



Discussion Guide

The Year of Inviting—John 4.1-42

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- Imagine someone has just told you that they have something that could change your life. What is your response? Can you explain why you might respond this way?

Setting the Stage: *Invitations are simple. They open the door for us, beckoning us to step into new experiences, new relationships, and new beginnings. Invitations surround us. The television invites us to try a new product. Our co-worker invites us to a party. An acquaintance invites us to become a friend. Invitations are a part of life. The question isn't whether we receive invitations. The question is what we do with them. How we respond can make all the difference in what happens next. So what are we doing with our invitations?*

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 4.1-26 in a dramatic manner. Those listening should close their eyes and attempt to visualize the scene. See if you can be a present observer of the unfolding drama.
- What are the invitations given by Jesus? Which seems to be the most significant to you? Can you elaborate?
- Read John 4.28-30 and 4.39-42 in a dramatic manner. Those listening should attempt to visualize the scene.
- What invitations are given? What is the nature of these invitations?
- What, if anything, is striking about these invitations and how they are received? Can you elaborate?
- Both Jesus and the woman issue invitations to life-change. What invitations to life-change have you heard recently? What, if anything, makes these invitations attractive to people?
- Jesus invites us to experience life-change by turning to him. In turning to him, we are changed so that we might invite others to experience life-change through Jesus. Take some time as a group and consider how you are responding to Jesus' invitation. Consider re-reading John 4.9-14, imagining that you are the woman and Jesus is speaking to you. Sit in silence for a few minutes to ponder Jesus' words. As a group discuss how Jesus is inviting you.
- Take some time as a group and consider how you and your group are inviting others. Consider re-reading John 4.28-30. Imagine you are the woman giving this invitation. Sit in silence for a few minutes to ponder the words and allow the Holy Spirit to speak. As a group discuss how the Holy Spirit called you to respond.

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

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Group Notes

The Year of Inviting: John 4.1-42

Context and Background

John: The Gospel of John is the fourth Gospel. It was perhaps the most influential Gospel in the earliest days of the Christian movement. The book of John differs from the other three Gospels in that it has no mention of Jesus' birth and little information about Jesus' ministry in Galilee. In contrast to the other Gospels, John focuses on Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, his final dialogue with his disciples, and the use of signs and metaphors to point to the divinity of Jesus. Some have noted that John's Gospel is decidedly more "theological" than the other three Gospels. This is not to say that theology is missing from Matthew, Mark and Luke. Rather, John's heavy use of dialogue in contrast to action in the other Gospels and the focus of these dialogues on the thematic topics of faith, life, love, regeneration, and truth provide a more explicit theology than the implicit theology found in the other Gospels. Another difference between the Gospel of John and the other Gospels which influences the nature of this Gospel is the intended audience. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each seem to be writing to specific audiences which influences the way the story of Jesus is told. For instance, Mark is writing to a Gentile audience and thus spends time explaining Jewish customs. John, on the other hand, seems to attempt to transcend audiences. He seems to be writing a Gospel for the "every man." He places his emphasis on universal truths that lead his audience to faith (John 20.30-31), universals such as light, life, truth, bread and water. His point may be both to lead people to faith for the first time and to lead people to deeper faith in Christ.

Samaritans: The Samaritans were an ethnic-religious group who lived in what formerly was the northern kingdom of Israel. This people-group were the descendants of those Israelites that remained in the land after the northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria in 721 BC. Theologically they resembled the Jews of Judea, aligning most closely with the sect of the Sadducees. This theological alignment was most likely due to their acceptance of the Pentateuch (Genesis – Deuteronomy) as their canon of Scripture, a practice also held by the Sadducees. While the Samaritans resembled the Judean Jews ethnically and theologically, they were not fully accepted as Jews. While the Samaritans were not fully rejected until around 300 AD by the Jews, in the time of Jesus they were viewed as little better than distant and estranged cousins. The primary reasons for the relational gulf between the Samaritans and Jews centered primarily on political and secondarily on religious issues. In the time of Nehemiah, the Samaritans resisted efforts to reestablish the city of Jerusalem as a political power. This resistance was political and the outcome seems to have been a schism between the Jews of Judea and the Samaritans that never healed (Nehemiah 2.10-6.14, 13.28). Within the context of this political schism arose a theological schism. During this time the Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim claiming that Joshua had originally built a sanctuary on this mount and that it was Eli who made the illegitimate move of the Tabernacle to Shiloh. The Jews disagreed and destroyed the temple on Mount Gerizim in a political-religious move in 128 BC. From this point forward, the two people groups were formally separate, viewing one another with guarded disinterest and at times disdain.

The Text

Jesus' Invitation (John 4.1-26): In John 4, Jesus withdraws from Judea to return to Galilee in order to avoid a confrontation with the Pharisees. In so doing, Jesus took the shortest possible route through Samaria (See *Samaritans*). About noon, Jesus and his disciples arrived near Sychar. Jesus remained at a well outside of the village while his disciples went to find something to eat. While Jesus waited, a woman came to draw water. That she arrives mid-day and alone indicates she was viewed as a social deviant or outcast as women drew water in the morning and evening and always in groups. Jesus strikes up a conversation with the woman about water. In this conversation, Jesus invites the woman to ask for living water from him. He indicates that the water he could give would become a living spring within a person. In the Gospel of John, water is a symbol for life that comes from God and this water is nothing other than Jesus himself (John 7.38-39). Jesus' use of the term "water" to refer to life is probably drawn from the prophet Jeremiah who stated that God himself was living water (Jer. 2.13). The fact that this water is "living" indicates the life Jesus gives is something that is a present, ongoing reality rather than something that is future experience. The woman misunderstands Jesus' invitation and takes his words to be literal. Jesus redirects the woman by revealing her life experiences. In revealing her experiences, Jesus demonstrates the implications of living water. The living water Jesus offers addresses and heals lives, even lives that have had five husbands!

The Woman's Invitation (John 4.28-30): After a dialogue with Jesus marked by misunderstanding and redirection, the woman finally comes to recognize who she is talking to, the Messiah (John 4.25-26). Though not explicitly noted, it seems that this woman accepts Jesus' invitation. Having accepted Jesus' invitation, the woman turns to invite others to Jesus. She returns to her village and calls people to come see the man who told her what she had done. She notes that it was quite possible he was the Messiah. These two statements, taken together, indicate that this woman understood Jesus to be the one who understood who she was and the one who offered to do something about it. It is important to note that her invitation is rooted solely in her experience with Jesus. She shares that she has met someone who can address a life like hers.

The Samaritans' Response (John 4.39-42): After hearing the invitation of the woman, the villagers respond in belief (faith). This is hard for a modern person to grasp until we recognize that the villagers knew the life story of this woman. In their estimation, anyone who held the key to addressing this woman's life was someone worth listening to. They physically come to Jesus and invite him to stay with them which he does for two days. After this time, the villagers fully believe because they too have experienced Jesus and found that he is the Messiah, the one who holds the key to life.

Application: Jesus invites people to come to him so that they might find life. In accepting this invitation we find our lives changed in such a way that we may invite others to turn to Jesus, pointing to our lives as proof of the difference that can occur when one turns to Jesus.