

**Search Party**  
**5 - God Meets You Where You Are**  
September 4, 2022

John 4

My name is Andrew, and I'm so glad to be with you! Crossroads is my home away from home. I lived here for nearly ten years, and so many of you are dear friends of mine, and many of you are like family. Crossroads provided my first full-time role in ministry, and I met my wife here. And we lived in the West Allegheny area for many years. It's so good to be reunited with you today!

Have you ever felt stuck without a way out? Have you ever been stuck in traffic on a bridge or in the tunnels? Have you ever been stuck at an airport? A few months ago, I was with a team traveling back from Central America. Our first flight landed late in Miami, Florida, around midnight, and we only had a few minutes to make our connecting flight to take us home. Our team rushed through customs, dropped off our luggage, and raced to the security checkpoint. But while we were in the security line, the connecting flight took off -- without us! Now, we're stuck in the Miami airport at midnight. There were no other flights going out that night, and at least 100 more stuck passengers were standing in line at customer support. We were stuck. It was midnight. We were tired. Hungry. And a little bit on edge. I did not want to spend the night stuck in the Miami airport! We only found one possible solution: there was a direct flight home leaving at 5:00 a.m. But it was leaving from Fort Myers, Florida, not Miami. Fort Myers is nearly 200 miles away! It was our only hope, so we booked the tickets and found a rental car company that was still open. Our team drove two rental vehicles across the state of Florida through the night. We arrived in Fort Myers at 3:00 a.m. and boarded the 5:00 a.m. flight for home. [Photo shown on the big screen.] And I finally got home around 9:00 a.m., after traveling more than 27 hours!

Have you ever felt stuck? Desperate? Trapped? Stuck in a bad relationship? Stuck in a sin habit or addiction? Stuck in a self-destructive, self-defeating pattern? Have you felt stuck spiritually? How does it feel when God seems distant?

If you feel stuck or trapped, there is hope! **God meets you where you are**. Whatever you think about God, whatever you're going through today, God meets you where you are. He meets you in confusion, in grief, in pain, in sin, in addiction, in brokenness. In **John 4**, Jesus intentionally meets a woman at a watering well. And at first, she assumes he's just another traveler on the road. However, Jesus comes to meet her where she is and provides the healing and hope that she needs. **John 4:3-9** *So he [Jesus] left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. <sup>4</sup>Now he had to go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup>So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. <sup>7</sup>When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" <sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) <sup>9</sup>The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)*

Jesus was risking his reputation with this woman. In the first century, they didn't have dating apps, so where is a single man going to meet a single lady? In those days, the local well was a pretty good spot to find a date. However, it was frowned upon for a lone man to be speaking with a lone woman -- especially for a Jew and a Samaritan!

Before we read more, we're going to watch a scene from the show "*The Chosen*," which depicts Jesus' conversation with the woman. [Video shown on the big screen.]

God meets you where you are. This woman clearly has some stuff going on, and Jesus meets her in the messiness. **God meets you in your stuff**. Say, "STUFF." We all got stuff, don't we? We have baggage, burdens, and hurts.

After Lauren and I bought our home in Indianapolis, we started having some home repair trouble, and I was really surprised by my first water bill. I thought, "Wow, water is a lot more expensive here." The average home uses around 3,000 gallons of water per month, but I got a bill for 40,000 gallons! The average swimming pool holds up to 20,000 gallons. I do not have a swimming pool. I don't even own a birdbath! So where was all this water coming from? What is going on?! There was no water damage in the house. No flooding in the yard. It was a mystery. When the plumbers came to the house, they cut up the floor and ripped into the foundation and located a water leak. [Photo shown on the big screen.] The plumbing crew brought in the heavy equipment, and a jackhammer, and tore up the foundation. It was ugly. It was messy. But it was necessary to repair the problem. And this is what we found. [Video shown on the big screen.] Water was leaking like this 24/7 for a month! There was no external sign of the water damage because it was going straight into the ground. But I was feeling the real effects of this hidden problem, and I needed help to repair the damage.

Many of us have hidden "stuff" that needs healed. We've got wounds. Pain. Emotional scars. Some stuff is hidden below the surface, like the water damage in my house. It may be some painful and traumatic stuff in your past. It may be a dark memory or a hidden hurt you've been carrying like a father-wound or a neglecting mother. For some, it's unforgiveness, bitterness, or shame. Sin. Addiction. This hidden stuff may show up as smoldering anger, secret insecurity, or explosive rage. God meets us in our stuff, and his Grace leads to healing and transformation.

When Jesus died on the cross, he paid the price for your sin so you can be forgiven. And when he rose from the dead, he secured your eternal life so you can come home to the Father. No sin will keep you stuck. No shame will keep you trapped. There is hope, and there is a way out of the stuff! **God meets you where you are.**

When Jesus meets the woman at the well, she is skeptical. She seems a little defensive and a little stubborn. **John 4:10-12**, *Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."* <sup>11</sup>"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" <sup>12</sup>*Are you greater than our father, Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"* How often do we treat God the same way?

Have you ever thought, "if there is really a God, I wouldn't be in this mess. If God is real, why is there so much suffering? Why am I hurting? Why won't he fix my problems?"

**God meets you in your stubbornness**. One time, I discovered a flat tire on my car. So, I decided to replace it with the spare tire. Stubbornly, I did not ask for help. I thought, "I can

do this!" I tried to loosen the lug nuts, but the last one was stuck like it was welded. I pulled and pushed with all my might, but it would not move! I was sweating and huffing and puffing, but I was too stubborn to admit weakness. Defiantly, I pulled and grunted with all my strength, and my whole body shot backwards when the lug nut came loose. Looking closer, I realized I didn't remove the lug nut. I actually broke the bolt right off the wheel! I was in a bad mood, and I needed real help. To this day, my car is still missing one bolt on its wheel. My stubbornness caused permanent damage. For a few days, my back was in pain from all my stubbornness. Your stubbornness can damage relationships and leave scars. Stubbornness can put us in pain.

What makes you defensive? Do you ever think, "I'm tough enough. I need to be strong and never show weakness." Does insecurity provoke you? Does the fear of letting people down keep you stuck in people-pleasing? Are you trying to prove a parent wrong? What makes you defensive? Argumentative?

Jesus is not put off by the woman's stubbornness. He meets where she is. **John 4:13-14** *Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

How many times do we return to the same things over and over again looking for satisfaction? We stubbornly go back to the same patterns and habits for relief. We stubbornly hold on to the sin, addiction, lifestyle, harmful choices, hurtful relationships. We are looking for comfort, but these things leave us unsatisfied. We stubbornly return to the same wells again and again, but we are thirsty again and again. God is not intimidated by our stubbornness. He meets us where we are, and he offers us real, eternal life -- the only thing that can satisfy our hearts.

Jesus wants to help this woman heal and live in freedom. And towards the end of the conversation, he reveals that he knows even the dark, painful parts of her past. **John 4:16-18**, <sup>16</sup>*He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."* <sup>17</sup>*"I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. <sup>18</sup>The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."*

We don't know the details of this woman's story. We don't know if she suffered abuse and neglect. But it's clear that she has a past that she's not proud of. No little girl grows up wishing to be married five different times. It's obvious her life is full of disappointment and false starts.

Shame will keep you stuck in the past and locked in brokenness. Brene' Brown once wrote: *"Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging - something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection."* I believe God uses other feelings like guilt, regret, and remorse, to lead us to healing. But shame is from the devil. Shame is not from God.

**3. God meets you in your shame.** Shame lures us into hiding our flaws, insecurities, and failures. Shame teaches us to hide in loneliness. Shame is one the strongest forces in my own life. When I was a teenager, I had a secret addiction to pornography that kept me trapped in shame. I was ashamed of being found out. I was ashamed of living a lie. I was ashamed that I couldn't get free. To this day, I fight the lie, "I am not good enough." When I make a mistake, I feel shame. When I let someone down, I feel shame. Shame tells me, "I'm not good

enough.” For a long time, shame motivated me to try and be perfect. And you know what that looks like? Competing for attention. Competing for recognition. Hiding mistakes and flaws. Lying about my shortcomings and weaknesses. Shame motivated me to be perfect. But God broke that secret addiction and freed me from the power of shame!

What are you hiding? What are you keeping a secret? Keeping in the dark? What lies do you believe? Do not listen to the lie that you are unworthy. Do not believe that you are too far gone. If there is breath in your lungs, there is hope and healing in Jesus! Jesus suffered the most intense shame on the cross. But he endured the shame of the cross so that we can be saved! He meets us in our shame, and he provides healing and freedom.

So where does this leave us? If we are stuck in our stuff, stubbornness, and shame, where do we go from here? **It starts with surrender**. We have to surrender the “stuff.” Let go of stubbornness and trying to do it on your own without God. Leave behind shame and come into his Grace.

In **John 4**, the woman surrenders to the grace of Jesus. **John 4:28-29, *Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, <sup>29</sup>“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”*** Jesus knows everything you have ever done. He knows your stuff, and he still meets you where you are.

Have you surrendered to Jesus? I believe today’s message has two invitations. One, for those of us here who do not follow Jesus, he is inviting you to surrender to him and put your faith in him. Have you surrendered control to him? Control of your self-worth? Control of your career and your finances? Is he in control of your family? Does he have access to the hidden, even painful parts of your past? Have you completely surrendered your “stuff”?

The second invitation is for those of us who have friends and loved ones who are far from God. He is inviting you to go and meet them where they are. Undoubtedly, in this room, many of us are thinking about a family member or a coworker who is stuck in their stuff -- burdened with shame, plagued by stubbornness, and it breaks our hearts. We have spouses who do not know God, children who have walked away from the faith, and God shares your burden for them.

The invitation today is to meet them where they are. Where is the modern-day watering well? Do you need to make a phone call? To have a conversation? Set up a lunch? Take a drive? Get on a plane? What does it look like for you to meet them where they are? God always meets us where we are. He will not leave you stuck in your stuff.

Last year, I met Krystal in Roatan, Honduras. [Photo shown on the big screen.] Krystal lives in a tiny house at the end of a dirt road. She has very little income, but she is full of love. Every day, Krystal feeds more than 50 children from her community. [Photo shown on the big screen.] Many of these children are poor and don’t have parents. Some are being raised by single moms or grandparents. Before Krystal started her ministry, many of the kids were underweight and unhealthy. But Krystal’s ministry is helping them grow strong. And Krystal doesn’t just give them food, she tells them about Jesus.

Before Krystal became a follower of Jesus, she lived a hard, painful life. When she was 12 years old, her stepdad started to abuse her, so Krystal ran away from home when she was 14 and lived on the streets. She started prostituting herself to make money, and at 16 years old, she had her first baby. By 20 years old, she had four children with different fathers. But her children grew up without a mother, because Krystal was also addicted to drugs, and she could

not care for her children. She lived like this for years and years. When Krystal's oldest daughter was 17 years old, she had a good job and saved up enough money to pay for Krystal to go to drug rehab. Can you imagine? A 17-year-old girl sending her own mother to rehab?! At rehab, Krystal found Jesus, and God changed her life. Krystal told me that rehab wasn't going to fix her addiction and her problems. She told me only forgiveness could set her free. God showed her how to forgive her mom, her stepdad, and forgive herself. God met her where she was.

I will never forget what Krystal said to me: "Andrew, my name is not Krystal. For my whole life, people called me names. They called me addict, prostitute, loser, lost cause. They called me names. But that is not my name. My name is CHOSEN. Because I am chosen by the king! I am his daughter. I am his child! I am chosen!"

This is the good news of Jesus: he meets you where you are, and he transforms you. You may not be fighting addiction like Krystal, but are you fighting fear? Stubbornness? Shame? Do you feel lost, confused, or separated from God? He meets you where you are, and he doesn't leave you where he found you. Today, will you surrender to him?

[Salvation Prayer]