

The Disciple's Guide to Sharing Christ

(John 4:5–30) ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ 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.) ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ 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." ¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." ²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he." ²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

In Christ Jesus, who came to seek and save those who are lost, dear fellow redeemed,

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. (1 Peter 3:15). These words of the Apostle Peter were ringing in my ears as we visited with Charlie, our taxicab driver. All total, Cindy and I would spend two hours in his cab. Charlie was as friendly as could be. He was a talkative fellow with much to say about his prior employment, his mother, his six children, the cost of healthcare and education and the state of the economy. He warned us at one point that he tends to talk a lot. But, honestly, we didn't mind. And then, rather suddenly, the conversation flipped as Charlie asked me, "So what do you do?" I looked over at my wife who had the slightest hint of a smile on her face. I could read her mind: "If Charlie

thinks he talks a lot, wait till this guy starts in.” She was right of course. I talk a lot. But at this moment, I found myself searching for words. This seemed like an opportunity to talk, not about me, but about Jesus. How should I do that? What should I tell this man? Was this the right time and place for a spiritual conversation? If you’re like me, you find yourself asking similar questions from time to time. Well, we’ve brought our questions to the right place because Jesus has some answers for us here in John 4. Let’s take his words and actions for what they are: *A Disciple’s Guide to Sharing Christ*.

In a few short paragraphs, John reminds us that our Savior is the God-man, God’s Son from all eternity who stepped into time, took on human flesh and blood and did so with one purpose in mind – to save all us sinners from our sin. As one who is fully human, a long journey on foot left Jesus tired, hungry and thirsty. This is a Savior who can relate to us and our needs. He doesn’t try to hide this. He’s not ashamed of this. He uses this to 1) meet people where they’re at. His weariness and thirst have brought him to a well in what Jesus’ countrymen would have considered enemy territory, but not Jesus. Oh, he knows all about the rift between those called the Samaritans and his people, the Jews. But he has come to seek and to save the lost of all nations. Sometimes he does this by addressing large crowds. At other times, he meets with sinners one-on-one, as he does this day in this place, a well in Sychar. Jesus, our all-knowing God, is expecting company – a Samaritan woman who should be arriving right about now: **When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (John 4:7).**

The One through whom all things were made, including every river and stream, humbles himself as he begs this woman for drink of water. She replies, **“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.)**¹⁰ **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.” (John 4:9-10).** In meeting this woman where she was at, Jesus took a need they both had – the need for water, and with it, he steered the conversation in a spiritual direction. Jesus’ piques the woman’s curiosity. She understands, at least enough, to realize that he can’t be offering to fetch her water from the well in front of them. He doesn’t even have a bucket. So what’s he saying? Does he have better water to give her than the water of a well that has served her and her people all the way back to the days of the great patriarch Jacob?

It turns out that’s exactly what he’s saying. **Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:13-14).** The One begging water now offers the greatest gift of them all – the living water of his gospel, so powerful that it satisfies the thirsty soul forever. But as it turns out, the Savior’s offer was lost on this woman. Maybe you can understand why. Her heart and mind were bogged down by the problems and challenges of everyday 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.” (John 4:15).** Translation: “Sir, if you really want to help, give me some of your special water so that I can stop wearing myself out running back and forth from this well every day.”

I say, maybe you can understand, because the same thing happens to us, doesn’t it? As sickness comes, as the bills pile up, as the workplace bickering and family back-biting increase, as worry about all these things and more consumes us, we convince ourselves that all we really need from Jesus is to make it all go away. If he really wants to help, he should wave his hand and fix our lives. Now that would be something to talk about with friends and neighbors. It sure would have given me something to say to our cab driver, Charlie. What if I could have told him that Jesus

would take care of the cost of his healthcare and his children's education? How grateful he would have been to have that conversation.

As it was, I could not promise that Jesus would make those bills disappear. But I could talk about a greater debt, one that Jesus did cancel with his lifeblood as the price. For that, I needed to refocus the conversation on the real problem, the underlying cause of all life's troubles and challenges. This is what Jesus does so masterfully here in *The Disciples Guide to Sharing Christ* as he shows us how to 2) Speak the truth in love.

The Samaritan woman had just told Jesus that she would love nothing more than to be unburdened of her daily trips for water. Jesus' response may sound a bit odd. **He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." (John 4:16).** At first blush it might look as if Jesus simply wants to expand his audience. But instead he means to show this woman, in the most loving way, that she's carrying a burden in life far heavier than a jug of water. **"I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ 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."** (John 4:17-18). We don't have, nor do we need all the details about this woman's past. What Jesus brings to light is the fact that this woman is living in a sinful relationship with a man to whom she is not married. It's not hard to imagine that her sin has made her an outcast from her community. More to the point, her sin had separated her from God. That's what sin does – always.

Like you and me, every person we know and meet came into this world a sinner, having inherited the sinful condition from his or her parents. The sinful nature that is ours from conception shows itself in sinful words and actions many times, many ways every day. Maybe you've seen the commercial that illustrates our nation's growing debt with a large numerical counter that seems to be spinning out of control. Picture that same sort of thing when it comes to sin. The sinner's debt before God grows and grows and with it the sinner's burden of guilt, until every problem in life convinces the sinner that God is angry with her and will soon sentence her to the ultimate punishment – an eternity of misery in hell.

There are, of course, loud voices that dismiss all this as nonsense. These are the people who are trying to do away with guilt by telling us that there is no such thing as sin. In their book everything is permissible. But they're not convincing anyone, not even themselves. For try as they might, these people cannot find a way to silence or shout down the voice of their own conscience. Nor can they deny that sin's wage of death is demanding payment every day all around them. They know that it's simply a matter of time before their bill comes due. So don't let anyone fool you. These things weigh heavily on the minds of the people we see and talk to every day. Sin is the elephant in the room. Talking about it is not unloving. You and I can address the subject from experience as fellow sinners. That's part of meeting people where they're at. We've been there too. We know the hurt and heartaches caused by sin – our sin, the sins of those around us. We can relate and say as much as we speak the truth about sin and its wages in a way that shows understanding and compassion. But we won't stop there. Because we know the one who has taken the sinner's burden to himself and canceled the sinner's great debt by paying sin's wage in our place. We know Jesus. We know his message of pardon and peace. And from *The Disciple's Guide to Sharing Christ* we know how important it is 3) to stay on message.

Jesus has shown the Samaritan woman that her sin is her greatest burden. You'll find her response in verse 20 where she says: **"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."** (John 4:20). As I read her words, I'm left to wonder if she's looking for a place to get rid of her guilt – a place to "make things right"

with God. Some see her words as an attempt to change the subject and so dodge any further discussion of her sin. Either way, I'm reminded of the fact that spiritual conversations can easily turn into religious debates or arguments. That serves no purpose, certainly not the Savior's. Rather than getting sidetracked, look how Jesus stayed on message. He explained to the woman that it was God's loving plan to bring the long awaited Savior into the world through the Jewish people. All the sacrifices and ceremonies that were part and parcel of worship at the temple in Jerusalem all served God's purpose as they pointed to the One who would come to save this woman and all others from their sin. Jesus also explained that with the arrival of God's anointed Savior – the Christ, those sacrifices and ceremonies would no longer be necessary or needed. Instead, as he explained: **“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”** (John 4:24). God is not some vague, distant force. He's a spiritual being who is interested and involved in the lives of the people he has made. So much so that he was willing to become one of us in the person of Jesus so that he could live and die and rise again in our place as the Conqueror of sin and death. He's our Champion. He is worshiped properly as we embrace this truth by the faith he gives us and as we share truth with others, trusting that God will be at work in our witness, creating faith when and where it pleases him in his grace.

This is a key thought for us as we worship Jesus in the conversations we have with others. Jesus hasn't set a quota for us as if we are some sort of spiritual salesforce. Instead he happily rules our hearts and lives by his grace every moment of every day. In this grace he freely pardons all our sins, even our sin of failing to share him with those who so desperately need him. He's not angry with us. He isn't looking to punish us or get even with us. He has taken away our sin. Instead of blaming us for our failures, he credits to us the record of his own perfect love. Think of what that means! As God sees it, you and I were the ones at Jacob's well, sharing God's living water with a sin-parched soul. We get the credit and we share the joy, the joy of watching another sinner so happy with her new-found peace that she wants to pass it along. Her example reminds us that we don't need to be seminary professors or even long-time Christians to share Christ with others. We can simply tell what he's means to us and then, like the Samaritan woman, we can invite all who will listen to **“Come, see.”** Her invitation was not lost on her fellow sinners: **They came out of the town and made their way toward him...Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony...”** (John 4:30,39).

I had a similar experience with our cabdriver. I was grateful for our conversation. I think he was too. We simply got to talk about Jesus, what his saving love means to us here and hereafter. That's something that we can all do. Take the time to think about the people in your life. Ask Jesus to give you the opportunity to tell someone about who he is and what he has done. Simply say what his peace means in your life as you face troubles and problems and more importantly as you look forward to a life without troubles and problems, the life that awaits you and all who believe in Jesus' name. Amen.