

Session 5: John 4:1–5:18

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

When we trust in Jesus, the savior of the world, he gives us hope for both our present and our future.

Head Change

To know that Jesus has overcome sin and its effects in our lives.

Heart Change

To feel the hope of Christ in every circumstance.

Life Change

To actively share the hope you have found in Jesus with everyone in your community.

OPEN

What gives you comfort and stability during difficult times?

Faith is an act of trust. When you put your faith in Jesus, you are entrusting both your present and your future to him. We will meet three people in this session: a Samaritan woman, a Judean official, and a paralyzed man. All three were in hopeless situations until they met and trusted in Jesus.

READ

John 4:1–5:18 (If you don't have time to read through this entire section, read 4:1–13, 46–54, and 5:2–15.)

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

How does Jesus approach racial divisions?

How should we respond when Jesus speaks?

What creates the change in the three stories in this passage?

Show Session 5: *John 4:1–5:18* (10 minutes).

DISCUSS

Read John 4:1–42.

Let's start this session by understanding the context of Jesus's actions. **Based on these verses, what is happening in Jesus's ministry? Who is working with Jesus and who opposes him? Where, specifically, is Jesus?**

Dr. Evan noted that this chapter occurs in the middle of social, political, and racial conflict. But Jesus does not align himself with particular factions. Instead, he crosses social barriers to show the world that he is the Messiah. **What stands out to you about the way Jesus interacts with the social norms of his day? In what ways can we emulate his behavior in our culture?**

Note: To learn more about Samaria and the Samaritans, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

The Jewish people wanted nothing to do with Samaritans. But Jesus intentionally goes to Samaria and sits down to have a conversation with a Samaritan woman. **Who in our society is like the Samaritan woman—outcast and ostracized?**

After Jesus asks the woman for a drink, he talks to her about living water. **According to Jesus, what are the benefits of “living water”?**

We all have spiritual cravings that lead us to sin—self-seeking desires for comfort, control, appreciation, and success. But our deepest longings will never be quenched with earthly things. We can only find permanent spiritual satisfaction in Jesus. In the words of the ancient Christian theologian Augustine of Hippo, “Our hearts are restless until they can find rest in [God].” **In what ways is your heart restless apart from Jesus?**

The woman at the well reveals a little about herself to Jesus, but he already knows everything about her life. Jesus already knows about our whole lives too—every sin we've tried to hide and every secret we'd rather not discuss. **What do you think Jesus sees when he looks at you?**

Jesus sees every one of your sins and yet he does not run away. Instead, he draws closer to you. Jesus, in his compassion, offers you forgiveness and restoration. And that is what we really need. **In what ways does Jesus's forgiveness impact the way you view him and his grace?**

The woman asks Jesus about temple worship—specifically, who worshipped in the right place: the Samaritans on Mt. Gerezim or the Jews in Jerusalem. Instead choosing the right site of worship, Jesus points to the right way to worship. **In what ways do you worship God both in and out of church?**

Note: To learn more about what it means to worship in spirit and in truth, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

To a Jewish person, Samaritans were hated and to be avoided at all costs. This Samaritan woman was also an outcast in her own society. She was one of the least loved people of her time. Even so, Jesus remains with her and reveals his true nature to her. **What do Jesus's actions teach you about God's love—both in general and for you personally?**

Jesus says in verses 34–38 that he compares his work to a farmer sowing and reaping crops. By talking to the woman at the well, Jesus was preparing the hearts of Samaria for a harvest. His disciples would join in his work later in the book of Acts to reap a harvest of souls trusting in Jesus. Jesus has prepared a harvest for us, sowing seeds in the hearts of people, preparing them to hear the gospel. **What opportunities has God given you to share in the work of evangelism?**

What can you do to maximize your work in the “harvest”?

“Jesus crossed the bridge no one else was crossing,” Dr. Evans said. “Jesus became their focus and divisions were broken down in a day.” **In what ways can you “cross bridges” no one else is crossing? What can you do to overcome our societal divisions to tell others about Jesus?**

Read John 4:43–54.

Jesus leaves Samaria and returns to a place where he is known and celebrated. **According to verses 45–46, where is Jesus and what is his reputation there?**

According to verse 48, what was Jesus's frustration with the people of Cana?

In verse 50, Jesus tells the official his son is healed, and we are told the official believed without seeing proof of Jesus's words. **What stands out to you about this official's faith?**

When the official sees that his son is alive, he and his entire household believe in Jesus. Just as the faith of the woman at the well brought her entire village to trust in Jesus, the official's faith led his entire household to trust in Jesus. **In what ways has your faith in Jesus affected the people around you? What can you do to share the hope you have found in Jesus in your workplace, home, or community?**

Note: For a deeper look at the royal official at Cana, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

Jesus then travels to a pool in Bethesda that was rumored to hold healing powers for the sick and paralyzed. Jesus finds a man there in a hopeless situation. **What is wrong with this man? How long has he been this way? According to verse 7, who does this man have to rely on for help?**

Note: To learn more about the pool at the Sheep Gate, go to **Go Deeper Section 4** at the end of this study.

The only thing Jesus asks of the paralyzed man is the desire to be healed. **What areas of your life do you need Jesus to heal? What's your answer to Jesus's question in verse 6?**

According to verse 14, the man's disability was the result of some sin. By healing the man, Jesus was showing that he was not only our great physician, but that he was also able to overcome the effects of our sins. **In what ways has Jesus restored your own life? How has he overcome the negative effects of your sins?**

In all three of the encounters in this session, Jesus asks the person he is speaking with to trust him and to put their faith in him. **What circumstances in your life do you need to actively trust Jesus with this week?**

LAST WORD

Jesus's actions were never just for show. In both his everyday interactions and his miracles, he was seeking to introduce himself as the Messiah to the world. Whenever a person came across Jesus they were confronted with the question, "Do I trust and believe that this man is the Messiah, the savior of the world?"

The Gospel of John repeatedly asks you the same question. What do you believe about Jesus? If you have trusted in Jesus as your savior, John asks you a second question: Whom are you sharing Jesus with?

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Samaria and Samaritans

When we read John 4:4, we might not think anything of Jesus choosing to pass through Samaria. But for the ancient reader, Jesus's act carried major significance. The Samaritans were deeply hated by the Jews, so much so that the average Jew would have preferred to walk around Samaria instead of travelling through it.

But why did they dislike Samaria? Where did this hatred come from?

Read 1 Kings 16:23–26. **What do these verses say about the founding of Samaria and its founder, Omri?**

Not a great start. Over the years, the Samaritans intermarried with foreign nations, mixed idolatry into their worship of God, and even founded a new temple to rival Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. Their spiritual distortion was compounded when the Samaritans directly opposed Nehemiah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

As a result of Samaria's ongoing aggression, their perverted worship, and the generations of intermarriage with foreign nations, the Israelites hated the Samaritans more than any other people on earth.

Reread John 4:1–9. **In what ways are Jesus's actions countercultural and even radical?**

By sitting with the Samaritan woman, Jesus rejected the commonly held—and racist—belief that she was worthless because of her heritage. By looking at the Samaritan town and calling it his “harvest” Jesus was teaching his disciples that God loves and desires to redeem all people.

Read Acts 1:8; 8:4–6, 14, and 25. **According to these verses, what was God's disposition towards Samaria?**

Jesus's work in John 4 and on the cross demolish the hostile barriers of race, uniting his followers regardless of their heritage or skin color. **Who in your community is disliked more than anyone? In what ways can you be like Jesus and the disciples as you reach out to them with the heart of God?**

2. Spirit and in Truth

Reread John 4:21–26.

When Jesus reveals himself to the woman at the well, he tells her that worship will no longer be confined to Old Testament regulations or geographical locations. We know that we don't have to worship in Jerusalem, but what does it mean to worship in spirit and in truth?

It's obvious enough that worship must be founded on the truth, that is, Jesus who is "the Truth" (John 14:6) and his message "the word of the truth, the gospel" (Colossians 1:5). We should then build on that foundation by learning more about God in his Word. As we grow in our knowledge of God, we will find more works we can praise, more promises we can rely on, and build a deeper relationship with God that we can be sure of.

But worship is not just an intellectual exercise. God wants you to love him with "all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:4–5, Mark 12:30). When you are born again, the Spirit of God enlivens you, enabling you to worship God with your whole being. That means we need to turn our affections, passions, and energy towards God as we worship. Worshipping God in spirit and truth means to worship him with both your head and your heart.

What practices help you worship in truth? What can you do to increase your knowledge of the Lord?

When was the last time you expressed your emotions to God?

What disciplines or practices help turn your heart to God? What can you do to focus your attention and emotions on God throughout your day?

3. The Royal Official

Re-read John 4:46–54. **What do these verses tell us about the royal official?**

We don't learn a lot about this man, but his actions and his faith have a lot to teach us. He was a royal official from Capernaum, a city almost fifteen miles from Cana. This man, who was most likely wealthy and powerful, rushed from his royal home to a remote town to humble himself in front of a carpenter's son.

His urgency and disregard for social boundaries are motivated by crisis: his son is dying. He could force Jesus to travel back home with him. Instead, he takes Jesus at his word and returns home emptyhanded. His faith is confirmed when he returns home to find his son alive. As he shares what Jesus has done, his faith becomes contagious.

Like the official, we should take Jesus at his word in times of crisis. When God answers our prayers and fulfills his promises, it will confirm and strengthen our faith. We then have an opportunity to share what God has done in our lives, so that others may also trust in Jesus.

Read Lamentations 3:26.

When crises come, how do you react? Where do you turn when times get tough?

Think back to a time when God answered your prayers and showed up in a moment of crises. **In what ways can his past faithfulness prepare you to trust him in future difficulty?**

What can you do to share what God has done in your life so that your faith, like that of the official, might be contagious?

4. Pool at the Sheep Gate

Refamiliarize yourself with John 5:1–9. **What details stand out to you about the pool of Bethesda?**

The pool at the Sheep Gate was a place of healing. Local superstitions held that angels would stir the water so that whomever entered the pool could be healed. But, only the first person to enter the pool after this “stirring” would be healed. The superstition seems unlikely, and it could have been that the warm spring was rich in minerals and was medicinal for people with joint and muscle ailments.

Regardless of the exact healing properties of the pool, people with all kinds of physical ailments would crowd around the water and wait for it to be stirred. When Jesus arrives, he proves that he, rather than superstitious beliefs or folklore, is the source of our hope.

Like the paralyzed man, we often sit beside pools of our desires: a promotion, finding a spouse, etc. These desires can either lead us to trust in worldly wisdom or into deeper trust in Jesus.

What do you desire more than anything else on earth? What do you pray for the most?

What conventional wisdom or common practices have you trusted to deliver on this hope?

What can you do to put you hope in Jesus and his timing instead of trusting in conventional wisdom?

Dr. Evans said, “We can get so used to our pain, discouragement, and defeat that we give up—not only on ourselves, but even on God. Do you really want

something different or are you so comfortable in your misery that you refuse to respond to Jesus?" Think about the question Jesus asked the paralyzed man this week: Do you want to be healed? Talk to Jesus about your answer.