

Lesson 11

Recognizing My Spiritual Opportunities

You play a valuable role in sharing the gospel

Introduction

“Don’t you say, ‘There are still four more months, and then comes the harvest’? Listen to what I’m telling you: Open your eyes and look at the fields, because they are ready for harvest. The reaper is already receiving pay and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap what you didn’t labor for; others have labored, and you have benefited from their labor.” Now many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of what the woman said when she testified, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. Many more believed because of what he said. And they told the woman, “We no longer believe because of what you said, since we have heard for ourselves and know that this really is the Savior of the world,” John 4:35-42.

This passage of course comes to us from John who details Jesus and the disciple’s trip back to Galilee from Jerusalem. Instead of going the normal route most Jews went when going north from Judea (which was to travel west and go up along the coast, or go east and travel along the Jordan), Jesus decided to take a more direct route – straight through the land of Samaria.

After traveling for several hours, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well when he stopped to rest. Although Jews typically did not associate with Samaritans, he engages her in conversation, asking her for a drink. As they speak, Jesus mentions “living water,” suggesting that whoever drinks the water He gives will never thirst again, but it will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life. The woman expresses her desire for this water, so she won’t have to return to the well again.

Their conversation deepens when Jesus accurately reveals details about her personal life, mentioning she has had five husbands and that the man she currently lives with is not her husband. The woman perceives Jesus to be a prophet and brings up a religious debate concerning the appropriate place to worship.

Jesus responds by emphasizing the significance of worshiping in spirit and truth, indicating that true worship goes beyond specific locations. He explains that God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and truth. As the dialogue continues, the woman mentions her belief in the coming Messiah. Jesus then reveals to her, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he,” identifying Himself as the awaited Messiah.

There is so much we can learn from this story and what it teaches us about seeing the opportunities before us. Going back to the first half of the chapter, we observe five great points in how we teach the lost:

How to Teach the Lost

4.7-9: We Have to Seize the Opportunity

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. “Give me a drink,” Jesus said to her, because his disciples had gone into town to buy food. “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans, John 4.7-9.

Here we see Jesus recognizing the moment. He was fully aware of the socio-cultural implications of speaking to a Samaritan woman. Yet, He recognized the unique moment he was in. So must we. Life often presents us with opportunities. Our surroundings, cultural contexts, or even our comfort zone must not blind us to the potential around us. Of ten what may seem like a chance encounter may be something God has led you to. What happened at the well that day wasn’t a coincidence, but a purposeful interaction.

Jesus didn’t wait for the Samaritan woman to approach Him. He took the lead. He did so by beginning the conversation with a simple request for water; a basic human need. We can do the same. What common interests do we share when interacting with people in the world? How can we use those things to transition the conversation to Christ? We shouldn’t wait on all the opportunities to come to us; sometimes we must create them.

This means we’ll have to be prepared to act when the time is right. Initially, the woman was defensive. Jesus doesn’t stop, however. Instead, he continues the conversation with patience and wisdom, especially as she reveals her skepticism through sarcasm. So, we must learn to read situations, understanding when to speak, when to listen, and when to ask questions. Opportunities can be fleeting. Jesus could have chosen to rest or wait for another time, but He seized the moment. We need to be quick to act, understanding that opportunities missed might never return.

4.10: Stress Jesus Has Something to Offer

Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would ask him, and he would give you living water,” John 4.10.

Here, Jesus introduces to the woman the spiritual gift he offers – a gift surpassing the physical water she came to draw out of the well. See how he treats her as a person, not as an outcast. When she was focused on the literal water in the well, Jesus redirects her attention to a deeper spiritual need. Just as water is essential for life, the *living water* Jesus offers is essential for spiritual life. What Jesus provides gives the lasting satisfaction of eternal life and spiritual fulfillment.

See here how Jesus describes salvation. It is the *gift of God*. It is something we receive – not earn. It is generously given out of God’s loving heart. Through Jesus people are promised a life that goes beyond death and offers the opportunity to be in God’s presence forever. Note also here how Jesus is the sole provider of the living water. He is the only one who offers genuine, eternal life, Acts 4.12; John 8.24. While there are many things in life that provide us with temporary happiness and momentary relief, the gift Jesus offers cannot be found anywhere else.

And now here how Jesus doesn't make the offer by stating a general truth . . . he makes it personal to the Samaritan woman. The gift of salvation is personal, available to every individual. While the gift is freely offered, it must be personally received.

4.13 – Highlight His Blessings

Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again, John 4.13.

Worldly comforts and pleasures offer only temporary relief. Whether it's a person's material possessions, sex, popularity, etc., these things can never truly fulfill the deepest longings of the human heart. Fleshly and worldly desires lead to a never-ending cycle of wanting more, never truly satisfying the soul.

What are some of the blessings that come with knowing Jesus?

Eternal Joy:

In Christ, there's a joy that isn't based on circumstances. It's a deep-seated happiness anchored in the unchanging nature of God, knowing that we are loved, accepted, and secure in Him.

Peace Beyond Understanding:

Jesus offers a peace that the world cannot give. Even during life's storms, we can have a calm assurance, knowing that God is in control and works all things for good.

Love that Knows No Bounds:

The love of Christ is unconditional and all-encompassing. It's not based on our performance or worthiness but stems from His very nature as love. This love fills our hearts, allowing us to love others with the same depth and intensity.

Transformation from Within:

We become a new creation, 2 Corinthians 5.17. Accepting Christ leads to transformation. Old desires and pursuits fade away, replaced by new passions and purposes aligned with God's will. We gain a life characterized by the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Eternity:

The blessings aren't limited to our time on earth. We have the assurance of an eternity in heaven, where there will be no pain, sorrow, or death. The ultimate blessing is the promise of being in God's presence forever, experiencing His love, glory, and majesty in ways that are unimaginable to our feeble mind.

4.16-18: Trust in the Power of the Word

"Go call your husband," he told her, "and come back here." "I don't have a husband," she answered. "You have correctly said, 'I don't have a husband,'" Jesus said. "For you've had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true," John 4.16-18.

Here Jesus reveals intimate knowledge of the Samaritan woman's personal life. Through His words, He brings to light her past and present, showing her (and us) the illuminating power of God's truth. For example, the word has a way of speaking directly to our individual circumstances. Just as Jesus pinpointed the woman's life situation, God's Word has relevance for our specific needs, doubts, and questions. The Scripture often unveils truths about our lives that we might be unaware of or choose to ignore. It sheds light on hidden sins, deep-seated fears, and unnoticed blessings.

The Word of God acts as a mirror, reflecting the state of our hearts and souls, James 1.21-25. When we immerse ourselves in it, we often find areas of our lives that require correction or repentance. Remember the purpose. God's word is intended to lovingly guide us toward righteousness. The aim is restoration and drawing closer to God's heart.

In this story, we are reminded of the word's ability to expose sin. Through God's Word, our sins are laid bare, Hebrews 4.12. This isn't meant to shame us, but to make us aware of our desperate need for salvation, much like the woman at the well who became aware of her life's choices when confronted by Christ. While the Scripture exposes our flaws, it also showers us with promises of forgiveness, love, and redemption. This is what leads to transformation. The truths within its pages have the power to renew minds, heal wounds, and revitalize spirits.

4.25-26: Jesus is the Answer

The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Jesus told her, "I, the one speaking to you, am he," John 4.25-26.

See how Jesus responds to her with one of the most direct affirmations of His identity in the New Testament: "I, the one speaking to you—am he." With these words, Jesus isn't just identifying himself as the awaited Messiah; he is offering himself as the ultimate answer to her spiritual thirst and the longings of humanity. Every individual, grapples with problems. While there are numerous solutions presented, Jesus stands out as *the* answer. Through his teachings, death, and resurrection, He provides solutions to the deepest problems of sin, separation from God, and the dread of death.

Understanding Jesus as the answer is not just about acknowledging a theological fact. It calls for a personal encounter and experience. When we grasp that Jesus is the ultimate answer to our problems, it changes our approach to challenges, offering hope where there was despair, and providing direction in confusion.

What This Means for Us

We are Part of God's Plan

Verses 26-30 of John 4 are all about God's **providence**. Think back to what has occurred in the chapter leading up to this point. 4.4 says He *had* to pass through Samaria on the way to Galilee, again, this was not the normal route for most Jews. So, Jesus walks 20 miles and arrives at exactly the right moment. The woman who comes to the well, at a time she knew no one else would be present, which just happens to

be when he is sitting at the well. He needs water and she can provide it. Through this, she comes to understand who He is, and she desires a relationship with God. Also, think how in this God is using the power of providence to bring all things together to accomplish his purposes. While Jesus is talking to the woman, he's breaking down barriers of tradition and prejudice: A man is talking with a woman. A Jew is talking with a Samaritan. A Rabbi is talking with an outcast.

Just as Jesus arrived at the well at the precise moment the Samaritan woman was there, we should trust that our life events and encounters happen for a reason. Sometimes, what may seem like chance is part of a bigger plan. Each one of us, plays a role in the bigger purpose. Our experiences, challenges, and triumphs all have a purpose. The Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus led her to desire a deeper relationship with God. Sharing our personal experiences and testimonies can inspire and lead others to seek a deeper understanding and relationship with God.

What is Really Important

We also see here how we need to make the spiritual the top **priority**. This is what we learn from 4.31-34. When the disciples got back with food and supplies, they urged Jesus to eat. Jesus wasn't really interested in what they brought. What was his top priority?

“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work,” Jesus told them. “Don't you say, ‘There are still four more months, and then comes the harvest’? Listen to what I'm telling you: Open your eyes and look at the fields, because they are ready for harvest, 4.34-35.

Jesus' primary mission centered upon redemption and salvation. God is the saving God. He desires all to come to a knowledge of the truth. Observe here as to what brings him satisfaction. His delight is in our salvation. See Hebrews 12.-12; Luke 15.

Opportunities Abound

Don't pass over John 4.35 too quickly. The fields are *ready* for harvest. Instead of seeing problems and difficulty, Jesus challenges us to see opportunity. The average Jew would have never considered Samaria as a mission field. For them, those people were too far gone. Yet, these are often the most fertile fields. Many come to Christ with a broken life. The woman he speaks with at the well had five husbands and was probably living in adultery. How many others in the village had lives wrecked by sin? How many people can we help?

“It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners,” Matthew 9.12-13.

The call for us is to go. And when we go there will be fruit. The opportunity for us may be in planting, or watering, or even harvesting. Our job is simply to go. Sowers and reapers will both rejoice when God gives the increase, 4.36-37; 1 Corinthians 3.5-6.

Opportunity Leads to Opportunity

John 4.39, 41-42 reveals to us that the woman believed and when she did, she **proclaimed** Christ. People heard and believed her testimony, and *many believed because of his word*, 4.41. They said:

And they told the woman, "We no longer believe because of what you said, since we have heard for ourselves and know that this really is the Savior of the world, John 4.42."

Conclusion

Living according to God's teachings is a powerful testament to His saving grace. When people observe our actions, behaviors, and choices, they witness firsthand the power of a God who delivers individuals from the grasp of sin. Every moment we live righteously, build a testimony—a silent sermon—that has the potential to lead someone toward belief. Godly living matters.

Our life story might just spark curiosity and interest in another. It could become the key that unlocks a door to someone's heart or, at the very least, keep that door ajar for the message of Christ to walk in. But while our personal testimony can initiate the conversation, the goal is to gradually steer it towards the ultimate testimony—that of Jesus Himself.

You can learn to guide someone else to Jesus. You can help them reach a place where they can confidently proclaim, "It's no longer because of you that we believe, but because of Him."

For Discussion

1. Why did Jesus choose to take a direct route through Samaria instead of the typical routes that other Jews took?
2. How does Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman challenge the socio-cultural norms of that time?
3. In what ways does the story highlight the significance of "living water" and how it is different from the physical water from the well?
4. How does the narrative emphasize the importance of seizing opportunities to teach and guide others towards spiritual truths?
5. Based on the story, how does Jesus use knowledge and understanding of individual circumstances to impart spiritual lessons and insights?

6. In what ways does the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman highlight the importance of God's providence and timing in our personal encounters?
7. How does Jesus' statement, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work," challenge our understanding of personal priorities and what truly matters in life?
8. Based on John 4.35, how can we shift our perspective to see challenges as opportunities, especially when it comes to sharing our faith and helping others?
9. How does the response of the villagers in John 4.42 emphasize the importance of personal experience and firsthand knowledge in developing genuine faith?
10. Why is it important for believers to not only share their personal testimonies, but also guide others towards the ultimate testimony of Jesus Himself? How can we ensure our personal stories don't overshadow the message of Christ?

i deSilva, David A. *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*. Second Edition. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2022, p. 107.

ii Rhetoric 2.7.1 [1385a16–20]

iii Cicero, *De Offic.* 1.47–48; Seneca, *Ben.* 1.4.3; *Sir.* 35:2; Isocrates, *Ad Dem.* 26.

iv Seneca, *Ben.* 5.11.5

v *ibid.*, *Ben.* 4.18.1, LCL

vi Roberts, Tom M. "The Power of the Gospel to Save." *Reemphasizing Bible Basics in Current Controversies*. Edited by Melvin D. Curry. Florida College Annual Lectures. Temple Terrace, FL: Florida College Bookstore, 1990.

vii *ibid.*