

Not sure if y'all know, but Kurt and I have something in common. No, it's not our striking good looks, our love of sports, or our hairlines. But both of our families are from Germany. My family fled Germany when the Russians invaded after World War II. 16 years many of us remember that The German Democratic Republic built the Berlin Wall. This was an almost 100 mile-long structure – laced with mines and soldiers waiting to shoot anyone who tried to cross. It divided Communist East Germany and Capitalist West Germany and prevented those on the east side from escaping to the west. Part of the wall went up overnight, separating family, friends, - even mothers separated from their newborn babies – further dividing a country that was already in disarray.

The people of Germany longed for this wall to be torn down – that they might be reunited with their families and hopefully one day reunified as a country. It had nicknames like “The Iron Curtain” and “The Wall of Shame” because it was a symbol of division and prevented people from having the freedom they so desperately needed. On November 9, 1989, East Germans showed up to the wall in droves – demanding access to the other side. Confused by the masses, guards opened the gates, and over the next several weeks the people of Germany destroyed the wall with hammers and chisels – some of them keeping pieces of the wall to remind them of a wall – a barrier – that once kept an entire country divided but now was a symbol of their freedom and unity.

Many of us in this room have a wall of our own. It lines the walls of our hearts and prevents us from having the kind of life-giving relationships that God has intended for us. It's a wall that protects us and keeps others out. And like the Berlin Wall, it prevents us from living a life of freedom. This morning I want you to know that Jesus wishes to “tear down that wall” – for you and for me. If you have a Bible, turn to John 4:1-26.

Quick warning. We're reading 26 verses straight but then we'll go back and discuss them at a slower pace. **I want you to know from the outset this morning that Jesus wishes to break down – to eliminate – obstacles that hinder a life-giving relationship with Him.** Sometimes we put up those obstacles and sometimes they're put up by those who came before us. Let's see how in this story. Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ²(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.”⁸(For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” ¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” ¹⁵The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸for

you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

Jesus hears that the Pharisees – the religious leaders of the day – are getting upset because He is starting to attract a following. Because He’s not ready for an encounter with those guys He decides to go to Galilee. Now, **if you are looking at a map**, Judea would have been south of Galilee. Jesus is traveling North. Now, if He goes straight North, then as verse 4 says, “He had to pass through Samaria.” **There are three problems with that phrase “he had to.”** First, no one was MAKING Jesus pass through Samaria. Second, there is more than one route to Samaria. Third, most conservative, religious Jews would have taken a different route because of the tension and hostility between Jews and Samaritans. You can see that expressed by the woman in verse 9 when she says, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” and then John adds the note, “(For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)”

What was the tension all about? Let me make it simple. At different times in history, both the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom were taken over. The Northern Jews intermarried with their captors and became known as “half-breeds” and in this passage, “Samaritans.” They believe in God, too, but only recognized the first 5 books of the Bible as God’s Word – ignoring the rest of the Old Testament. The Southern Kingdom did NOT intermarry, remaining 100% Jewish and they rejected the Samaritans because of their lack of purity and rejection of traditional Judaism. To make matters worse, when the Jews rebuilt their temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritans offered to help but were forbidden. In response, the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerazim. In 128 B.C., Jewish zealots burned the Samaritan temple to the ground.

Understand the tension, now? It would be like sending a couple of Aggies right down the middle of a field packed with Longhorns. Or if you are an Alabama fan and you step foot in my house. Just kidding. But seriously. Ok, back to the passage. Jesus HAD to pass through Samaria and here’s why: **Jesus wants to eliminate racial and religious obstacles that would hinder a relationship with Him. He’s opening the doors for the gospel to spread.** He doesn’t have to go through Samaria. He wants to.

It takes about 3 days to make that trip by foot and when He arrives around noon, we get a glimpse of His humanity. Stressed. Tired. Thirsty. He just wants a place to sit down and get a sip of water. We have a Savior who says, “I’ve been there. I get it. I’m with you.” He sits down at the well and a Samaritan woman approaches and He says to her, “Give me a drink.” Now, this is pretty controversial. Jesus talks to a woman in public. Gasp! But in this 1st century culture, no self-respecting rabbi would do this. By asking her for a drink, He’s basically saying, “Let’s be friends.” Y’all remember doing that when you were like 5-years old – you see some kid on the playground and ask, “Want to be my friend?” Jesus has just told the woman He wants fellowship with her. He wants to talk and be friends.

By going through Samaria, He is breaking down religious and racial obstacles. By speaking to this woman, He is eliminating a cultural and religious wall to a relationship with Him. There's supposed to be tension here, tension that is no fault of Jesus or the woman, but Jesus is there to do something about it. Where hostility has existed for hundreds of years, Jesus comes to re-establish relationship.

Listen, church. This is more of a secondary point this morning but we can learn something from how Jesus interacts with this woman, how He interacts with someone He's not supposed to befriend. We currently live in an age of outrage. Every day in the news and in social media we have one more issue that we are supposed to be outraged by. And when we do, when we get angry and reactive, we begin to put ourselves into a position of opposition. Republicans vs. Democrats. Liberals vs. Conservatives. Pro-life vs. Pro-choice. Pro-vax vs. anti-vax. Christian vs. Atheist. Men vs. Women.

We must care about justice and about what is right and good and godly. But I fear that when we are outraged – when we're reactive – we lose the opportunity to sit at the well with someone we disagree with – and ask for a drink – so conversation, change, and relationship can happen. I'd invite us, when we feel tension or disagree with someone, to say, "Hey, want to be my friend?" Here's a good question to ask: Is what I am about to say, do, or post going to eliminate an obstacle to the gospel or create one?

This week, Jim Denison had an interesting article. He quotes an NPR article by Hanna Rosin who says, "[Americans these days seem to be losing their appetite for empathy.](#)" The word *empathy* was coined in 1908 and was promoted aggressively after World War II in response to the nuclear age. The idea was that we need to understand the other side before we annihilate each other. Civil rights activists began advancing the value as well, hoping people with power and privilege would learn to comprehend the realities of people with neither. As Rosin notes, "An evolved person was an empathetic person, choosing understanding over fear."

Then, more than a decade ago, things began to change. Researchers note that by 2009, young people on average measured 40 percent less empathetic than their parents. The argument was that standing up to the other side is essential for progress. We should empathize with the victims, not their enemies. We should take sides, and strongly.

Empathy today is mistaken for accepting and even justifying the other point of view. In a day when we're less worried about Russian missiles than social media support, empathy is a sign of weakness, not strength.

Church, we must follow Jesus' example and choose empathy. He cares about meeting people where they are no matter race, gender, religion, or culture. He's concerned with eliminating obstacles that keep any of our hearts from Him and each other.

The woman responds to His request for water by reminding Him of the issues between Jews and Samaritans and in 4:10, He says, "Hey, if you knew who I was – you would have asked me for a drink and I would have given you living water." Living water was water that flowed from a spring, a river, or a stream. For Jews, it was used in ritual washings to make unclean worshipers – pure. Where these two are, there is no running water. That's why in verse 11 she asks, "Where do you plan on getting this? This well right here was dug by Jacob. We have no running water and you don't have a bucket to draw with."

Jesus gives a further description of the water – probably pointing down to the well. Drink this and you'll be thirsty again. Drink what I give you and you will NEVER thirst again. Nothing on this earth will satisfy – not even good things – not fresh water, warm sunshine, physical intimacy, healthy food, or the love of the most amazing person in the

world. But the “living water” will become a well of water springing up – leading to eternal life. The water Jesus gives will lead to spiritual renewal and to being satisfied in Him. Her response: I want that! Give me some so I never have to come back here.

But she can't have it yet. You see, there is no reaching the true living water until something hidden has been exposed – until this woman knows that Jesus KNOWS her and still wants her. He has one more barrier to eliminate – a wounding to expose.

Verse 16. Jesus tells her to call her husband. She says, “I have no husband.” And then Jesus brings what is in darkness to light. You're right – you don't have a husband. You've had 5 husbands and the man you're with now isn't your husband.” Much has been made of this statement in the past. I've heard everything from, she was an adulteress to she was trying to find her identity in men, to she was barren and therefore divorced, to she was widowed 5 times. I heard one pastor say, “Hey, if she's been married 5 times and each guy has died, the 6th ain't sayin' 'I do' with this woman.” The same would be true if she were an adulteress.

To be honest, we don't know what her story is. If I know sin and its consequences like I think I do, it's likely a combination of all the above. Perhaps she's caused some of the divorces, maybe a husband or two died, and maybe there's been some death or barrenness along the way. **No matter the circumstances, this woman knows pain.**

Here's what we DO KNOW. We know that in this culture, it was the woman's responsibility to gather water for the family in the morning and at night and that it became a social gathering. They didn't draw water alone and they didn't do it in the middle of the day. Only women who had reason to be isolated and alone would do that. So, she probably is some sort of outcast, who has either been isolated or isolated herself.

She's exhibiting a major sign of shame. And don't miss this – Jesus meets her there. He not only meets there, but He brings it up. He brings up the wound. He has to. He's breaking down another barrier – this time the barrier of shame – because shame loses its power when it's brought to light. She's either a seeker or a sinner but either way Jesus meets her in a moment of need and DRAWS her to himself. **Don't miss this: Jesus meets us where our shame carries us in order to open our hearts to Him. Jesus wishes to eliminate shame because it hinders a life-giving relationship with Him. Shame is an obstacle to a satisfying relationship with Jesus and it must be eliminated.**

Brene Brown, a renowned shame researcher, says this, “Shame is an 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.” You were hardwired for connection, love, and belonging. We are spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically hardwired for that. It gives purpose and meaning. When we let shame rule in our lives, when we let a wounding have power over us, we can't have those things. We end up at a well, all alone, hoping no one shows up to talk to us.

I know each of you have been impacted - some of you deeply wounded - by your own decisions and by the decisions of others. And because of that, you experience this same isolating feeling and you need healing from it. To be 99% known is to be unknown. If there is even 1% unknown, you can't be fully known/fully loved and shame thrives there.

Let's see how this story finishes. Because He knows her story, she mistakes Jesus for a prophet. “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.” Now, the woman redirects – another

sign of shame by the way – and goes back to the religious issue. Jews worship in Jerusalem. We worship here on this mountain. It's a futile attempt at distraction.

Jesus responds and I love these words, "Woman (don't worry – He didn't say it with attitude – it was actually a sign of respect), Believe me. There's coming a day – and it's actually here right now with Me being here – that worship won't take place in Jerusalem and it won't take place on this mountain. It will happen in you as the Spirit and the Word of God come alive in you." And she says, "Oh, I know the Messiah is coming." And Jesus does something He rarely does, He declares with His lips, "That's me." Now, look at verse 28-29. ²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

Over the entirety of this passage, Jesus has been revealing more and more of Himself to this woman. And as she begins to grasp who she has encountered her response has changed. At first, He was a man named Jesus, then He was Jewish, then He was sir, then He was Messiah, and now the Christ. It reminds me of a recent encounter my family had.

Some friends of ours found out our 5-year old, Roman, loves basketball and they were kind enough to gift us with some tickets to a Mavs game and was able to get us in the "Hi-5 Line" – where fans get to hi-5 the players. We made our way down a back hallway to get in line and when we open the doors – there's a tall figure coming towards us. I look up and immediately recognize this NBA "legend" and grab Roman by the shoulder to get him to stop walking and I say, "Roman, you're going to want to give this guy a hi-5." Roman doesn't even look up – just sticks his hand out – the man gives him a hi-5 and then leans down a little to playfully push Roman's hat over his eyes and keeps on walking. In and out of my life forever.

As soon as he walks away, I look over at Erin and her eyes are big and her mouth is wide open. I'm usually the calm one in these moments. It took everything in me not to fangirl this guy. We keep walking, get on the elevator and I can finally show my excitement, "Oh my gosh, that was Larry stinkin' Bird!" We interacted with a true legend – a hall of famer. I haven't let my son wash his hands in weeks. I reacted like most of you would if you met someone of that magnitude. There was excitement – so much so – that I've told that story over and over again the last few weeks.

Roman didn't have much of a reaction. You know why? He didn't know who he was interacting with. He didn't understand the magnitude of the moment. But my hope is that over time, as he continues in his basketball fandom, he'll one day appreciate the day he met Larry Bird and one day it won't be my story to tell – but his.

And that's exactly what happened for this woman. **When she recognizes who she is interacting with and that He is the Christ, she leaves behind the jar she brought to draw water because she got the water she needed. Her thirst is quenched and she runs to tell others of her experience. Much like the walls came tumbling down in Berlin - the walls of defensiveness and shame come tumbling down in her heart. She moves from stuffing to sharing, from shame to freedom, from isolated to belonging.**

She is accepted, known, and invited into life-giving relationship with Jesus and that's only possible because every obstacle that could have prevented her from experiencing life in Him was removed. **Jesus wants to eliminate shame from our lives and to bring healing to our deepest wounds.** That happens when you let yourself, all of yourself, be known to Him. It's handing your shame over to Him realizing His grace reaches beyond that. I am excited for this fall when we'll be re-introducing a recovery ministry here at Fellowship –

a ministry that isn't for the addict – but for everyone – so that this can be happening on a more consistent and purposeful basis here.

Shame isn't just for those of us who have experienced trauma. It's something we all experience. It exists in the day-to-day. Brene Brown, in her research, found that there are 12 areas of life that shame shows up.

- Appearance and Body Image
- Money and Work
- Fatherhood/Motherhood
- Parenting
- Family
- Mental and Physical Health
- Addiction
- Sex
- Aging
- Religion
- Surviving Trauma
- Being Stereotyped or Labeled

Before I give you time to reflect. I want you to know I have experienced shame in almost every category listed. Some of them daily. Just this week, Erin and I were discussing out parenting and there was some shame there. A couple of years ago, I realized that I have a tell when I am experiencing shame. Erin and I labeled it, "The Shame Song." It sounds, really happy, right? It's like I am trying to remind myself to be happy because I am not. But it's good for me because when I hear the song I know I have something to tell Erin.

Many of us here today are holding on for dear hope that no one ever find out about some secret sin or wounding or that every day we wrestle with shame in one of those areas. We'd much rather hide it in the darkness and pray it never comes to light. We'd rather play it "safe." And in doing so, we find ourselves at a well – alone – in the middle of the day instead of being able to freely live in the community and presence of others. And beyond that, it's hindering our relationship with Jesus. When it comes up, we fearfully hide it again hoping He and we can forget about it.

This morning, I want to give you some time to look at these 12 areas for yourself. I want to give you some time to reflect and offer up to the Lord an area or two or three or all 12 that you have shame about. I want you to write it on one of the prayer cards and take that to the Hub for the staff to pray for you, to a prayer room, or to your Life Group.

What could you gain for yourself to acknowledge it, stop hiding, and offer it up to Jesus? What would happen if you stop hiding your shame because of fear, what if you stopped denying it exists, what if you stopped blaming others and offered it up to Him? What would happen to your life?

I am going to pray, we'll give you time to reflect, Noah will lead us, and then we'll dismiss.

Let's pray.