

Engaging Other Cultures with the Gospel

By Keith Eitel

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read John 4:1–6. Look at a map depicting Palestine in the time of Jesus. You can find a map in the back of a study Bible or online. Note the journey from Jerusalem northeast up to Galilee. The shortest route would take a traveler through Samaria.

Notice the Jordan River running from the Sea of Galilee south to the Dead Sea. Using a study Bible or online Bible commentary, discover an alternate route between Jerusalem and the Galilee that would have required crossing the Jordan. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: Why would some travelers walk the longer route? Does the study Bible or commentary explain why there were long-standing cultural tensions between the Jewish people and the Samaritans?

Assignment Two

Read John 4:7–26. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What does the woman say that would make us conclude that she is interested in physical needs and Jesus is more interested in her spiritual needs?

Assignment Three

Read John 4:39–42. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What stimulated the Samaritan woman to be motivated to go to town and bring so many others to meet Jesus?

Scripture to Memorize

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 1 Corinthians 9:19

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand the model Jesus gave for engaging those of other cultures, especially those cultures our own culture tells us to dislike.

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<http://swbts.edu/keitel>.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

On the border between Lebanon and Syria, thousands of refugees are escaping war and horrid cruelty, especially if they are Christians. Militant terrorists are committing atrocities not seen for centuries. In response, people worldwide experience deep anger toward such militant groups. Hating them is easier than loving them. Did Jesus die for terrorists? Can we love them in spite of their barbaric acts? Only Christ can love them, and He does so through us.

Read John 4:1–43 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Some cultures we perceive negatively, and people from that group intimidate us. Some we perceive positively, and we enjoy thinking about being around them. Perception makes the difference. If we measure people in another culture—and their customs, practices or beliefs—by our own culture, we are being ethnocentric. This term describes an exaggerated cultural pride that blurs our vision or love for people of other cultures.

Every culture has sinful actions. We need to differentiate between sinful *acts* and the *people* Christ died to save. In John 4, Jesus demonstrated that He could set aside cultural prejudices in order to engage the spiritual need of a woman from a culture historically hated by the Jews.

Verse 4. had to pass through Samaria. Was this a compulsory route? Why might it be unusual for Jews to pass through Sychar?

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week may now share a report on the routes from Jerusalem to Galilee that Jewish people would take.

Discussion Questions

Do you think negatively about people of any other culture? Why or why not? Ask God to enable you to be transparent while discussing this.

On Your Own

Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you areas of prejudice or hatred you may have for those culturally different. If you do not have any such sentiments, ask God to show you new ways to relate to those of other cultures and provide ways to speak the gospel to them.

Studying the Passage

Verse 9. Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. The Samaritan woman noticed Jesus was a Jew. Jesus would have been dressed as a Jew and wearing prayer tassels around His waist. She obviously had a perception or prejudice about Jews and thought He would also negatively view her. To her, He was out of place in her town. She brought a cultural bias to the discussion but still was curious enough to ask Jesus why He was there.

Notice that each time she brought up a subject, she focused on the differences of thought between the Jews and the Samaritans (e.g., where to worship). Jesus' answers pointed her beyond the cultural tensions to the one thing that can unify—worshiping God in spirit and truth.

Verse 11. You have nothing to draw water with. The woman asked about Jesus' drawing water with no way to carry it.

Verse 14. the water that I will give him. Jesus spoke then about living water. Using a play on words, this was a spiritual reply to a physical question. Jesus continually engaged the woman's greater need related to salvation. Jesus pointed her to His uniquely divine ability.

Verse 16. Go, call your husband. Jesus zeroed in on her need for salvation by asking a question that placed her in a position to either lie or tell the truth. Her marital circumstances meant she had a sexually immoral reputation. Jesus was bringing her closer to salvation, even though she belonged to a rival cultural group. Jesus knew salvation was something a Samaritan could experience as well as the Jews.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week may now share an answer to the following question: What does the woman say that would make us conclude that she is interested in physical needs and Jesus is more interested in her spiritual needs?

Discussion Questions

Do you see yourself more in terms of your own physical needs or spiritual needs? How would you differentiate between physical and spiritual needs?

On Your Own

Review the essential components of salvation in Romans 3:23; 6:23; and 10:9-10. In the space below, list the names of one or more lost people from other cultures in your immediate world. Then pray for wisdom from God to make clear when and how you might introduce them to Jesus.

Studying the Passage

Verse 32. food to eat that you do not know about. When the disciples returned from looking for food, Jesus surprised them when He said He had food.

Verse 34. My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me. Jesus was talking about something more profound than physical food.

In both the prior conversation with the woman at the well and this one, Jesus proclaimed that the spiritual has priority over the physical. The supreme focus of life is found by realizing this truth. To know Christ personally and to do His will are the only sources of full and meaningful life.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week may now share an answer to the following question: What stimulated the Samaritan woman to be motivated to go to town and bring so many others to meet Jesus?

Discussion Questions

What do you think the reaction might have been when the woman with a tarnished reputation went to the men and told them about Christ? In Greek, the term for *men* specifically means the males in the city. Her boldness brought many to see Jesus.

On Your Own

In the space below, write a brief prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand ways your encounter with Jesus could entice others to find living water too, especially those of other cultures.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something life for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

Read Matthew 28:16–20 out loud.

Jesus said to go into all the world and make disciples among all peoples. The band of eleven disciples gathered as Jesus instructed on the mountain in Galilee. They were mostly fishermen who likely had never imagined going and living among Gentile peoples in order to make disciples of them. Peter still had trouble later in Acts 10:1–11:14 and needed a miracle to remove the doubt He had about breaking Jewish prejudices about other peoples.

In order to cross cultural frontiers, disciples need to look beyond cultural differences and see people the way God sees them and loves them. After all, He sent Jesus to die for them!

Ask the Holy Spirit to impress on you a straightforward answer to these questions: Do I see people from other cultures the same way that God sees them? Why or why not?

If God convicts you of a barrier in your life inhibiting you from taking Jesus to all nations, confess that to Him. Ask Him to guide you into a deeper walk with Him. Ask Him to deepen your willingness to engage people of any other culture to share the gospel and make disciples.

Follow up Question

Are there ways you can better demonstrate openness and sharing the gospel among people of other cultures?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.