

Small Group Guide

WEAVING THE GOSPEL INTO THE FABRIC OF CULTURAL CHRISTIANITY

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. Jim Shaddix

March 17, 2013

John 4:1-42

This guide is a tool to help you lead your group into spiritual transformation. Use it as a resource to train your group into potential disciple-makers and lead your group in discovering, owning, and applying the truths of God's Word. There may be aspects you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on an aspect of their relationship with God. Your role is to help facilitate this encounter with God in His Word with His Body, not just to complete the guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid group task list.

Relate . . .

Begin your group time by engaging in relational conversations and prayer that may include the following elements:

***Welcome**—a simple, brief time to greet one another (especially new friends), enjoy refreshments, and make announcements.*

***Review**—a time to review the truths discussed last week and report on how members have had success or frustrations in applying those truths during the week. (The leader will want to provide encouragement and shepherding during this time.) Periodically, the leader will also want to review the gospel and allow members to share reports about opportunities they've had to share the gospel. Occasionally, the leader will want to review the vision for the group and discuss ways to accomplish that vision better.*

***Prayer**—a time of general prayer with the whole group praying for struggles regarding the application of truths, for those with whom the group is sharing the gospel, and for understanding of today's truths.*

Reflect . . .

Use the following summary and questions to review this week's message and reflect on its implications for our lives. (As a training tool, leaders might want to have various members summarize the teachings in their own words each week sharing how they think the Scripture applied to the original hearers and how the principles apply to us today.)

Message Outline

"Weaving the Gospel into the Fabric of Cultural Christianity"

John 4:1-42

We are the Woman first

Why not Jesus?

- We can't satisfy spiritual thirst. (10-14)
- We can't read people's hearts. (16-18)
- We can't claim to be the Savior. (25-26; cf. 3:31-36)

Why the woman?

- We are outside of God's family and need Jesus to seek us. (1-9)
- We are thirsty for God's life and need Jesus to satisfy us. (10-18)
- We are blind to God's worship and need Jesus to show us. (19-26)

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We are the Weaver second

The cultural Christianity she represents...

- Sacrifices encountering Christ to sustain cultural etiquette (9)
- Values religious heritage over reformation of the heart (12)
- Wants a genie for the flesh rather than Jesus for the soul (15)
- Practices religious forms without repentance from sin (16-18)
- Avoids personal responsibility by arguing religious trivia (19-20)
- Accepts Jesus as a prophet and a priest, but not as a King (25)

The threads Jesus sews...

- Verse 7 – Character of God
- Verse 10 – Character of God, Sufficiency of Christ, Necessity of Faith, Urgency of Eternity
- Verses 13-14 – Sinfulness of Man, Sufficiency of Christ, Urgency of Eternity
- Verses 16-18 – Sinfulness of Man
- Verses 21-25 – Character of God, Necessity of Faith, Urgency of Eternity
- Verse 26 – Sufficiency of Christ, Necessity of Faith

The lessons we glean...

- Be intentional about getting where lost people are. (1-6)
- Get outside of cultural and religious comfort zones. (7-9; cf. 27)
- Take the initiative in starting gospel conversations. (7)
- Use gospel threads to prompt curiosity in conversation. (7-26)
- Make the gospel big by addressing personal sinfulness. (15-18)
- Anticipate and accept some digression and diversion. (15,19-24)
- Be willing to chase rabbits...all the way back to threads. (20-24)
- Don't demand full understanding of every gospel truth. (25-26)
- Imagine every unbeliever as a potential gospel weaver. (27-30)
- Trust gospel threads to wield the gospel's full power. (28-42)

Message Summary

Having discussed the five threads of the gospel, this sermon and the next focuses on how two different people in Scripture wove gospel threads into their conversations with unbelievers. In John 4, Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at a well, and although she considered herself to be religious, she was outside of God's family and needed Christ to satisfy her thirsty soul. We are all like this woman – enemies of God, spiritually thirsty, and spiritually blind. Yet John describes Jesus as the Savior who satisfies our spiritual thirst through the life-giving water of His Spirit. While we are the woman first, those who are Christ-followers are also gospel weavers. As a culturally religious person, the Samaritan woman represents modern cultural Christians who self-identify as Christians but who lack a relationship with God and who are secular in their day-to-day thinking. From Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman, we learn to be intentional in going where lost people are, to take the initiative in starting gospel conversations, to address the person's sinfulness, to imagine every unbeliever as a potential gospel weaver, and to trust gospel threads to wield the gospel's full power.

Digging Deeper

The woman at the well represents a culturally religious person, and as a Small Group Leader, there could be cultural Christians in your small group. This is one reason why it is important to emphasize how we are like the Samaritan woman. As you prepare, pray for God to use this passage and discussion to open people's

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eyes to whether or not they have trusted in Christ for salvation. During small group, ensure that the differences between cultural Christians and actual Christ-followers are clearly explained. Flesh out the list on the sermon outline discussing the cultural Christianity the woman at the well represents. What are examples of how cultural Christians embody the characteristics of this list? Also, express that Christ offers us salvation just as He did the woman in John 4.

“Is it okay to worship God *and* Buddha?”

This was a question posed to me last summer by a middle-aged woman when I was in Southeast Asia on a short-term mission trip, and during the conversation, we discussed how Jesus states, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6). He does not say that He and Buddha are the way.

Later, I was talking with one of the college girls on our mission team who had been present during the conversation with the Buddhist woman, and she said that this was the first time she had ever seen someone else share the gospel. While she had been taught how to explain that God chooses to save sinners by grace through faith in His Son and while she had shared this with others, she had never witnessed someone else do so, and she’s twenty years old!

There are likely people in your small group who have never shared the gospel before or who, like the college girl in the story above, have never seen someone else weave gospel threads into a conversation. They may know the five gospel threads but lack knowledge or confidence in how to actually talk to an unbeliever about Christ. Often, having an example to follow helps us as we try such things on our own. Share with your small group about how you have jumpstarted gospel conversations in the past, and provide an opportunity for others in the group to discuss different ways they have initiated conversations about the gospel. As you have opportunity, take people with you when you minister, for as you do, you are providing them with an example of how to share the Word with others. If people in the small group have children, challenge them to think through how they modeling sharing the gospel to their children and how they are explicitly teaching their children to have spiritual conversations.

For those in the group who are Christ-followers, discuss the challenges of sharing the gospel with cultural Christians, and using Jesus’ example in John 4, identify how He navigated a conversation with a culturally religious person about Himself. The Apostle John gives us a glimpse of how Jesus met a stranger, began a conversation with her, and led the topic to spiritual things.

- **Jesus placed Himself where lost people would be.** For those in the group who mostly interact with fellow believers, help them think through how they can regularly engage lost people. This will likely involve a shift in the person’s schedule and routine as well as other sacrifices in order to prioritize engaging lost people with the gospel. Pray for the Holy Spirit to burden the hearts of believers in the group for the lost.
- **Jesus initiated the conversation.** Coach those in your small group to not always wait for someone else to begin a conversation. Take initiative in getting to know them. Pray for an awareness of the people around you and for boldness in starting conversations with people.
- Christ began building a relationship with the woman **by conversing about the one thing they had in common** – water. As we encounter people, we can ask them questions, get to know them, and build a foundation on what we have in common. As you converse, listen for topics or statements where you could transition to talking about the gospel. As a small group, brainstorm topics that could naturally connect to the gospel. Encourage those in the small group to be natural and intentional in guiding a conversation with an unbeliever but to not force the conversation in a particular direction, especially if the person is shutting down. Sharing your story of how you came to faith in Christ can be a natural conversation bridge, and it gives you an opportunity to ask the person if they have had any such experience.

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- **Jesus actively listened** to the woman at the well. His manner and His words communicated care, respect, acceptance of *her* even though He did not agree with her beliefs, understanding, friendliness, trustworthiness, and empathy. Looking at John 4, how did Jesus demonstrate the characteristics listed above? When speaking with others, how well do you listen to them? What does your body language and facial expressions communicate? Do you actually attend to what the person is saying, or are you more focused on your next response? Allow the person to talk and to ask questions.
- **Jesus addressed the woman's sinfulness and need**, and when she diverted the conversation, He chased the rabbit with her and redirected the conversation back to different threads of the gospel. Encourage those in your small group to not shy away from speaking about the sinfulness of man, and pray for boldness for each other. Also, coach those in your small group in how to redirect conversations back to the gospel. Pray for discernment for each other when having spiritual conversations.

Group Discussion

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- Describe the Samaritan woman. How are we like her?
- How does having the foundational understanding that we are like this woman prepare us to be gospel weavers? Why is it important for Christ-followers not to forget their identification with the woman at the well?
- What are descriptors of a modern cultural Christian?
- Cultural Christians might perform religious acts or even abstain from certain things, but their actions do not stem from a heart transformed by the Holy Spirit. Even Christ-followers struggle with treating God like a genie, with obediently submitting to the Lordship of Christ, and with performing religious acts with a godly motive. How can we as Christ-followers fight against such temptations? What sins do we need to confess? Discuss the role of the Holy Spirit as well as the role of the individual in the sanctification process.
- Cultural Christians often avoid personal responsibility by arguing religious trivia. Identify examples of "religious trivia" or controversial issues that are commonly brought up. How can you respond to such people and topics in a way that points the person to Christ? How do we navigate such conversations without getting lost in spiritual rabbit chases or tangled in debates about secondary issues?
- What challenges exist in engaging cultural Christians with the gospel?
- How do we reach cultural Christians with the gospel? What can we learn from Jesus in how He engaged the woman at the well?
- A characteristic of cultural Christianity includes claiming to be a Christian yet living a life of uninhibited, unrepentant sin. How does trusting in Christ for salvation affect *every* area of our lives? In your day-to-day thinking, in what ways are you more like the world than like Christ?
- Do you find it difficult to bridge conversations from ordinary topics to the gospel? If so, why?
- In John 4:7:26, identify the gospel threads that Jesus wove into His conversation with the Samaritan woman. When under similar circumstances, how can you say similar things to someone who does not know Christ as Savior?
- In the sermon, Pastor Jim stated that we ought to show the gospel with our actions as well as verbally share it with others. How do you *show* the gospel in your conversation with someone? Why is this important?
- Discuss practical examples we can learn from Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well.
- Although Jesus did not have to take the road through Samaria in order to get to Galilee, He had "to pass through Samaria" (v. 4) because of a divine appointment with the Samaritan woman at the well. How can you rearrange your schedule this month to intentionally get where lost people are? How can you engage them with the gospel?
- Identify fears in starting gospel conversations. What does Scripture say about such fear? How can you initiate spiritual conversations? What are questions you could ask to build a relationship with

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someone? What are questions you could ask to transition the conversation to spiritual things? How can we prompt curiosity in conversations?

- Discuss the implications of the lesson not to demand full understanding of every gospel truth when sharing with a cultural Christian. Why is this important? We cannot and should not expect the person we are sharing with to have a full-orbed understanding that they can articulate regarding each of the gospel threads.
- Consider the unbelievers in your life and imagine those specific people as gospel weavers. How does this change you, your interactions with that person, and your prayers for that person? Pray with each for God to change your hearts and to not give up on the unsaved in each other's families and spheres of influence.

Respond . . .

Encourage your group to break out into smaller, same-gender groups where they will respond to the truths of today's study. These groups will share with one another based on the following questions and then close in prayer:

- What are some of the main truths that God wants you to know from this study?
- How do your thoughts need to adjust to align with these truths?
- According to the truths from this study, what does God want you to desire/value?
- How do your values need to change to align with His values?
- What actions does God want you to take according to the truths of this study?
- What is an action that you can start to implement today or tomorrow?
- What is going to be the most difficult aspect of this study to personally apply?

Close this time by praying for each other, specifically for strength to apply these truths, for personal needs, for the lost people with whom you are seeking to share the gospel, and for our weekly prayer focus as a church.

Weekly Prayer Focus ... (from our worship guide)

- *Church: Praise God for the truth of the gospel and the people in your life He used to reveal to you the gospel and call you to repentance and faith. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide our understanding of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4, specifically to recognize how He modeled weaving gospel threads into conversation with an unbeliever. Pray for those around you who do not know Christ. Ask God to grant you opportunities to share the gospel with them. Pray for God to help you maximize opportunities to saturate common conversations with the gospel.*
- *Local: This week we are praying for an outreach initiative on Saturday, March 23, to the residents of East Lake and Gate City called Operation East. This outreach event is being coordinated by New Rising Star Baptist Church. Brook Hills is providing food and clothing support and several of our members are serving at the event. We are also praying for Mt. Mariah Baptist Church and Darryl Lee, Pastor.*
- *Global: This week we are praying for Brook Hills Long-Termers Dwight and Mary Kay Martin, serving in Thailand. Dwight owns a software development company that helps to resource the Thai church and pastors to mobilize believers to engage the unreached with the gospel. Currently they are working to help the Thai church*

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implement disciple-making strategies so more people can hear the gospel. We are also praying for our Short-Term team of college students serving with Dwight and Mary Kay Martin this week in Thailand.