

What Do You Seek?

Session 1: The Thirst

A study for seekers, and for the friends who walk with them

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: The group discovers, from John 4 itself, that Jesus initiates the encounter, that the woman's long search for something that would finally hold mirrors our own, and that the restlessness every honest person carries is not a malfunction but a clue about what we were made for.

Catholic Touchstone: The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God, and God never ceases to draw man to Himself (CCC 27).

The Knock and the Door: Piece One

The Gospel, Week by Week

This study replaces a prayer curriculum with something a seeker needs first: the message itself. Each week you will present one piece of the Gospel plainly, for about three minutes, before discussion begins. Nothing is assumed; nothing is pressured. The frame for the whole study is this: God always moves first, and He never forces the door. Grace knocks; freedom answers. You will not name Revelation 3:20 until the final core session; until then, let the group notice the pattern for themselves.

This week's piece, in one sentence: You were made for God, and the restlessness you feel when everything else falls short is not a defect; it is a homing signal.

A read-aloud script is provided in the Discussion Guide. Deliver it as a host, not a lecturer: unhurried, warm, and finished in under three minutes.

What You Need to Know

John 4 crosses lines the text itself flags: Jews and Samaritans kept apart (Jn 4:9), and the disciples are astonished to find Jesus speaking with a woman (Jn 4:27). This woman comes to the well at noon, the hottest hour; many readers infer she was avoiding the morning and evening crowd, though John does not say so. If she was managing her exposure, most seekers in your room are doing the same thing.

Notice who initiates. Jesus is tired, sits down, and asks *her* for a drink (Jn 4:7). The divine initiative arrives disguised as a need. He does not open with her sin or with doctrine; He opens by making Himself her guest. Only after she is curious does He raise the stakes: "If you knew the gift of God..." (Jn 4:10).

The five husbands (Jn 4:18) are usually read as a long search for something that would finally hold, though the text never says how the marriages ended; widowhood and divorce are both possible, and some of it may not have been her choice. Present this as a reading, not a verdict on her. Jesus names her history without humiliating her, and she does not run; she goes deeper, then runs to town saying "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did" (Jn 4:29). Being fully known and not condemned is itself the living water beginning to flow.

Handle the moral history the way Jesus does: truthfully and without a lecture. In a seeker group, the point of verse 18 is not her failure; it is that five attempts at the same solution did not work, which every honest adult recognizes.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Jeremiah 2:13. God's own diagnosis of the human condition: two evils, forsaking “the fountain of living waters” and digging “broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” Jesus’ “living water” language in John 4 strongly echoes this verse; Jeremiah is the sharpest of several Old Testament water texts standing behind the phrase. The group will find it live in session.

Psalms 42:1-2. “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” The psalter already knows the thirst is for a person, not an experience.

Isaiah 55:1-3. The invitation to “come to the waters” without money: satisfaction that cannot be purchased, offered freely. Background for the leader; it returns later in the study.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine *Confessions, Book 1*

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” Augustine wrote this as a man who had run the full experiment: pleasure, ambition, philosophy, applause. The sentence is his lab report.

St. Augustine on this very scene *Tractates on the Gospel of John, 15*

Commenting on the well, Augustine observes that He who was asking for a drink was thirsting for the faith of the woman herself. The scene runs both directions: her thirst for something that lasts, and God’s thirst for her.

St. Teresa of Avila *Lines found written in her breviary (traditionally attributed)*

“Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you... God alone suffices.” The tradition attributes these lines to her own hand. They state the session’s claim in the affirmative: the one object that finally holds.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 27:** the desire for God is written in the human heart; only in God will man find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for.
- **CCC 30:** people may forget or reject this search, yet God never ceases to call every man to seek Him; quotes Augustine’s restless heart.
- **CCC 2560:** reads this very well scene: Christ comes to meet every human being; it is He who first seeks us and asks for a drink; Jesus thirsts for us.

Hosting Your Seeker Friend

This Week’s Coaching

Your friend is a participant, never a project and never the subject. Two standing rules govern every session of this study: nobody is ever cold-called, and nobody’s answer is ever critiqued. Say both rules out loud tonight before the Win questions; it changes the room. Do not ask your friend to read aloud, pray aloud, or report their sealed sheet. If they say something theologically wrong, receive it with interest, not

correction; the text will do the correcting over six weeks. Your job this week is simple: make them glad they came.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- **The First Word:** in every encounter this study visits, track who speaks or moves first. Do not point it out. The group discovers the pattern at Session 6.
- **Doors and Thresholds:** meetings at wells, blocked doorways, gates, keys, and one final door. Plant nothing; just protect the details when they appear.
- **The Sealed Sheet:** tonight's Take-Home carries a private write-in box: "What am I actually seeking?" It is folded, kept, and never shared. It is opened privately at Session 6.

Session Goals

1. Establish the room: meal or refreshments first, the two standing rules stated aloud, no religious performance expected from anyone.
2. Present Piece One of the Gospel: made for God; restlessness as signal, not defect.
3. Walk John 4:1-30 inductively, letting the group notice who initiates and what the five husbands represent.
4. Land the live discovery in Jeremiah 2:13 so the group connects living water to God's oldest diagnosis.
5. Send everyone home with Take-Home 1 and the sealed sheet instructions.

Time Note

Planned for 75 minutes of content inside a 90-minute evening with food. If you run long: cut the Dig Deeper box first, then trim Build questions 5 and 6 into one. Never cut the Knock segment or the sealed sheet instructions.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening

Leader prays alone, briefly. Nobody else is expected to pray, tonight or any night of this study.

“God, thank you for this table and these friends. Whatever each of us walked in carrying, meet us honestly tonight. Amen.”

State the two rules: “Two rules for this whole study: nobody ever gets called on, and nobody’s answer ever gets graded. Everything here is voluntary.”

The Knock and the Door (read aloud, under 3 minutes)

Piece One: Made for More

“Before we open anything, I want to put one idea on the table, and over these six weeks the pieces will add up to a single message. Here is the first piece. Every person in this room has felt it: you get the thing, and the thing is good, and three weeks later the ache is back. The promotion, the relationship, the trip, the purchase. Tonight we are going to take that ache seriously instead of numbing it. The oldest Christian claim about you is not first about rules. It is that you were made, on purpose, for a relationship with God, and that the restlessness is what being made for something feels like before you have it. You do not have to believe that yet. Just test it against tonight’s story, and against your own history.”

Win

Tom Brady, freshly holding three Super Bowl rings, told 60 Minutes in 2005 that he still felt something was missing, that there had to be more than this. Asked what the answer was, he said he wished he knew.

1. What is your version of the third Super Bowl ring: the thing you were sure would settle it, and then it did not?
2. When the ache shows up, what do most people do with it? What do you do with it?

Build

Read John 4:1-9 aloud. (One volunteer reads, or the leader reads.)

1. Look closely at verses 6 and 7. Who starts this conversation, and what does He open with? What is surprising about that?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Jesus does. Tired and thirsty, He asks her for a drink. The encounter begins with Him making Himself the one in need, her guest rather than her judge. He crosses real social lines to do it: Jew to Samaritan, and a man speaking alone with an unknown woman, something that startles even His own disciples (v. 27). The initiative is entirely His, and it is disarming rather than demanding.

Read John 4:10-15 aloud.

2. Jesus says everyone who drinks “this water” will thirst again (v. 13). If the well stands for everything we use to satisfy the ache, what are some of the wells people your age keep returning to?
3. “Living water” is a loaded phrase from the Old Testament. Where have we heard God talk about water like this before?

Live discovery: *have the group find Jeremiah 2:13 and read it aloud. Give them a minute; do not rescue them early.*

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Jeremiah 2:13 is God's own diagnosis, six centuries early: my people committed two evils; they forsook me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Every well that fails us is a cracked cistern. Jesus is claiming, at this well, to be the fountain the cisterns were substituting for.

Read John 4:16-19, 25-26 aloud.

4. Five husbands, and the current arrangement is not marriage. Without piling on this woman, what does that history look like from the inside? What was she doing?
5. Jesus names all of it in one sentence, and she does not leave. Verse 29 says she later tells the whole town, "he told me all that I ever did." Why would being fully known feel like good news instead of exposure?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The text does not tell us how the five marriages ended; some may have been losses rather than choices. What the story does show is a life that has cycled through arrangement after arrangement without arriving at rest, and on that reading it is the Brady quote with different furniture. And when Jesus names her history, He does it without contempt and stays in the conversation; she experiences, maybe for the first time, being completely known and not discarded. That combination, truth plus welcome, is what she cannot keep quiet about. It is a preview of the whole Gospel.

Where the Skeptic Is Strongest (steelman)

Take the best version of the objection, and say it well: "Restlessness proves nothing. Evolution built brains that adapt to every gain and then want more; dissatisfaction kept our ancestors striving and alive. Religion just rents out the itch and sells a scratch." Grant what is true in it: hedonic adaptation is real and well documented. Grant also that the naturalist has more to say: imagination, social comparison, and culture can stretch appetite into open-ended longing, so an ache aimed past every finite thing is not, by itself, a defeat for the theory. Then put the honest question on the table: which account better fits what the woman's five attempts, and Brady's third ring, keep reporting, a thirst that no finite good has ever quieted? Moving from that desire to God is an inference, not a proof. The ache is not proof of God; be honest about that. It is evidence of a fit, the way hunger is evidence that food exists. A signpost, not a syllogism.

Dig Deeper (optional)

Ancient readers would catch something modern readers miss: in the Old Testament, when a man meets a woman at a well, a betrothal follows: Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 24), Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29), Moses and Zipporah (Exodus 2). John places Jesus at Jacob's own well, meeting Samaria. Many commentators, ancient and modern, read the scene as a bridegroom motif: God coming to woo Samaria back. Some go further and give the five husbands a symbolic meaning tied to Samaria's history, but that step is disputed; keep to the betrothal pattern itself. Offer it lightly; it rewards the group's attention to detail.

Send

3. The woman left her water jar behind (v. 28) and went straight back to town, to the very people she had every reason to dread. What would it look like to take one honest step toward the ache this week instead of numbing it?
4. If it turned out the ache really was a homing signal, what would that change about how you read your own history?

Live It This Week

1. Complete the sealed sheet on your Take-Home tonight or tomorrow: “What am I actually seeking?” Fold it. Nobody will ever read it but you.
2. Once this week, when the ache shows up, do not reach for the phone for ten minutes. Just notice what it is actually asking for.
3. Read next week’s story in advance if you like: Mark 2:1-12. Watch what gets blocked, and what Jesus says first.

Closing

Leader alone, briefly: “God, if you are the fountain, we would rather have you than the cisterns. Give us an honest week. Amen.”

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst.” John 4:14

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 1 and point to the sealed sheet box. Fold it, keep it somewhere safe; we will need it, privately, at the end.

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every Passage in This Session

Primary Text

- John 4:1-30, the well, the request, living water, five husbands, the abandoned jar

Live Discovery Text

- Jeremiah 2:13, the fountain of living waters and the broken cisterns

Supporting Texts

- Psalm 42:1-2, the soul's thirst for the living God
- Isaiah 55:1-3, come to the waters without money (leader background)
- Genesis 24; Genesis 29; Exodus 2:15-21, well betrothal scenes (Dig Deeper)
- John 4:39-42, the town believes (leader background)

Catechism

- CCC 27, 30, 2560

Memory Verse

- John 4:14

The Knock and the Door

- Piece One: made for God; restlessness as homing signal; sealed sheet distributed