

*“The love of Christ embraces all without exception.”
- Brennan Manning*

In John 4, Jesus meets an unnamed woman at a well. While John doesn't provide us with many details surrounding this woman's life, there are a lot of clues we can gather as we examine how this scene is set against the backdrop of ancient near eastern culture.

Going to the local well to draw water was primarily a task for women in this time, and it also provided an opportunity for social connection. It was customary to arrive in the early morning hours to avoid the desert heat on their return trip, which could be several miles. We find the Samaritan woman traveling to the well alone in the heat of the day, going to great lengths to avoid the need to interact with her community and at great personal cost to herself.

Jesus seeks her out when she is hiding—either from repeated rejection or out of self-preservation. Her life is far from put together. It is here that Jesus meets her, engages with her and invites her into a new life. In fact, she is the first person in the book to whom Jesus chooses to reveal that he is the savior of the world!

In this story, we see a God who pursues us, no matter the life circumstances we find ourselves in. Jesus is especially tender-hearted toward the rejected, the outcast and those who find themselves in a mess mostly of their own making. There is nothing that could disqualify us from the life that Jesus offers.

READ

John 4

REFLECT

1: If you were to meet Jesus today, what would he notice about you that you are trying to hide?

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2. What do you learn about Jesus from the way he interacted with this woman?

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3. The faith of the Samaritan woman led her to immediately share about Jesus with others. Does faith have that effect on you? Why or why not?

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RESPOND

Take some time this week to write out the story of your faith in a way that you could share in 30-60 seconds. Focus on how your life was *before* you met Jesus, how you came into a relationship with him and how your life has changed *now*. Make it a goal to share your story with one person this week. Many people believed because of this woman's story. We are praying this will be true for you as well.

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PRAY

Make a list of the people in your life who are far from God. Commit to praying for God to provide opportunities to share your faith with them. Reread John 4:42 to believe the same can be true for you.

WEEK TWO

DAY TWO

*"Love is never wasted, for its value does not rest upon reciprocity."
- C.S. Lewis*

In today's reading, Jesus encounters a man who had been incredibly sick for nearly forty years. Chronic illness has the capacity to completely sap the joy from life. Living day in and day out with pain, fatigue and limitations that most people never have to think about is a heavy burden to bear. It can leave a person feeling isolated, depressed, angry and resentful.

Jesus meets this paralyzed man near a pool which supposedly possessed healing powers. The people believed that an angel would occasionally come to stir up the water, activating its healing powers for the next person who entered. The man had likely spent years on the periphery of this pool with no healing.

This man had been sick longer than Jesus had been alive. When Jesus looked in his eyes and asked if he wanted to be well, we don't see a sudden, miraculous shift in his outlook on life. His words have an edge and his response is to complain, explaining he can't get better because no one will help him. And despite the fact that this man is bitter, rude and completely oblivious to who is standing before him, Jesus heals him anyway. In his incredible grace, he looks past the man's unpleasant exterior and completely restores his life.

Again, this interaction provides us with a picture of Jesus reflecting the heart of a God who is always moving toward us. Having faith is not a prerequisite for God to work in our lives. God moves on our behalf because of his love and because of his grace—even when we doubt, when we're bitter and when we can't see how our lives could ever get better.

READ

John 5

REFLECT

1: What reactions do you have about Jesus in today's reading?

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2: What is your response to others in your life who have problems they don't seem too invested in fixing? How does seeing Jesus' response affect how you may interact with these people moving forward?

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3. In what areas of your life do you struggle to feel motivated to change?

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RESPOND

At strange as it may sound, we sometimes fail to change because not changing actually benefits us in some way. If we don't take risks, we don't have to experience the pain of rejection if we fail. As you look back to your response for Reflection Question 3, what are the benefits to not changing? What is one step you could take this week toward overcoming this barrier?

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PRAY

Spend some time in prayer today that God would give you the courage and strength to push through the barriers in your life that keep you from change. Pray also for those in your life who are stuck in destructive patterns, unhealthy relationships or are experiencing persistent depression or anxiety.

*"When you follow Jesus, you never reach a dead end."
- Matt Carter & Josh Wredberg*

In John 6, we find Jesus nearing the end of a long and exhausting journey of traveling, preaching and healing. We can only imagine he and his disciples boarded that boat near the end of their physical, emotional and spiritual resources. They reach the shore and find a quiet mountainside to rest and refuel. Moments later, Jesus looks up to find that a crowd of more than five thousand people had followed them. This enormous group was so focused on hearing more of what Jesus had to say that they left with no food.

In our technologically advanced and developed culture, it is rare to meet a problem we can't solve with a Target run, Uber Eats and Amazon Prime. And yet, figuring out a way to feed a crowd of this magnitude with no notice is an impossible task in any time period. To put things in perspective, one of Jesus' disciples estimated that it would have taken the equivalent of eight months' salary to feed all of these people.

Though we are able to read this in short form as a story, this would have been an unbelievable thing to experience. In this incredible miracle, Jesus reveals that there is nothing that is impossible for God. Not only do we see Jesus meeting the needs of this crowd, there is food left over. This isn't an accident.

Jesus reveals that God is a God of abundance. The overflow of physical resources provides for us a picture of God's unlimited spiritual resources. His ability to create a feast out of a little boy's lunch points us toward where Jesus' story is ultimately headed—the cross. He has the power to do the impossible, and death will be no match for him.

READ

John 6

REFLECT

1: What was the last "impossible situation" you faced? What was your first reaction when it occurred, or the reaction that sticks with you now?

2: How do you respond to God when facing a difficult situation?

3: How does today's reading impact how you will approach God in the future?

RESPOND

In this week's reading, we saw Jesus do amazing things in people's lives—from miraculous events to incredible changes in individual hearts. When we see all that Jesus can do, it often creates in us a desire to respond. While the term worship is most commonly associated with the songs that we sing during a church service, worship is all about seeking to know and love God in a personal way. Below is a list of characteristics which describe who God is. Which of these most describes God's presence in your life right now? Spend some time in prayer today thanking God for the specific way he is showing up in your life.

Even when we're in a painful season and God seems distant, we can still worship. In fact, there is a whole section of the Bible called *laments*, where people pour out their questions and broken hearts to God.

Attributes of God

(Adapted from the Exodus Study Guide developed by The Village Church)

Almighty || Nothing is too hard for God || Jeremiah 32:17

Attentive || God hears and responds to our prayers || Psalm 66:19

Compassionate || God sees, care and acts when we are in need || Psalm 145:8-9

Creator || God made everything || Nehemiah 9:6

Deliverer || God rescues his children || Psalm 32:7 or 2 Samuel 22:2-3

Faithful || God always does what he says he will do || Hebrews 10:23

Generous || God gives what is best || Romans 8:31-32

Glorious || God shows his greatness and worth || Colossians 1:16-17

Good || God is what is best || Psalm 145:9

Holy || God is completely perfect and separate from sin || 1 John 1:5

Just || God does what is right and takes action against evil || Deuteronomy 32:3-4

Loving || God does what is best || 1 John 3:1

Merciful || God does not give us what we deserve || Titus 3:3-7

Provider || God meets our needs || Philippians 4:19

Refuge || God is a place of safety and protection || Proverbs 18:10

Sovereign || God has the right, wisdom and power to do all that he pleases || Ecclesiastes 7:13-14

Unchanging || God never changes || James 1:17

Wise || God knows what is best || Psalm 147:5

Worthy || God deserves all the glory || Revelation 4:11

PRAY

Spend some time in prayer today thanking God for the specific way he is showing up in your life. If you're in a difficult place today, write out a totally honest, unfiltered prayer to God about what you're going through.