

THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

PART 2: THE PICTURE OF A DISCIPLE
UNIT 4: A DISCIPLE ENGAGES WITH HIS OR HER SURROUNDINGS

LESSON 35: ENGAGING WITH OTHERS IN SPITE OF OUR DIFFERENCES

What we want students to learn: That for followers of Christ, serving others in Jesus' name can't be limited by any difference between those whom we serve and ourselves.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To consider how differences play a role in how we serve others, and to commit to avoiding this trap.

Scripture Focus: John 4:1-42

Overview: Our world does a good job of reinforcing barriers of division between people. Gender barriers. Racial barriers. Economic barriers. Each of these, and more, contribute to people feeling a sense of insulation and isolation from each other. But for the Christ-follower, difference can never be a barrier to service. We are called to engage with others in spite of any sort of ethnic or cultural boundary. Jesus modeled this in the most powerful way. The story you'll teach in this lesson will highlight this truth and challenge your students to embrace this in their own lives.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

Each **LIFE** lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your **LIFE** lesson 35 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 35, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The *Bible Background* is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. The Details gives you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what's happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every **YM360** Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know **who** wrote the book, **when** it was written, and **why** it was written.
- **What's the big deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

THE DETAILS

- **Author:** The Gospel of John was written by John the Apostle, son of Zebedee. A fisherman who left his trade to follow Jesus, John also penned the Book of Revelation, as well as the three letters in the New Testament that bear his name.
- **Time frame:** The Gospel of John was probably written between 85 and 95 AD. John most likely wrote his gospel in Ephesus before he was exiled to Patmos.
- **Purpose:** John's stated purpose for writing this book can be found in John 20:30-31, the last two verses in his

WEEK 35: LESSON PLAN
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gospel: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John's goal seems to have been to clearly communicate a full theology of Jesus as the Messiah, the promised Son of God.

THE SETTING

John 4 finds Jesus going on a trip from Jerusalem back to Galilee. John tells us that the reason Jesus leaves Judea is because His public ministry had gotten a large enough following to attract the attention of the Pharisees. We don't know exactly why Jesus wanted to avoid the Pharisees at this time. It's likely that Jesus wanted to avoid conflict with religious leaders early in His ministry because He knew that such conflict would eventually lead to His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. The time would come for that, but that time was not now.

John notes that in order to go to Galilee, Jesus "had to" pass through Samaria (4:4), which was in between Judea and Galilee. It may be that Jesus "had to" pass through Samaria because it was the quickest route, but many read John 4:4 to mean that Jesus intentionally took that route because He knew He would meet the Samaritan woman there. Samaritans were religiously and ethnically different from the Jews. Though most Jewish people took the shorter route through Samaria when travelling between Galilee and Judea, some avoided Samaria altogether and took a longer journey around Samaria to avoid dealing with the Samaritans and possibly becoming ritually impure. So when Jesus talked with and served the Samaritan woman, He was crossing several social, cultural, and religious boundaries that most religious leaders in His day would never have crossed.

THE MAIN POINT

When it comes to serving others and sharing His Gospel, Jesus is our model. One of the things that was shocking to people was not just Jesus' message of forgiveness of sins, but whom He was willing to share that message with. Throughout the gospels, Jesus loves and serves those known as outcasts among the Jews, such as notorious sinners, the sick and disabled (whose plight is seen as a just reward from God by religious leaders), and even a Roman military officer. But nowhere does Jesus interact with someone so different from Himself as when He engages in conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4. If we are honest, followers of Jesus often have a difficult time crossing the same boundaries Jesus did in order to love someone. But if we take Jesus' teaching and actions seriously, followers of Jesus should be characterized by serving and loving those with whom we might have very little in common.

LESSON PLAN

The *Lesson Plan* contains three elements: An introductory activity called **The Lead In**; the Bible study section called **The Main Event**; an application-focused segment called **The Last Word**.

THE LEAD IN

- **Goal:** To get students thinking about how we treat others who are different from us.
- **Setup:** You'll need a treat that's easy to quickly hand out to a group, such as "fun size" candy bars or ice cream sandwiches. You should have at least one for each person. You'll also need to be ready to tell an interesting, light-hearted story that will take about five minutes to tell, such as something fun you did over the weekend. (The story doesn't need to relate at all to the lesson. In fact, it's better if it doesn't.)

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FIRST, explain that to begin, you have a story to share with the group. Then, start telling your story. As you tell the story, start passing out a treat to everyone in the group who is wearing a certain color. For instance, if you have a green shirt on, you might pass out a treat to everyone who also is wearing some green. Try to pick a color that about half the group is wearing. If any students object to not getting a treat, just tell them to listen to the story, and they can ask questions at the end.

NEXT, lead a discussion about the experience after you've finished your story. Ask:

- **Some of you are kind of annoyed. Why?**
 - Answer: They didn't get a treat!
- **Why do you think some people didn't get a treat?**
 - Answers will vary. Once a student figures out the pattern, give only that student another (or maybe their first) treat.
- **What did it feel like to get a treat?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **What did it feel like to not get a treat?**
 - Answers will vary.

THEN, help your students explore how this scenario often plays out in real life. Say,

- **When does this kind of thing happen in real life?**
 - Give your students space to think of at least a few examples, such as racism.
- **When have you personally seen this kind of thing happen, like in your schools?**
 - Answers will vary.

FINALLY, give the remainder of the candy to those who didn't get any to begin with. Then, let your students know that you'll be talking about this exact topic. Say:

- **I made it a point to NOT give candy to those whom I had predetermined didn't fit my mold. You were different than those I had chosen. This is a simple example of something we see all the time. If we're honest, all of us have treated people a bit differently because we thought they were different. Today we're going to talk about what this has to do with being a disciple of Jesus.**

Transition into *The Main Event* portion of the lesson.

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** Students will understand that for followers of Christ, serving others in Jesus' name can't be limited by any difference between those whom we serve and ourselves.
- **Setup:** Students will need a Bible or a Bible app. You'll also want to provide a map of first-century Judea, Samaria, and Galilee and a dry-erase board to write on.

FIRST, turn to John 4. Provide the context for the passage by referencing the Bible Background portion of your lesson plan. Then, introduce the conversation Jesus has with the Samaritan woman by having a student read John 4:1-9. When the student has finished, ask:

- **What are the locations and places mentioned in this passage?**

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- o Answer: Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Sychar, and Jacob's well.
- **How does the woman respond to Jesus' request for a drink?**
 - o Answer: She seems puzzled, because she is a Samaritan, and according to her, Jews and Samaritans don't get along very well.
- [At this point, show your group the map.] Here is what Jesus and His disciples journey looked like. Judea and Galilee were mostly populated with Jewish people. People in Samaria had some Jewish background, but years ago people in Samaria had begun to mix with other cultures. This caused their view of God and how they worshipped to be different from how the Jewish people worshipped. Each group thought they were right—some Jewish people purposely avoided even travelling through Samaria—and this caused a lot of animosity between them.
- **With that in mind, how do you think the woman felt when Jesus—a Jewish man—started talking with her?**
 - o Possible answers: She may have been frightened; she may have felt defensive or unsure.

NEXT, start to unpack the social and cultural boundaries Jesus would cross over the course of this conversation. Say/ask:

- **There were a lot of differences between Jesus and the woman He was talking to at this well. According to the social norms of Jesus' day, there are a lot of reasons He should not have been talking to her, but He did anyway. We're going to keep track of their differences on this board. What are a couple of differences we've already seen in this passage?**
 - o Answer: She was a Samaritan and He was Jewish; she was a woman and He was a man. Write these answers on the board.
- **To us, those may not seem like huge differences. But based on how the woman responds to Jesus, what do you think were some of the social "rules" that went with those differences?**
 - o Possible answers: They would not help one another; they would not drink from the same cup or bowl; they would not talk with each other at all and simply ignore one another.

THEN, continue working through the passages, leading a conversation about the differences between Jesus and the woman and how Jesus handles the conversation. Have a student read John 4:10-26. Then, ask:

- **Take a look at verses 10-14. What is Jesus doing here?**
 - o Answer: He is beginning to tell the woman about the God's grace and the Gospel.
- **What does Jesus' attitude toward the woman seem to be?**
 - o Answer: Positive. Jesus cares about the woman and wants her to experience a relationship with Him.
- **Why do you think He brings up her husband? Isn't that kind of mean when she doesn't have one?**
 - o Answer: Help your students wrestle with this question. John doesn't explicitly tell us the answer to this question, but it seems that Jesus wanted to show His divine attributes as proof to her that He is the Messiah. He likely also wanted her to know that He knew everything about her and still loved her.
- **What are a couple of more differences between Jesus and the woman that we see in this passage?**
 - o Answer: They have two different views of God, with two different ways of worshipping Him; her history with men would have kept most religious leaders from even talking with her. Write these answers on the board.

NEXT, have a student read John 4:27-38. Ask:

- **When the disciples return and see Jesus talking with the woman, what is their reaction?**
 - o Answer: They don't say anything, but they are very surprised.

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- **Why do you think they are surprised?**
 - Answer: There are several social rules that Jesus was breaking by even talking with the woman. However, much of their surprise may have been that Jesus was telling her about salvation and the Gospel. During Jesus' ministry (and even after his death and resurrection), there was disagreement among Jesus' followers about how someone who was not Jewish could become a Christ-follower and be saved.
- **When Jesus says, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work," what work do you think He is talking about?**
 - Answer: Let your group wrestle with this question. Jesus is likely reflecting on His conversation with the woman and using it as a teaching opportunity for the disciples. They brought physical food, but what sustains Jesus is doing God's will, specifically, telling people about God's Kingdom.

THEN, have a student read the remainder of the story, John 4:39-42. Ask:

- **Because of her past, it's very likely that the woman was an outcast in her own city, which may have been why she was alone. What do you think gave her the confidence to go back to town and tell everyone about her interaction with Jesus?**
 - Possible answers: She believed He really was the Messiah; the way He disregarded social norms and treated her with kindness gave her confidence to cross social boundaries of her own.
- **What happens as a result of the conversation that Jesus has with the Samaritan woman?**
 - Answer: Many people in the town are introduced to Jesus and begin a relationship with Him.
- **Do you think the same thing would have happened if Jesus had just gone into the town with His disciples and started preaching?**
 - Answers will vary. Encourage a short discussion around this topic; there is no right or wrong answer. Of course, Jesus is Jesus, and people may well have responded to Him if He had just started preaching. However, the people may have been hesitant to listen a Jewish stranger. What seems to have gotten them to listen is His interaction with the woman, which started with Him reaching out and serving someone very different from Himself.

FINALLY, wrap up by making sure that your students understand just how unexpected it was that Jesus would serve someone so different from Him with such kindness. Ask:

- **Take a look at these differences we found between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. To recap, just shout out the differences you see here.**
- **In our culture, these differences may not seem like such a big deal. But it was a huge deal in Jesus' day. What are some differences in our day—maybe in your schools—that sometimes keep a person from interacting with someone different from them?**
 - Answers will vary. Give your group time to answer, and push your students to come up with differences that aren't just on the surface. Write their answers on the board.
- **Based on what Jesus did in His interaction with the Samaritan woman, how should we serve those that we know but who are different from us?**
 - Answer: By intentionally and kindly engaging people who are different from us.
- **Does that sound difficult to do?**
 - Answers will vary. Students will have more of an opportunity to unpack this idea in *The Last Word*.

Ask if there are any questions, and if there are none, transition into *The Last Word*.

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THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To consider how differences play a role in how we serve others, and to commit to avoiding this trap.
- **Setup:** You'll need a copy of the "Reaching Across the Lines" handout for each person.

FIRST, explain to your group that it's one thing to talk about loving and serving others who are different from us, but it's another thing to do it. Distribute a copy of the "Reaching Across the Lines" handout to your students. Then say:

- **For the next few minutes, we are going to think of ways that we can love others who are different from us this week. We've all got a handout that will help us commit to loving and serving others the way Jesus did—especially those different from us. Take a minute and list two or three people in each circle: Friends you usually hang out with, people you see most weeks but don't talk with much because they're not really like you, and people who you see as so different you honestly might avoid them on purpose.**
 - Make sure that your group understands the instructions before giving everyone about two minutes to fill out the handout.

NEXT, lead a discussion on why students listed certain people in the different circles. Ask:

- **Tell me about one person in each of your circles. Why did you list them there?**
 - Answers will vary. If needed, start off the discussion by being vulnerable and sharing your own answers.
- **What is so different about the people you put in the "People Who Are Different and I Avoid" category?**
 - Answers will vary. Give students space to think through their answers.
- **We're going to take another two minutes, and I want you to choose two people—one in the "People I See but Don't Really Talk With" category and one in the "People Who Are Different and I Avoid" category that you could somehow serve this week. It might be as simple as starting a nice conversation, complementing them, or it could be helping them in some way or inviting them to hang out with you. Write down what you are committing to doing next to their names.**
 - Give students a couple of minutes to do this.

THEN, process what your group wrote down. Ask:

- **Was it hard to come up with ways to serve people?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **What were some of the things you committed to doing?**
 - Answers will vary. Allow students to simply share. Only push back if they don't take the exercise seriously or if it can't actually be done this week.

FINALLY, encourage your group to follow through on what they committed to doing. Say:

- **I hope that we can do what we wrote down this week, and that we'll have some great stories to tell next week. Remember, Jesus showed us how to do this, not just with the Samaritan woman, but also by becoming one of us—a human—so that He could rescue us. I'll be praying for you this week.**

Allow time for any closing thoughts or questions from your students.

- Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're posting them on Instagram, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.

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- Use the **Social Media** guide to stay in touch with students via text or Instagram, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.