

These verses report the step by step process which Jesus took to move from an everyday opportunity to a revelation of Himself as the promised Christ. Jesus had been in Judea, but chose to leave for Galilee, either to avoid any hint of rivalry with John the Baptist or to avoid premature conflict with the Pharisees. Although according to Josephus it was not uncommon for Galilean Jews to take the direct route through Samaria, it was not necessary, since more scrupulous Jews, who wished to avoid Samaritans, would cross over the Jordan River and by-pass Samaria. The word translated “he had to” is used 9 other times in John’s Gospel with reference to a divine necessity and so it appears that this encounter was divinely directed.

As Jesus waited at Jacob’s well outside the Samaritan town of Sychar (possibly modern ‘Askar), while his disciples went to fetch food, a Samaritan woman came to draw water. In five steps Jesus moves to a revelation of Himself as the promised Messiah.

I. *The first stepping stone (4:7-10): Jesus opens a door by countering common prejudice and making a thought-provoking observation.*

1. *Jesus opens a door for interaction by going against common prejudice.* A Jewish rabbi would talk little to any woman and especially not with a Samaritan woman. Furthermore, Jews would not share dishes with Samaritans for fear of ceremonial defilement (the more probable meaning of verse 9 rather than “do not associate”). By asking for a drink Jesus went against common prejudice and got the attention of the woman.
2. *Jesus opens a door for conversation by making a thought-provoking observation.* The observation of Jesus (v 10) was at best ambiguous for the woman, since “living water” could be figurative or refer to a spring. In hindsight we understand that the gift of God was most likely the Spirit which God had promised, which Jesus, the Messiah, would receive from the Father and pour out upon those who believed, becoming “springs of living water” from within the believer (cf. 7:38).

II. *The second stepping stone (4:11-14): Jesus points to eternal things as more desirable than temporal and finite things.*

The Samaritan woman missed the spiritual significant of what Jesus said, and focused on the temporal and finite, but Jesus pointed her to eternal values, water that would quench forever.

III. *The third stepping stone (4:15-18): Jesus points to spiritual needs as greater than physical needs.*

Although Jesus got his point across concerning eternal things being more desirable, the woman still thought along physical lines. Therefore Jesus pointed to her spiritual need as greater than her physical need. By instructing her to call her husband, Jesus not only prepared to reveal His divine abilities, He pointed to her situation that revealed her spiritual thirst and her spiritual need.

There is an empty hole inside each person that people attempt to fill with things that cannot satisfy. Jesus put his finger on the sore spot in the woman’s soul and reminded her of her sinfulness with one little command, “call your husband.”

IV. *The fourth stepping stone (4:19-24): Jesus explains that spiritual hunger and thirst will only be satisfied by a true worship of God, not by religious form.*

Though she might have been directing the conversation away from her own situation, the woman’s question may have been an honest issue. Since 400 BC the Samaritans had had a center of rival worship on Mt Gerizim. Where was the correct location? Jesus’s answer contains three parts.

1. Worship of God the Father would soon not be geographically bound, neither on Mt Gerizim nor in Jerusalem.
2. The Jews had had it right, because it was to and through the Jews that the promises of deliverance had come. (Cf. Romans 9:4-5)
3. Never-the-less true worship was at that moment being changed from an outwardly ritualized form to something based on a spiritual reality in full conformity to the character of God. On Pentecost the Spirit of God would be poured out. Believers would be joined together into the Body of Christ by the baptism with the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13) and become the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16; Ephesians 2:21). The very presence and ministry of Jesus even before the cross pointed to that coming time. True worship must come from within, from a spirit changed and conformed by the truth of God.

V. *The final stone (4:25-26): Jesus revealed Himself to a woman whose heart had been prepared.*

The answer which Jesus gave apparently overwhelmed her, but she held to her belief that a Messiah would come. (The Samaritan expectation was that the Messiah would be the ultimate prophet, who would teach God’s truth.)

To this affirmation by the woman Jesus makes the startling response, “I who speak to you am he.” He had not yet made such an open and definitive declaration of his identity to anyone as recorded in the Gospel accounts.

This was the revelation to which Jesus was moving and to which we also should be moving in our attempts to share the Gospel. We want to introduce people to Jesus Christ as the One who deals with our ultimate problem of separation from God. It was a divine encounter and God was drawing this woman to Himself. Though he uses different means, the goal remains the same, that they be confronted with the person and work of Jesus Christ.