

# A VISION FOR EVERYONE

## Discussion Guide

### Joining God: John 4.27-38

#### Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o Are you a person who enjoys trying something new, or are you a person who prefers familiar routines? Can you elaborate?
- o Optional: What, if anything from the sermon, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

**Setting the Stage:** *God is working. All the time. All around us. It's wonderful and amazing, and it's a problem. Sometimes God works in ways that make me uncomfortable, in places that I would prefer not to go. I would be fine with God working there if it wasn't for His call for me to join Him, for His call to see the fulfilling of His will and completing of His work as the most important thing in my life. God wants me with Him. Am I ready to go? I suppose the answer is found in whether I am ready to allow His will to become my own.*

**Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes** (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read John 4.27-38. (*You may want to read John 4.1-26 for context.*)
- What surprises do the disciples experience? (*Look down through the text to draw out as many as possible.*)
- Using the background and textual notes, imagine you are one of the disciples present. What about this experience is challenging for you? What is most challenging? Can you elaborate?
- What would it take for these disciples to respond to Jesus' call to join God in His work?
- Jesus claims that God is at work in ways and places that surprise His people. Where do you see God working right now? What, if anything, about the way God is working is surprising to you?
- Jesus instructs his disciples to join God in what He is doing. Considering where and how God is working, what challenges does God's work create for you?
- How might seeking to do God's will as the most important goal in life enable you to overcome challenges in joining God? (*See vs. 32-33.*) Can you elaborate?
- Do you find it easy or difficult to seek God's will as the most important goal in life? What are the most important goals for you?
- What might it take to seek to do God's will first? What steps might you be willing to take to move in this direction?

#### Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

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## Group Notes

### *Joining God: Discussion Guide*

#### **John 4.27-38**

##### **Context and Background**

**Samaritan:** Samaritans were Israelites who lived in the former northern kingdom of Israel. After the reign of Solomon, the kingdom of Israel split in two, the north locating its capital in Samaria and the south locating its capital in Jerusalem with the Temple. While these two countries were sometimes at odds politically, in spirit and history they were one. This changed in 721 B.C. when Assyria captured the city of Samaria and the northern nation of Israel ceased to exist. The history of the Samaritan people becomes muddled at this point. However, it seems that some Israelites were not deported but were left in the land. They intermarried with pagan peoples, but seem to have maintained their Jewish traditions and identity. At some point after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's temple (586 B.C.), they chose to build their own temple on Mt. Gerazim. It is at this point that the Jewish people of the southern kingdom and the Jewish people of the northern kingdom parted ways. The Jews of the southern kingdom—those who returned from Babylonian exile and rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple—viewed the Samaritans and their land as ritually impure. Thus, to associate with a Samaritan would make a Jew ritually unclean. Religious Jews avoided Samaritans for fear of spiritual contamination, however the Samaritan's Jewish background made them ready recipients of Jesus' teaching, something the early disciples discovered to be true (Acts 8-10).

**High noon at a well:** As Jesus and his disciples traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee, they chose to travel through Samaria, thus risking, in the minds of religious Jews, ritual defilement. Near the Samaritan village of Sychar, Jesus stopped and rested while his disciples went into the village to buy food. While resting at the well, Jesus begins speaking to a woman who is drawing water. That the woman is alone and at the well mid-day indicates she is a social outcast, something her story bears out as it is revealed that she has a less than upstanding sexual history (John 4.17-18). The situation is highly charged and unusual. First, Jesus was where a good rabbi would not go, Samaria. Second, Jesus is speaking to a Samaritan woman. That she is a Samaritan would have been enough to keep most Jews from engaging her in conversation. However, in Jesus' day, it was taught that rabbis were not to speak to women. Women were not intended to speak with men outside the home. For a rabbi to speak with a woman not of his family was seen as a distraction from his study of the Torah, a potentially dangerous activity that could result in Hell for the rabbi. By his actions, Jesus demonstrates that he is willing to cross social and religious barriers. This is not new for Jesus. He spent much of his ministry crossing social and religious barriers (See Mark 1.40-3.6 for a string of such crossings). However, Jesus did not cross such barriers just to be counter-cultural. Jesus crossed barriers to demonstrate the character and activity of God, a character and activity that Jesus was urging his followers to make their own.

##### **The Text**

**This isn't Kansas anymore (John 4.27-30):** Jesus is in the midst of a conversation with a Samaritan woman of ill-repute when the disciples return with food from Sychar. The language of the NT indicates that the disciples are utterly astonished at what they find, their rabbi speaking with a woman, a dirty, foreign woman at that. The intense religious and social prejudice is hard to recreate for a modern reader. One might come close by imagining the feelings of a young white southern male coming upon an African-American male asking the white male's sister out on a date in 1960. Such things were not accepted socially and religiously and often had disastrous and tragic results. Such is the case with Jesus' present situation. The disciples are so shocked that they cannot ask Jesus the appropriate and condemning prejudicial questions of that time. The disciples are baffled. Jesus has them in a land in which they do not belong and he is crossing social and religious lines that should not be crossed by anyone, much less a good rabbi. This is not an area or experience they are comfortable with. However, it is one in which the gospel is going forth. Upon the arrival of the disciples, the woman leaves to speak to her townspeople. Having no shame, she recounts that she has met a man who knows her sexual history, and she urges the villagers to come with her as perhaps she has found the Messiah.

**Joining God in leaving Kansas (John 4.31-38):** With the departure of the woman the disciples attempt to return the scene to a state of normalcy. They urge Jesus to eat something. However, Jesus refuses stating that he has already eaten. Not unlike his conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus speaks to the disciples of spiritual realities using physical terms. Like the woman, the disciples are confused. Jesus indicates that that which sustains him—food—is nothing other than doing the will and engaging in the work of God the Father. Jesus' words here echo Deuteronomy 8.3 (See Matt. 4.4). Basically, Jesus states that what matters most in his life is joining God in His work. Jesus encourages the disciples to do the same. Probably noting the season, Jesus states that it was still four months until the harvest. One might imagine the surrounding area full of freshly sown fields. However, Jesus claims that the disciples need not wait for the harvest because if they would open their eyes they would see that the fields were already ripe for harvest. Once again, Jesus speaks of spiritual realities using physical terms. He is referring to the spiritual harvest to be had among the Samaritan people. He seems to claim that the disciples are blind to this reality, thus the command to open their eyes. God wants to do something among the Samaritan people. Not only this, but God has already been at work among the Samaritans, something Jesus points to as he refers to those who have done the hard work. God is at work. This is His work. Jesus has joined God the Father and is urging the disciples to do the same. If the disciples are to join God in His work, they must leave their social and religious prejudices and see the will of God as the most important and sustaining force in their life.

**Application:** God is at work all around us, and He is inviting us to join Him in what He is doing. This is what it means to be on mission with God. However, we often miss God and what He is doing for we are blinded by our understanding of the world and how we think God can and should move in it. If we will open our eyes we will see God is often not where we expect Him, beckoning us to join Him. However, it is our same reduced view of the world that can hold us back. Only when we grasp the idea that real life is found in seeking God and joining Him and not in traveling set and familiar paths will we find ourselves free to partner with God. Life is found in being with God where He is, not in asking God to join us where we are.