

REACHING OUT

by Rich Carlson

Let us look at a model Jesus gave us that we are to emulate. John 4:1-6 gives the setting:

When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. And He had to pass through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

Jesus and his disciples have been ministering in Judea, and the word is getting out to the Pharisees that in fact his disciples are baptizing more people than John the Baptist is. That is of concern to the Pharisees. Jesus realizes that, and he doesn't want to have a confrontation over this issue now, so he decides to go back to Galilee.

MAKE CONTACT WITH THE LOST

In verse 4 it says, "And He had to pass through Samaria." Now we can see by looking at a map that if you were in Judea, you would naturally go through Samaria to get to Galilee. Yet if you were a Jew in those days, what you would do if you wanted to make this trip was go to the east, cross the Jordan River, then go north until you were opposite Galilee, then cross the river and go back. Thus you would completely avoid Samaria. To me, if you're walking, short is good. Why would you turn a three-day trip into a six-day trip if you didn't have to?

The hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans had grown over a long period of time. The Assyrians had captured the northern kingdom, and some of the conquered Israelites had remained there. But they had intermarried with the incoming foreigners, and therefore, as far as the rest of the Jews were concerned, they had committed an unforgivable crime. That represented the very epitome of compromise. The Jews saw the resulting race, the Samaritans, as unclean. In fact the Samaritans had even built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, which is just south of Jacob's well, and therefore they were worshiping in the wrong place. To the Jews the Samaritans were despicable and to be avoided at all cost. And because of the way the Jews treated the Samaritans, even attacking them at times, the Samaritans hated the Jews as well.

Yet Jesus, as a rabbi (a teacher of the law), decides that he needs to go through Samaria. He decides to go against the social norm and the devout religious traditions of his day, and to purposefully make contact with sinners. So he leaves Judea and takes the short route through the city of Sychar with his disciples. A three-day walk with Jesus-I wish I'd been there.

In verse 6 we see a wonderful picture of Jesus' humanity. It says it's the sixth hour. In Jewish time that means noon. In Roman time it means six o'clock in the evening. I really think it's probably six o'clock in the evening, and Jesus is tired and thirsty. So he sits down by the well. The disciples have gone into the city to get food.

I believe that Jesus needed to go through Samaria in order to teach something to his disciples, and we have something to learn from this picture as well. The first principle is very clear: Make contact. If we're going to introduce people to Jesus Christ, we need to get to know them. We must spend time with non-Christians. This might well mean breaking the traditions of the religious establishment. This might mean breaking with some prejudice that you and I might have. This might mean stepping out of our comfort zone. What's the best way to catch a cold? Contact with people. What's the best way to spread a rumor? Contact. What's the best way to

make friends? Contact. What's the best way to spread the fragrance of the knowledge of him in every place? You have to make contact with people, to befriend and get to know non-Christians.

But quite frankly, as I look at the body of Christ, at times I'm very fearful. I think we may be going in the opposite direction. We have Christian yellow pages, Christian radio, Christian television, Christian clubs, and Christian colleges. In this valley alone, we have over one hundred Christian schools. I'm not saying that these things in themselves are bad, but what I fear is that we'll do something just like what we did with the inner city: leave the community and avoid opportunities to meet people who need to know Jesus. But here Jesus is making specific provision to come face-to-face with people who don't know him.

In John 17:15,18 Jesus prays, "I do not ask Thee to take them [the disciples] out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one...As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." The Lord understands the tension. We are to be in the world, yet not of it. But in our efforts to keep ourselves from being of the world, we are forgetting to be in it.

Jesus says in Mark 1:17, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." The first topic you discuss when you're going to go fishing is where the fish are. I like to talk to fishermen, because they always have the inside track about that topic. Sometimes you have to travel some distance, and when you get there the fish may be in very inconvenient places. You might even be in danger of falling in trying to fish for them, particularly if you're a fly fisherman.

When I was in high school the church I went to taught me to fish in the rain barrel. That is, you brought the people to church, and then they gave an invitation every week inviting people to come to know Jesus. There's nothing wrong with that. But I soon found that it was very hard to talk people into coming to church. And when they were there, they weren't very comfortable. So if I was successful in getting the fish into the rain barrel, they never bit in there. We need to be stepping out, reaching out, because we catch fish someplace else, not at church.

Let's look at the preceding events in this book. In chapter 1 John the Baptist announces that the coming of the Messiah is imminent. Then he announces that he is there. In chapter 2 Jesus goes to a wedding, and his mother tells him there is no more wine. He has some water jars filled up with water, and the head waiter says, "This is better wine than what we started with." In chapter 3 a ruler of the Jews sneaks in at night and Jesus talks to him. Now in chapter 4 Jesus is going to talk to a Samaritan woman in public as a rabbi.

In Matthew 9:13 he says, "'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Did you ever consider that Jesus was probably invited to parties because people liked him? He was good with people. He loved them, he never put them down, he never showed them disdain, and he could engage them in the most interesting conversations. Matthew himself knew that. This tax collector got Jesus into trouble right away. Jesus went to Matthew's party, and the word got out that he was talking with publicans and sinners. Jesus says that's whom he came to save. So the first principle we see is to make contact.

REACH OUT IN LOVE

Now let's see what we learn from verses 7-26. This encounter that surprises everyone else doesn't surprise Jesus at all. He had it in mind the entire time.

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman therefore said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Jesus answered and said

to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty, nor come all the way here to draw." He said to her, "Go, call you husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands; and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know; for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

It's evening, time to draw water. Why isn't there anyone else there? Evidently this well is south of the city between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal in the valley. There is another well in the city, and most people go there. But this woman is not welcome at that well. She probably is of notorious character, scoffed at by her neighbors, ridiculed by other women in the village, and avoided by any decent man who wants to retain his reputation. But now in verse 7 Jesus shows he cares deeply. In spite of the facts that she is a Samaritan and a woman, he is a Jewish rabbi and a man, and they are in public, his heart goes out to her. "Give me a drink," he says. Just those few words leap over all the boundaries that are there, and start a conversation that leads to life. Can you imagine the woman's shock? In verse 9 she evidently recognizes him as a Jew, probably from his accent, perhaps from his dress. She asks him, "What on earth are you doing speaking to me, a Samaritan, a woman, in public? What do you want?"

Jesus answers, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." He uses the metaphor of living water, trying to get the woman to understand, but she misses it. He's trying to bring the conversation around to the spiritual, but she's focused on the physical. Even down in verse 15 she's still thinking it would be nice not to have to go out there and draw water all the time. She demonstrates her spiritual condition-dead. She doesn't understand what he is talking about. Jesus knows her problem, which is our problem and everyone's problem: She needs God, the source of living water, and she has been looking in all the wrong places. She has been looking for a relationship with a man that will solve everything. Somehow Jesus knows that, and he also knows it isn't working.

What does he mean by living water? Look at John 7:37-39: "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive...." Jesus wants to give this woman life. He wants her to experience his Spirit's taking residence in her heart and making her a new creation. He wants her to be born again.

In verse 16 he says to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." Jesus now jumps the values barrier. He's getting a little bolder. He desires to confront her choices.

Then in verses 17-18 he confronts her with the facts, and she begins to see that maybe she is talking to someone special. They are standing in a valley between two mountains where the forefathers of both the Samaritans and the Jews taught and worshiped. Now she immediately turns the conversation, and our interpretive options are either that she is trying to get a conversation started about religious differences to deflect him, or she is trying to get clarity. From his response, it appears she is doing the latter. Seeing her concern now about worship, in verses 21-24 he teaches her the truth. He says, "Trust me. Yes, salvation is from the Jews, and I'm Jewish. But in reality, it is not at all important where one worships. Let me tell you what the Father is seeking: He wants men and women to worship him on the inside, in their innermost being.

He wants them to worship him in truth, in the new reality of a changed life."

In verse 25 she says, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." You see, she has some knowledge. She has remembered something she has been taught, but it hasn't affected her lifestyle. And then in verse 26 Jesus says this to her: "I who speak to you am He." Can you hear her breath stop? She is face-to-face with the Messiah, Jesus.

In the setting we learned to make contact. What should we learn from the encounter? John 3:16 is a very familiar verse: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Jesus is living out that principle in this passage. He is modeling for us how to reach out in love. He doesn't first try to change her living situation, her background, or her lifestyle. His compassion causes him to see her desperate loneliness and personal despair. He understands the death she is experiencing and he cares. "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). He wants her to have that gift.

At times I am fearful that we forget that people are lost, that though they are putting on a good front, they are in desperate need. We have the gift of God, don't we? He has made us part of the process of demonstrating that love to others, hasn't he?.

We need exactly what this woman experienced: to encounter Jesus again, face-to-face, and understand his love once again. That's what I'm personally praying for. We need the fresh breath of the Spirit blowing in our face the way a cold morning sea breeze hits you in the face, makes you catch your breath, and wakes you up. I'm convicted at this point. John introduced this book with these words (1:14): "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." We need to behold him. We need to look in his face and understand his essence. We need to

*"...Look full in his wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace."*

BRING OTHERS TO JESUS

What do we learn from the responses in verses 27-42?

And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He had been speaking with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?" So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city, and said to the men, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" They went out of the city, and were coming to Him. In the meanwhile the disciples were requesting Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." The disciples therefore were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows, and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

And from that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I have done." So when the Samaritans came to Him, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."

There are three responses in this section: the disciples', the woman's, and the Samaritans'. Let's look at the woman's response first (verses 28-29). Notice her actions: she leaves something, she goes, and she says something. Verse 28 is interesting. What does she leave? Not Jesus, but her waterpot. She has every intention of coming back for her waterpot. But the importance of the physical has been superseded by the importance of the spiritual. She needs to go and tell somebody. To whom does she go? Only to those who will listen; the text tells us the men listen. That makes sense, doesn't it? And did you notice all the theological training and Bible study courses and equipping that she is able to gain between the well and the city? What does she say? Simply, "Come and see a man who told me all the things that I have done. This is not the Christ, is it?" It's a wonderful response.

Observe how the Samaritans respond (verse 39): "And from that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I have done." And then what happens? They ask him to stay two more days. "And many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world.'" See what happens? They themselves personally encounter Jesus face-to-face. They recognize him as the Savior of the world and they individually respond to him.

But for our purposes the response of the disciples is even more telling (verse 27): "...His disciples came, and they marveled that He had been speaking with a woman...." They think to themselves, Why is he doing that, in public? This is a Samaritan woman. What's going on? We just went to the city and got him food, didn't we? Why would he be speaking with her? But they're beginning to get the point that he is a little different, because they don't have the courage to confront him directly. In verse 31 they tell him they have gotten the food, and they ask him to eat. But he is evidently preoccupied with something else.

As the woman was, and as we are sometimes, the disciples are earthbound here. They are seeing life only on the surface. They mistakenly thought that the purpose of this was to get to Galilee in three days instead of six. And all of a sudden they're finding out that they're going to spend two more days right where they are. They think life is presently about eating and drinking. They think Jesus is standing there because he needs to drink. But he says, "I have food that you don't know about." Verse 33 confirms that they are completely missing the point: "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" They are still earthbound, unlike the woman who has now departed.

So in verses 34-38 Jesus tries to explain his perspective. He says, "My food [in other words, what really nourishes me, what really keeps me going] is doing the will of the Father." What is the will of the Father? In John 6:40 he says what the Father's will is: "For this is the will of My Father, that every one who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." He is telling the disciples, "What I am focused on is doing the will of my Father. That's the whole reason I exist on earth. I don't want to lose one of his precious flock. I want them to behold the Son. I want them to look at me, see me face-to-face, consider me, discover whom I am, and trust me for eternal life. And I'm looking forward to raising them up on the last day and presenting them to the Father. That's what my life is about, disciples. How about you?"

They are standing in a place that is known for its corn crops. They had a saying: "Four months and then you will harvest." What Jesus is saying is, "Don't miss the point. The physical is really demonstrating the spiritual." Verse 39 confirms what happens. The Samaritans are coming out from the village. They have responded to a woman who said, "Come and see." They're coming out in twos and threes, men and women, in their off-white robes, walking across the field. What does Jesus say? "Look into the fields-they're white for harvest. It's not about corn, it's about people. It's not about traveling, it's about making contact, and reaching out in love. That's what life is about, that's why I've come." He's telling them to get ready. In verses 36-38 he further explains: "Look, some have been sowing...." For both the Samaritans and the Jews there is a lot of history in this place. A lot of seeds have been planted here. They have been told that Messiah is coming. Some of those prophets who have gone before have watered. Now the Samaritans discover that Jesus is here, so he's saying to his disciples, "Please participate with me in the harvest, and let the sowers and the reapers rejoice together. Wake up! Don't miss the opportunity."

Jesus is saying the same thing to us today. "Please look into the fields. They're white for harvest. And be careful where you look. The ones you're looking for may be those you would never suspect: the rejected ones, the outcasts, the ones who have no hope, the ones you thought would never come, the ones you thought you would never approach. They are thirsty for answers, they are hurting and bleeding, looking for salvation in all the wrong places." Some of us are asked to sow seeds. Some of us are asked to water. But some of us are asked to reap those men and women for whom Jesus died. Jesus is saying to us, "Please love them the same way I do."

What do we have to do? The same thing the woman of Samaria did after she met Jesus. "Come and see-isn't this the Christ?" she said. The model directs us to bring others. Look at John 1:40: "One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found first his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which translated means Christ). He brought him to Jesus." Make contact, reach out in love, and bring others. That is the model of Jesus. That's the normal pattern. That's why the Billy Graham Association calls the encouragement for us to do the same Operation Andrew.

I've been quite convicted that I have spent so much of my time ministering, both here and overseas, that I've forgotten about the folks in my own neighborhood, even folks across the street. My wife and I have been convicted to pray. All of a sudden the woman across the street wants to walk with my wife in the morning. And all of a sudden her daughter came to me and said, "Rich, would you help me with my mathematics this summer? I'm not doing well." All of a sudden I've had a chance to share the name of our plumber with them. We're still praying.

If you have been thinking of someone in particular, write their name down. Then take the names that come to mind and pray about these people. Pray about how you can make contact with them, reach out to them in love, and bring them to Jesus. Let's remind each other to pray, and support each other in prayer. And then let's rejoice together when people start coming to Jesus and meeting him face-to-face.

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