or dignity?*

*How do you think the Samaritan woman **felt** when she realised Jesus knew all about her? How does it make you feel to think that Jesus knows all the secrets of our hearts, our fears and failures, and yet still love us?*

*Jesus met the woman as she carried out her **usual daily task**. Have you ever felt Jesus to be present in the middle of your ordinary daily activities? Do you have a place where you feel more aware of God's presence?*

*What do you understand by **spiritual thirst**? If you experience times of spiritual dryness, what do you do?*

*What does worship '**in spirit and truth**' ([verse 23](#)) mean to you? How does the Spirit help us to worship?*

*What **changes** do you notice in the Samaritan woman as a result of Jesus' conversation with her? Have you ever been surprised and encouraged by someone's personal testimony and enthusiasm for God?*

*When it comes to the '**spiritual harvest**' ([verses 35-38](#)), where might God already be at work in people's lives in our communities? And how can we create opportunities for people to 'come and see' Jesus today?*

PRAYING TOGETHER

Pray together for the personal concerns of members of your group; for Jesus to meet with those you've been praying for; and for discernment to see where God is already at work in your community.

A prayer: Thank you, Jesus, that even though you know everything about us, you love us and offer us living water that leads to eternal life. Thank you that no one is beyond your love and saving grace, and that you can use people like us to reach out to others and encourage them to 'come and see'. Amen.

Sing or read: '**There's a wideness in God's mercy**' (*Singing the Faith*, 416). Finish with **The Lord's Prayer**.

COVENANT LIVING: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE (to think about afterwards)

Is there anyone who God might be prompting you to encourage to 'Come and see'?

Are there any in your neighbourhood who are left out of social interactions? How could you offer a hand of friendship to them?

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A MEETING AT A WELL -

Jesus talks to a Samaritan Woman

Written by Andy Murphy.

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Junior Good Soil is for children's and young people's groups in churches.
It can be easily adapted and you can add your own ideas!



PLANTING THE SEED – what are we thinking about today?

Today, we will be thinking about the time when Jesus stopped to talk to a woman from the neighbouring country of Samaria. In those days, Samaritans were not seen as 'good' by the Jewish people, and the Samaritans generally felt the same way about the Jews. But, while travelling through Samaria, Jesus stopped by a well that was built by Jacob – who was a great-great-great-great-grandfather (and many more 'greats') to both the Jewish and Samaritan people. There he met a woman who came to the well in the midday sun, when no-one else was around. It was very unusual for a man to talk to a woman he didn't know, and it was even more unusual for a Jewish person to speak to a Samaritan. But this conversation changed the woman's life! She felt that she had come close to God that day, and found his love.

QUIET TIME – a prayer (for use at the start or end of the session)

Dear God, we praise you and worship you:

You give us your love, you forgive us when we get things wrong, and you send your Spirit to be with us.

We thank you for welcoming us into your family, and for sending Jesus to be our Saviour and King.

Help us today to understand more of your love, and think about how we can help to welcome others.

In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

TELLING THE STORY – reading the Bible... John 4:1-42

Read the story from a Bible of your choice, or use this link to read it from the **International Children's Bible: John 4:1-42**. (It's quite long, so you might like to just read to verse 30, if you wish.)

WATERING AND GERMINATING – what can we learn? / what does it tell us?

The conversation between Jesus and the woman might be confusing for us. They were talking about water, but what kind of water? The woman thought he meant the water in the well, but Jesus was talking about the spiritual water God offers us. God's love can wash us clean – and forgive us from the things we get wrong. God can also refresh us like a big drink of water, or jumping in a pool. God gives us eternal life, just like water brings life. The woman had a difficult past, but Jesus seemed to know all about it, and still offered her God's kindness and grace. Whatever has happened in the past, God can always give us a new start.

LETTING IT GROW – ideas for activities and discussion

Get a jug of water (maybe with ice) and some different types of cordial or squash. Invite them to try different drinks. Ask the children: *Which do you like better, and why? Which is most refreshing?*

When did you last feel really thirsty? How does it feel when you're so thirsty but then have a big drink?

Discuss: *What is the 'living water' God offers us? What sort of God-things make us feel happy or refreshed?*

After the woman met Jesus, she invited her friends to 'Come and see'! *How can we invite friends to get closer to God, or to meet Jesus?* Perhaps design an invitation. Or think about who you might invite to something you love doing at church.

PRAISE AND WORSHIP – hymns and songs (can be used at the start or end, or whenever!)

As the deer pants for the water (by Martin Nystrom) www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jv6Z8t1Tz_g
(also found in *Singing the Faith* – no.544)

Let your living water flow over my soul (by Jimmy Swaggert) www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2UvQlnP27c