

Leader Preparation Guide

Give Me a Drink

Movement Two: Creating Space for an Encounter · John 4:1-42

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover how a real conversation ascends, by tracking who asks what and in what order: Jesus opens by needing something from her, lets her deflect twice without chasing the deflection, names the sore place only after she has asked him for something, answers her theological dodge seriously instead of dismissing it, and gives her the first plain statement in this Gospel that he is the Messiah.

Catholic Touchstone

The Church proposes Christ inside real conversation, and grace works through the natural. The Catechism locates the whole mystery of prayer at this well: Christ comes to meet every human being and is the first to ask for a drink, and his thirst arises from the depths of God's desire for us.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Where the conversation starts

Verse 4 says he "had to pass through Samaria." The Greek is *edei*, the same family as the necessity you met at Zacchaeus's house in Session 3. Be careful how you use it: the verb can express ordinary necessity, and the road through Samaria was in fact the direct route from Judea to Galilee. John may well intend divine purpose here, and the geography does not by itself prove it.

He arrives wearied from the journey and sits down by the well at about the sixth hour. On the standard reading of St. John's time references that is noon, which is how nearly all commentators take it; a minority argue he uses Roman civil reckoning, which would make it early evening. Noon is the reading this session assumes. She comes at noon too, alone. It is often said that women drew water in the cool of the morning and in company, and that noon suggests isolation. Treat that as a common inference rather than an established custom: the text gives neither her motive nor any comparison.

Then the opening line: "Give me a drink." He does not open with a claim, a diagnosis, or an invitation. He opens by needing something from her, which puts her in the position of benefactor to a stranger who has nothing to draw with.

The barriers, which the text names for us

Verse 9 has her list them herself: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" Then the narrator adds the aside, "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans."

Stack them: ethnic and religious hostility going back centuries, a man speaking to a woman alone in public (verse 27 tells us the disciples marveled at exactly this), and a rabbi speaking at length with a woman alone. Jesus crosses all three in six words, and he does it by asking for a favor.

The ladder, and the two deflections

She turns aside twice, and both times he raises the stakes rather than chasing her. Note that the text does not tell us her motive, so offer "deflection" as one pastoral reading rather than a finding. At verse 9 she turns to ethnicity, and he answers with the gift of God and living water. At verse 11 she deflects into the practical ("you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep"), and he answers with water welling up to eternal life.

"Living water" ordinarily meant moving water, spring water rather than cistern water. She hears it that way, which is the point. St. John does this constantly: Nicodemus hears "born again" literally one chapter earlier. The misunderstanding is not stupidity. It is what happens when someone is being addressed at a level they have not yet arrived at, and Jesus does not correct the misunderstanding so much as keep climbing until she follows.

At verse 15 she asks: "Sir, give me this water." She has asked. Note that carefully, because the next verse is the one everyone quotes out of order.

What he says about her life, and what he does not say

"Go, call your husband." Then, when she answers honestly, he states the fact: five husbands, and the man she has now is not her husband. That is all. No adjective, no verdict, no exhortation, no call to repent of it. He names it once and never returns to it for the rest of the chapter.

Be honest with your group about what the text does not tell us. It does not tell us her moral history. In that world a woman could not ordinarily initiate a divorce herself; five husbands could be consistent with widowhood, with being discarded repeatedly by men, with levirate arrangements, or with a chaotic life. Preachers fill this in constantly. The evangelist did not. Saying that out loud in front of your group is itself a lesson in how much we assume about the people we are praying for.

What is not in doubt is that she recognized it as exposure: "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet."

The theological dodge, and why he takes it seriously

Verse 20 is one of the most human moves in the Gospels. Right after she names him a prophet, she turns to a live controversy. Whether this is evasion, or a real question put to a prophet, or both, the text does not say: our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you say Jerusalem. This is exactly what your friends will do when a conversation gets close, and it will usually arrive as a question about the Crusades, or contraception, or why God allows suffering.

Watch what Jesus does not do. He does not dismiss it as a dodge, and he does not drag her back to the husbands. He answers the question substantively, and his answer is not a soft one: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (v22). That is a hard, non-relativist sentence, and it sits in the middle of the most tender conversation in the Gospel.

Then he moves past the question to what it was really about: the hour is coming when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, and the Father is seeking such people. He answered the question and refused to let it be a hiding place.

The self-disclosure, and what she does with it

Verse 26: "I who speak to you am he." In this Gospel that is the first time Jesus plainly tells anyone that he is the Messiah. Andrew had already used the title back in 1:41, but this is Jesus saying it himself, and he says it to a Samaritan woman alone at a well, not to the crowd, the authorities, or the Twelve.

Verse 28: she left her water jar. She came for water and went home without it.

Verse 29 is the form of her evangelizing, and it is worth reading twice: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" An invitation and a question. Not an announcement, not an argument, and not a claim she was not yet in a position to make.

Then verses 39 to 42. Many believed because of her word. Then they came, heard him themselves, and told her: it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves. That sentence sounds dismissive and is in fact the highest compliment the chapter pays her. Her witness brought them to a direct encounter with Christ, which is what witness is for. Hold this; it comes back in Movement Four.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The well, and what happens at wells

This is tonight's live discovery, so do not spend it in prep. The relevant passages are Genesis 24:10-27, Genesis 29:1-12, and Exodus 2:15-21. Read them yourself before the session so you can steer without telling.

The fountain of living waters

Jeremiah 2:13 is the sharpest root: "they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water." See also Jeremiah 17:13, Isaiah 55:1, Ezekiel 47:1-12, and Zechariah 14:8. Living water is not a metaphor Jesus invented on the spot. Jeremiah 2:13 is a likely and illuminating background, though the image carries several biblical associations at once: cleansing, divine life, the water from the temple, and the Spirit.

Where the Samaritan quarrel came from

2 Kings 17:24-41 gives important biblical background to the later hostility, describing the resettlement of Samaria after the Assyrian deportations and the mixed worship that followed, and the Samaritans maintained a temple on Mount Gerizim, destroyed by the Hasmoneans in the second century before Christ. When she says "our fathers worshiped on this mountain," she is standing within sight of the ruins of a real argument, not raising a hypothetical.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine on who was really thirsty

St. Augustine, preaching through the Gospel of John, teaches in substance that the one who asked for a drink was thirsting for her faith. He asked for water and he was seeking the woman.

The Catechism makes the same move at CCC 2560, where it says that Christ is the first to ask for a drink and that his thirst arises from the depths of God's desire for us. If you take only one image away from this session, take that one: the conversation opened because he wanted something, and what he wanted was her.

St. Augustine, summarized from his Tractates on the Gospel of John. A faithful summary of his teaching, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Francis on where the word comes in

Pope Francis described person to person evangelization as beginning with personal dialogue, in which the other person speaks first and shares their joys, hopes, and worries about the people they love, and said that only afterward is it possible to bring up God's word.

That is the order in John 4, put in modern words. He also insists in the same passage that the word does

eventually get brought up, which is why this study has a Movement Three.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 128 (2013).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | The Eastern tradition on the woman at the well

The Eastern churches have long honored this woman as an evangelist and martyr under the name Photini, "the enlightened one," with a body of tradition holding that she preached and died for the faith. The Syriac tradition, associated with St. Ephrem, dwells on her as the one who carried the news back into the city.

Take it exactly as it stands: a venerable tradition rather than something St. John reports. The Gospel tells us that many believed in Jesus because of her testimony, and that the town then came to him themselves. The tradition tells us the Church never forgot her.

Eastern liturgical tradition, honoring her as St. Photini. Tradition, not Scripture, and offered as such.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Catechism reaches this well at the opening of its treatment of prayer, which tells you how central the Church takes this scene to be. Part Four begins at CCC 2558; the well appears at 2560.

- **CCC 2560.** Beside the well where we come seeking water, Christ comes to meet every human being, and he is the first to ask for a drink. Prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours.
- **CCC 2561.** Our prayer is a response to the living God who thirsts for us; the request comes second.
- **CCC 728.** Jesus alludes to the Holy Spirit in speaking with the Samaritan woman, before the Spirit is fully revealed.
- **CCC 694.** Water is a symbol of the Spirit's action in Baptism.
- **CCC 839.** The relationship of the Church with the Jewish people, which is the ground beneath "salvation is from the Jews" in verse 22.
- The application of CCC 2560 to your own conversations this week is our extension of the paragraph, not its wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Developed tonight in the strongest form yet: she leaves the jar and goes to the city, and the town comes out. Do not comment on it.

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" This is its biggest development before Session 8. Two places: verse 23, where the Father is the one seeking worshipers, and verse 42, where the town tells her their faith no longer rests on her word. Someone may put it together tonight. If they do, agree in one sentence and move on. Do not resolve it. Session 9 is where it pays.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." Samaria itself, and verse 27, where the disciples marvel that he was talking with a woman. Note that none of them said anything.

Watch for. Verses 16 to 18 will land hard on anyone in the room who is divorced, remarried outside the

Church, or living in an irregular situation. Handle the honest note about what the text does not say, and give it fully. It is protective.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group build the order of the conversation out of the text: he asks first, she deflects twice, she asks at verse 15, and only then does he name her life at verse 16.
2. Establish that he named the sore place once, without a verdict, and never returned to it.
3. Have the group see that he answered her theological dodge seriously rather than dismissing it, and that his answer at verse 22 was not a soft one.
4. Have them find the Old Testament well pattern themselves, and see what St. John is doing with it.
5. Land verse 42: being walked past is what a bridge is for.
6. Move the ladder from hospitality to a question that goes one layer deeper than usual.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Field report on rung three, the shared meal.
0:12-0:20	Win questions.
0:20-0:26	Read John 4:1-30 aloud. It is long; assign parts and read it as dialogue.
0:26-0:40	Build 1 to 3, the opening, the barriers, and the ladder.
0:40-0:52	Build 4 and 5, what he says about her life and what she does with the theology question.
0:52-0:58	Build 6, the self-disclosure.
0:58-1:10	Live discovery: what happens at wells.
1:10-1:18	Build 7, her evangelizing and verse 42. Read verses 39 to 42 aloud here.
1:18-1:26	Build 8, the build-then-press on naming sin.
1:26-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Read only verses 1 to 26 aloud at the start and summarize 27 to 30 yourself. Saves five minutes.
- Run the well discovery with Genesis 24 and Exodus 2 only, dropping Genesis 29. Saves five minutes and keeps the pattern intact.
- Drop Build 6 (the self-disclosure) into the take-home; verse 26 will have already come up in the reading. Saves six minutes.
- Do not cut Build 8. If the session is running long, cut Build 3 instead.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If the room starts speculating about the woman's sexual history, stop it at once and give them the honest note: a woman could not ordinarily initiate a divorce herself in that world, and the text does not tell us. Then ask what it means that we filled in a gap the evangelist left open, and whether we do that to the people on our own lists.

If someone is thrown by "salvation is from the Jews," do not soften it. Read CCC 839 and let it stand. It is one of the clearest anti-relativist sentences in the Gospels and it is spoken to a Samaritan in a conversation of enormous tenderness. Both things are true.

If a person in the room is in an irregular marriage situation and goes quiet, do not pursue it in the room. Follow up privately in the week, and know your parish's process before you walk in.

If the group concludes "so we should never bring up sin," point to verse 16. He did bring it up. Then point to verse 15 and ask what had just happened.

Discussion Guide

Give Me a Drink

John 4:1-42

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you sat down tired at a well in the middle of the day and asked a stranger for a drink, and by the end of the conversation she had left her jar behind. Give us that patience and that nerve. Teach us to ask before we tell, to hear the question under the question, and to want the people we love to know you more than we want to be the one who explained you. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Five minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you ate with someone and paid, with no agenda. The question you took away was: was I with them, or working on them? What was the honest answer?

Leader: if several people say they were working on them, do not reassure. Say that is exactly what the next ten weeks are for, and move on.

WIN

- ▶ When has someone asked you for help, and the asking itself changed how you felt about them?
- ▶ Think of a conversation that got too personal too fast. What did you change the subject to?

BUILD

Read John 4:1-30 aloud with parts: a narrator, Jesus, and the woman. This is the longest conversation Jesus has with anyone in the Gospels, and it needs to be heard as a conversation rather than a text.

1. Verses 4 to 7. What condition is Jesus in when this begins, and what are his first words to her?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He is wearied from the journey and sitting down. It is about noon. And the first thing he says is "Give me a drink."

He opens by needing something. He does not lead with a claim, a diagnosis, or an invitation, and he has nothing to draw with, so the request is real. For a moment she is the one with the resources.

Note verse 4 as well: he "had to" pass through Samaria. The Greek is *edei*, the same word family as "I must stay at your house today" in Luke 19. It can carry Johannine purpose, and it can also mean ordinary

necessity; Samaria was the direct route. Offer the theological reading as a reading.

2. Verse 9. What barriers does the text itself name or imply between these two people?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

She names two: he is a Jew and she is a Samaritan, and she is a woman. The narrator underlines the first with the aside that Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

And verse 27 supplies a third from the outside: the disciples come back and marvel that he was talking with a woman, though none of them said anything.

Centuries of religious and ethnic hostility, a public conversation between a man and a woman alone, and a rabbi in long conversation with a woman alone. He crosses all of it in six words, and he crosses it by asking her for a favor.

3. Verses 10 to 15. She misunderstands him twice. Track it: what does she think he means, and what does he do each time she turns aside?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

At verse 9 she turns to ethnicity, and he answers with the gift of God and living water. At verse 11 she turns to logistics, that the well is deep and he has no bucket, and he answers with water welling up to eternal life.

"Living water" normally meant moving water, spring water rather than cistern water, so her reading is the ordinary one. St. John does this repeatedly: Nicodemus hears "born again" literally one chapter earlier. The misunderstanding is not stupidity; it is what happens when someone is being addressed above where they currently stand.

Notice he never chases her aside and never corrects her tone. He keeps climbing until she follows. And at verse 15 she does: "Sir, give me this water." She asked. Mark that verse, because the next question depends on it.

4. Verses 16 to 18. What does Jesus say about her life, and what does he not say?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He says "Go, call your husband," and when she answers honestly he states the fact: five husbands, and the man she has now is not her husband.

What he does not say is everything else. No adjective, no verdict, no exhortation, no call to repent of it, and he never returns to the subject for the rest of the chapter. He names it once, accurately, and stops.

And note the order, which almost everyone reverses when they retell this story. This comes at verse 16, after she asked him for the water at verse 15. He did not lead with it.

Say this part out loud. The text does not tell us her moral history. In that world a woman could not ordinarily initiate a divorce herself, though the legal picture was not uniform across the period. Five husbands could be consistent with widowhood, with being discarded repeatedly, or with a chaotic life. Preachers fill this gap constantly; the evangelist left it open. Ask the group what it means that we filled it in, and whether we do the same to the people on our own lists.

5. Verse 20. What does she do once the conversation has named her situation, and how does Jesus handle it?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

She turns to a theological controversy: our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you say Jerusalem. It reads to many as changing the subject, and it may equally be a real question put to someone she has just called a prophet. The text does not tell us.

This is what your friends will do too, and it usually arrives as a question about the Crusades, or the abuse crisis, or why God allows suffering. Some of those questions are sincere. Some are a place to stand that is not this close.

Watch what Jesus does. He does not call it a dodge, and he does not drag her back to the husbands. He answers it, and his answer is hard: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews." Then he moves past the question to what it was actually about, worship in spirit and truth, and tells her the Father is seeking such people.

He answered the question and moved through it to what it was about. Both halves are the skill.

6. Verses 25 and 26. What does Jesus tell her, and who else in this Gospel has heard it yet?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"I who speak to you am he." In the Gospel of John this is the first time Jesus plainly tells anyone that he is the Messiah. Andrew used the title in 1:41; this is Jesus saying it himself.

Not to the crowd. Not to the authorities. Not to the Twelve, who are at that moment in town buying lunch. To a Samaritan woman, alone, at noon, at the end of a conversation that began with him asking her for a drink.

Let that sit for a moment before you move on. It says something about who the Gospel considers a suitable recipient.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Do not tell them. Send three readers.

Genesis 24:10-27, then Genesis 29:1-12, then Exodus 2:15-21. Read all three aloud, back to back.

Then ask one question: what keeps happening in these stories?

What they should find: a man travels to a foreign land, stops at a well, meets a woman there, water is drawn, the woman runs home to tell her household, and a betrothal follows. Abraham's servant and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah. It is a recognized pattern, and St. John's first readers would have known it the way we know the opening of a fairy tale.

Now ask: where is Jesus sitting in verse 6, and what happens in verse 28?

Then push it one step further. Look back one chapter, at John 3:29, where St. John the Baptist calls himself the friend of the bridegroom. Many readers see the evangelist invoking the well-betrothal pattern and placing the bridegroom at the well. If that reading is right, what is being offered to this woman is not only water. Give it to the group as a reading, which is what it is.

7. Verses 28 to 30 and 39 to 42. How does she evangelize, and what happens to her role at the end?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

She leaves her water jar, which is the detail St. John chose to keep. She came for water and went home without it.

And look at the form of what she says: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" An invitation and a question. Not an announcement, not an argument, and not a claim she was not yet in a position to make. She evangelized from inside what she actually knew.

Then verses 39 to 42. Many believed because of her word. Then the town came, heard him themselves, and told her that their faith no longer rested on what she said, because they had heard for themselves.

That sounds like a slight and it is not one. Her witness did exactly what witness is for: it brought them to him. Ask the group how they would feel on the receiving end of verse 42, and then ask whether that feeling is something to repent of.

8. Someone says: Jesus named her sin within six verses. All this friendship-first material is a modern evasion. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. The answer is not that he avoided it, and it is not that he led with it.

DIG DEEPER

Noon. Verse 6 says about the sixth hour. It is commonly said that women drew water in the morning and in company, and that she was avoiding people. That is an inference resting on a contested reconstruction of custom, and the text says nothing about her motive.

The Samaritan quarrel. 2 Kings 17:24-41 is important background rather than the whole origin; the Gerizim sanctuary and the later schism have their own complex history, and the Samaritans read it very differently. Her question in verse 20 is a live grievance, not a hypothetical.

Broken cisterns. Jeremiah 2:13. The living water language is not invented on the spot. Jeremiah is one likely background among several, and the image also carries cleansing, divine life, temple renewal and the Spirit.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build this properly. The person making it is usually the one in your parish who is tired of a Catholicism that never says anything.

He did raise it. Verse 16 is not ambiguous, and he did not soften it: five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. He knew, and he said so, to her face, in a first conversation.

And notice how fast. This is not a fifteen year friendship. It is one conversation at a well, and the sore spot is on the table before it is over. Whatever this passage teaches, it does not teach infinite delay.

Meanwhile the pastoral cost of the opposite error is real and everybody in the room has seen it. A

generation of Catholics have been accompanied warmly and at length by people who never once told them a difficult truth, and some of them have concluded, reasonably, that the difficult truths were never really believed.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First, the order. Verse 15 comes before verse 16. She asked him for the water, and then he said "Go, call your husband." He did not open with it, and he did not raise it until she had asked him for something. Anyone using this passage to justify leading with sin has to explain away the fifteen preceding verses.

Second, the manner. He states a fact and stops. No adjective, no verdict, no exhortation, no call to repentance attached, and he never mentions it again. Compare that to how most of us do it.

Third, what he did with her escape hatch at verse 20. He did not drag her back to the husbands. He took her theological question seriously, answered it without softening it, and moved through it. The sin was named once and then it was not the subject of the conversation. It was the door into it.

Fourth, the honest limit. The text does not tell us her moral history, and every reconstruction of it is ours. If we are willing to invent a backstory for a woman in Scripture in order to make a point about naming sin, we should ask what we are inventing about the three people on our list.

So: yes, name the true thing. This passage models patience, truth and prudence rather than issuing a formula, and note two limits. Jesus knew her life; you will usually only suspect. And the text never tells us her moral history, so be slower than he was, not faster.

SEND

- ▶ What is the question under the question, for one of the three people you are praying for? What are they really asking about?
- ▶ Verse 42 says the town stopped believing because of her and started believing because of him. Where in your life would you find that hardest to accept?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 4 of the ladder. One question that goes a layer deeper than you normally go, and then silence.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- With one of them this week, ask one question that goes one layer past where you usually stop. Not about faith. About their life, what they are carrying, what they actually hope for.
- Then stop talking. Do not fill the pause, do not solve it, and do not attach anything to it.
- If they deflect, do not chase it. Notice where they went, and let them stay there.
- Write down afterward: what did they ask for, if anything? Bring that back next week.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you asked her for a drink because you wanted her. Give us the humility to receive something from the people we hope to bring to you, and the courage, when the moment comes, to say the true thing once and then be quiet. Make our witness the road they walk to you, and make us glad of it. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

John 4:29

Leader Reference Card

Give Me a Drink

Every passage used in this session, in the order it appears.

Passage	Where and why
John 4:1-42	Primary text. Read verses 1 to 30 aloud with parts; read 39 to 42 aloud at Build 7.
John 3:29	Live discovery. The friend of the bridegroom, one chapter earlier.
John 3:1-8	Build 3. Nicodemus and the same literal misunderstanding device.
Luke 19:5	Build 1. The divine necessity behind "I must stay at your house today."
Genesis 24:10-27	Live discovery. Abraham's servant and Rebekah at the well.
Genesis 29:1-12	Live discovery. Jacob and Rachel at the well.
Exodus 2:15-21	Live discovery. Moses and the daughters of Reuel at the well.
Jeremiah 2:13	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. The fountain of living waters and the broken cisterns.
Jeremiah 17:13; Isaiah 55:1	Old Testament Roots. Further living water texts.
Ezekiel 47:1-12; Zechariah 14:8	Old Testament Roots. Water flowing from the temple and from Jerusalem.
2 Kings 17:24-41	Dig Deeper. The origin of the Samaritan quarrel.