

Hope Church February 8th, 2026

Habit #8: crossing boundaries.

John 4:4-26

- I spent my first 15 years growing up in **South Africa under Apartheid**.
- My dad was different from MOST WHITE AFRIKANER MEN of that time.
- He **welcomed Black South Africans** into our home. They used our same cups and plates. Not the tin mugs most families kept separate.
- I grew up thinking that meant I couldn't possibly be racist.

- Fast-forward twenty years. I'm in full-time ministry. I'm passionate about cross-cultural ministry and missions.
- I honestly thought I understood this racism stuff. I thought my heart was changed.
- Then I met PASTOR PETER HLOKWA.
- Peter led a church in **Munsieville** – a community where many families live in shacks and survive on less than a dollar-a-day.
- We became close friends. The deeper our friendship grew, the more I REALIZED how *uncomfortable I was with parts of his culture*.

- I began to realize that what I thought was me not-being-racist, was just me carrying a **quiet kind of superiority.**

- Deep down I thought:

I'm here to help him. To fix things. To make his life better.

- One vacation changed everything.
- Peter's wife was in her mid-thirties. Their two daughters were 8 and 10. They had never seen the ocean before.
- We took an 800-mile drive to my parents' house in Jeffreys Bay.
- **Every time we passed a big body of water**, the girls asked:

Uncle, is that the ocean?

- And I kept saying:

You'll know it when you see it.

- When we finally arrived, seeing their faces as they ran into the waves for the first time – it was holy moment.
- We spent the week together. Sharing a house and meals and even the same bathroom.
- Somewhere in that week, God started exposing the lies I believed about myself.

- I realized that even with my dad's influence, the apartheid system I grew up in QUIETLY INFLUENCED me to see **non-Caucasian people as inferior** to me.
- My friendship with Peter helped me discover that we're born with a reflex to fear what's different. Whether it's **race** or **culture** or **religion** or **language**. It's HUMAN NATURE.
- Our friendship taught me that following Jesus means a lifelong intentional process of letting God **reshape my heart and mind and attitude** – especially towards those who are different than me.
- I discovered that that only happens when I'm doing life with people who are different than me.

What I've wrestled with in my own heart is now playing out all around us. This natural fear of anything different has grown into **full-blown polarization** in the USA. Families are *divided by politics*. Friendships are strained over race and immigration and identity.

We surround ourselves with people **who sound like us**. People who **believe like us**.

People who **behave like us**. People who **vote like us**.

Into this kind of world, followers of Jesus need a different reflex. The 8th habit of following Jesus is **CROSSING BOUNDARIES**. Remember: a habit is letting something become so normal, so practiced, that it's simply part of who you are.

Because Jesus crossed every barrier to reach us, we're called to show up fully in our neighborhoods and move on purpose toward people who **look and think and believe differently** than we do. As we do, we start to see the beauty of God's creativity in our diversity, and we make His unity visible in a DIVIDED WORLD.

We are reading from **JOHN chapter 4** today – if you want to open your Bibles. Before we dive into the story, we need to understand the crazy context of the story:

- Around 700 years before Jesus, the **Assyrian Empire conquered** the northern kingdom of Israel.
- Many *Assyrians moved to Samaria and settled there*. Bringing with them their **own culture and religion**.
- Many Jews that remained in the northern kingdom INTERMARRIED with Assyrians and they **adopted their customs and beliefs**.
- Over time, faithful Jews labeled Samaritans as half-breeds: **compromised** and **unclean** and **not fully Jewish**.
- When the exiled Jews returned to rebuild the temple, the Samaritans *offered to help*, but **Jewish leaders refused it**.
- So Samaritans built their own temple.

- Centuries of **fighting and resentment** FOLLOWED. Including a moment where a Jewish leader destroyed the Samaritan Temple and attacked their towns.
- Bottom line: Jews and Samaritans *hated* each other. There was no love lost between them.

Into that divided world, Jesus walks into Samaria, sits down at a well, and starts a conversation.

Verses 4-9:

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 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.)

- Most Jews travelled around Samaria. To avoid the half breeds and their impurity. But Jesus took his disciples straight through it.
- Getting water at the hottest time of day reveals that this woman was an outcast in her own community. She is getting water at the least busy time to **avoid people and being shamed**.

- Jesus meets her not at the temple. Not during a religious event. But in the middle of an ordinary moment in an ordinary day.
- Jesus doesn't start with a SERMON. He doesn't start with a JUDGEMENT. He starts with a simple question: *Will you give me a drink?* He **begins with weakness** – with his need – letting her see his thirst instead of his superiority.
- A **respected Jewish man** was not supposed TO SPEAK to a woman IN PUBLIC that wasn't a family member. Not supposed to speak to a Samaritan woman at all. Definitely not alone.
- **Jesus is crossing** every religious and cultural and social lines to CONNECT with *someone everyone else is avoiding*. Everyone else has judged to be unworthy.

Verses 10-15:

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." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 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?" ...

...Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 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.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

- Jesus uses the phrase **ὕδωρ ζῶν** (hydor zon). Living water literally means water that’s fresh and flowing – like from a spring and not a pond.
- He uses water to describe the grace He wants to give her. Grace that washes away her sins. Grace that **renews**. Grace that **restores**.
- But she still doesn’t get it. She’s still thinking of a physical thirst.
- Jesus really wants her to get it. He changes his approach. He **shifts the conversation** to her deeper hurt.

Verses 16-20:

He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. 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.” “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

- In other words: she is busted.

- **Jesus names her story.** He reveals her brokenness without shaming her. Without condemning her.
- The beauty of this moment: *Jesus sees her fully and He stays in the conversation.* He doesn't walk away.
- **A prophet was someone that was sent by God.** She knows there is something about Jesus.
- But she still tries to change the subject of the conversation. Change it to the religious world she grew up in – where is the correct Temple.

Verses 21-26:

“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks...

...God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you – I am he.”

- Jesus confirms that God's rescue plan hasn't changed. That it will happen through the history of Israel.

- But *true worship* won't be about the **right mountain or the right method or right denomination** – it's not about JERUSALEM nor GERIZIM anymore.
- *True worship* is about who we worship. Faith that is **rooted in the Father**. Being **reconciled in the Son**. Living in the **power of the Holy Spirit**.
- The *future of worship* is about how we worship. **It's about being real and authentic with God**.
- Jesus uses the Greek phrase **ἐγώ εἰμι** (egoo eimi) – *I am he*. This is one of the first moments in the Gospel where Jesus openly He reveals Himself clearly: I'm the Messiah.
- And He doesn't say it to a priest or to one of his disciples. *He shares it with a broken Samaritan woman*. Someone everyone else dismissed.
- And many people in her town got saved through her story.

Jesus meets her needs before she even understands her own needs.

He **CROSSES religious and racial and social boundaries** without hesitation.

He holds truth and grace together. Fully honest and fully loving. *And it disarms her animosity*.

Jesus shows us what BOUNDARY-CROSSING LOVE looks like. Inviting everyone – no matter what side of the boundary they are – into His family. Just like with the Samaritan woman, it starts by saying yes to his invitation.

Repentance refers to a change of mind, actually a radical transformation of thought and attitude, of outlook and direction.

Floyd McClung

What does this mean for us who are called to be BOUNDARY CROSSERS?

- Jesus WELCOMED someone that was on the *wrong side* of every boundary. Wrong **race**. Wrong **gender**. Wrong **religion**. Wrong **reputation**.
- We should expect to see and meet Him on the *wrong side* of my own boundaries.
- Jesus CALLS us to see people **first as image-bearers of God**. Not as political opponents or 2nd rated human.
- Jesus promises us in JOHN 4 that He will give us a *new heart* **capable of love beyond comfort zones**. Capable of stepping into other's pain and stories and deeply held beliefs.

Five simple ways CROSSING BOUNDARIES can start to look like real life for us.

AWARENESS – notice who you walk past.

- Think about the spaces in your life – your home or your workplace or the school bleachers or the church lobby.
 - ⇒ Who do I **naturally greet and connect with**?
 - ⇒ Who do I walk past without even noticing? Who do I **tend to avoid**?
- If I'm honest with myself, my answers WILL REVEAL the **subtle places** where I still think I'm better than others. Where I still live in fear of anyone that is different.
- Let God quietly nudge you this week:
 - ⇒ Who should I move toward?
 - ⇒ What invisible boundary can I cross today?
 - ⇒ Start by learning someone's name and listening to a piece of their story.

PRESENCE – show up in the community where you don't have to.

- Most of us live inside safe circles – the same **friends** and same **routines** and same **social feeds** and same **podcasts**.
- Jesus went *through* Samaria and not around it.
- JOHN 4 invites us to live in our communities.
- That we will be **visible and available and relational**.
- Showing up may look like:
 - ⇒ Joining a school booster group or volunteering as a coach.

⇒ **Attending a city council meeting** to listen and pray, not to speak.

⇒ Serving regularly at a local outreach like WeCare.

- **We're not there to fix the room or win debates.** Just to be genuinely present and available.

CURIOSITY – practice to listen before you speak.

- Jesus didn't start a culture war with the Samaritan woman.
- He asked **questions and listened** like her *story mattered* – because her story did.
- When we really want to get to know people, their defensiveness drops.
- It means moving from ***How can I fix you?*** to ***What can I learn from you?***
- Even when we completely disagree on politics and race and faith and parenting and hot-button topics, listening **communicates respect**.

SHARED LIFE – make room at your table for people who are on the other-side-of-your-boundaries.

- TRUE HOSPITALITY means more than inviting people who look and think and sound like us.
- It means **creating space** in our homes and schedules and budgets for people our culture tends to keep at a distance.

- It might look like:
 - ⇒ Sharing a meal with a family from another country.
 - ⇒ Partnering with a ministry that serves refugees.
 - ⇒ Helping a neighbor whose car broke down.
 - ⇒ Showing up for a single parent who's overwhelmed.
- Jesus shared a table with people on every wrong side. **He crossed every boundary** – including death – to invite us into his family too.

CHANGE OF HEART – Pray for people you don't understand.

- We may never fully agree politically or theologically or culturally.
- But we can't follow Jesus and **keep the "other side" locked as enemies in our hearts**.
- Prayer isn't PRETENDING the *differences don't matter*.
- Prayer is bringing **real people**, with **real names**, before a **real God who loves them**.
- As we PRAY, God **untangles our contempt**. God softens our tone. God **gives us new eyes** to see *His image in others*.
- Prayer gently transforms us.
- Even if you're not sure where you stand with faith yet – start there. Ask God to bless the people you usually avoid or misunderstand.

It is hard to stay angry at someone if you are praying for them. It is also hard to stay angry unless you feel superior, and it is hard to feel superior if you are praying for them, since in prayer you approach God as a forgiven sinner.

Timothy Keller

If Jesus calls us to be BOUNDARY CROSSERS, **where is your *Samaria***?

- Who's on the *wrong side* for you – politically and racially and culturally and spiritually?
- What are you intentionally going to do about them?
- And as you go, REMEMBER:

You're not the Savior at the well – you're the thirsty one who met Him there.