

experiencing
Life
to the
Full



How God Meets
Our Three
Most Basic Needs

4) Jesus said the greatest commandment was: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. And the second is to love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:30,31)

Why do you think God associated these 2 verses together?

5) Who are some people you would nominate for the "Good Samaritan Award" in your neighborhood; in your life?

What do you think makes a Good Samaritan really 'good'?

Our significance lies in allowing ourselves to be a channel of His love!

- Loving and caring about others in place of selfish ambition.
- Caring for others serves as a great relational bridge to sharing the Good News you have received.
- Our waking hours would be simplified by regularly asking Jesus how He would want to love others through us.

Significance is Realized as we Love, Care... and Share

Jesus came to "Seek and to save the lost". Now he does it through us.

- "Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Mark 1:17)
- "You must tell everyone what you have seen and heard." (Acts 22:15)
- "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19,20)
- God "added to their number daily those who were being saved". (Acts 2:47)

¹¹As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." ¹²Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. ¹³For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."¹⁴ But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? ¹⁵And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"
(Romans 10: 11-15 NLT)

NOTE: Verse 15 is a quote from Isaiah 52:7. It refers to those who brought good news to the Israelites who were being held captive in Babylon that they were soon to be released. Here it is applied to those who share the Gospel (Good News) to release from the captivity of sin.

6) Discuss the steps (or process) involved in someone being "saved"?

Verses 14-15... circle the verbs (action words) that identify the process.

7) How has the Good News become really 'good' in your life?

8) Who can you reach out to with love, caring and with a desire to share Jesus with?

Life to the Full

How God Meets Our Three Most Basic Needs

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Introduction for the Mentor or Leader

Suggested use of these lessons:

Although these lessons are good for anyone, they were designed with the newer believer in mind. Many new believers do not attend church. This simple study is intended to build relationships with them while bringing credibility to the Scriptures and show how relevant the Bible is to everyday life. Hopefully, during your time together, you can encourage them to become involved with your local church activities. With this in mind, it may be best to arrange these studies in their home or some neutral place.

Be sure to prepare. Look through the material ahead of time. Print out the handouts and pray asking God's blessing. Remember that your friendship is as significant as the material you are studying. So take your time. Show interest in the things that are important to them. Let them talk and refrain from lecturing. Don't feel you MUST get through all the lesson. Remember your goal is to help them take a step closer to the Lord, encourage your relationship with them, and help them become involved in your church.

If there are several people, draw out those who might be less responsive. Quieter people often have good insights to offer. However, be careful not to put someone on the spot. When you seek someone to read, ask for volunteers or graciously ask someone who you are quite sure wouldn't mind reading.

Finally, ask the Lord for wisdom and insight in how you can serve and help them grow closer to Jesus. And look for opportunities to introduce them to other believers.

Materials Overview:

Addressing People's Needs

People are interested in issues, causes, and activities that match their own needs and interests. God designed us with three basic and fundamental needs:

- #1 - To connect with the 'supernatural', i.e. our Creator - God
- #2 - To experience love and acceptance in true community
- #3 - To live with purpose

#1 - Spiritual Hunger for a Divine Relationship

Everyone at some point in life wants to know God. That longing to solve the dilemma of life's God-shaped vacuum. There is a great interest in spiritual things today - to connect with something greater than ourselves.

Most of the top-grossing films have a clear supernatural theme. Many of the great literary works deal with the human quest for God. A look at some of the present musical titles reveal this:

I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For – U2

Losin' My Religion ("Life is bigger... than you") – R.E.M.

Higher (Can you take me higher/to a place where blind men see? /Can you take me higher/to the place with golden streets?) – Creed

Saint Augustine spoke of this desire. He said, "You awake us to delight in your presence; for you made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

The QUEST FOR SIGNIFICANCE

If we asked 5 people 'what makes life fulfilling', what might they say?

Realize Your Significance to God

Based on the following verses, how important are you to God?

- "While we (you) were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)
- "Because of His love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ He would make us His children - this was His pleasure and purpose." (Eph.1: 5)

He wants you to enjoy life, not just endure it.

Purpose is Experienced Though What We Do: Love, Care...

The Parable of the Good Samaritan Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷ He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

1) Identify all the characters in this story. Just for fun, reflect on whom you most resemble. Why?

2) In this uncaring, unloving world, how are people 'beat up' today?

3) Discuss... who you would say is your "neighbor"?

What does Jesus say about this “living water”? In light of the burdens of life she is carrying, why do you think that it is so appealing to her (vv. 13-14)?

5) Jesus brings up her list of past marriages and current problematic relationships. He catches her in a lie when she responds with a half-truth saying, “I don’t have a husband”.

Why do you think the woman didn’t give up on this conversation when Jesus told her, “Go and get your husband”? What was it about her encounter with Jesus that freed her to be so transparent about her life?

Jesus Reveals Who He Is

²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth. ²⁵ The woman said, “I know that the Messiah [Christ] is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he.”

6) Jesus was Jewish and this woman knew that the Messiah would be a Jew. Now Jesus (the Messiah) points out that “true worshippers”, Jews and Gentiles (her) alike, would soon realize equality in Christ and worship Him “in spirit and truth”. This was a huge admission of love and acceptance to her, a ‘Samaritan’ Gentile.

Discuss how she might have felt about being treated this way by the “Messiah”.

Many Samaritans Believe

²⁷ Just then his disciples arrived. They were astonished to find him talking to a woman, but none of them asked him why he was doing it or what they had been discussing. ²⁸ The woman left her water jar beside the well and went back to the village and told everyone, ²⁹ “Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did! Can this be the Messiah?” ³⁰ So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

³⁹ Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, “He told me everything I ever did!” ⁴⁰ When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay at their village. So he stayed for two days, ⁴¹ long enough for many of them to hear his message and believe. ⁴² Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe because we have heard him ourselves, not just because of what you told us. He is indeed the Savior of the world.”

7) How do you think the disciples would have treated this woman as compared to Jesus? How would their attitude influence their actions? Why?

8) This woman, who was traveling about hiding from the general public due to her sin and shame, now has an encounter with Jesus resulting in a significant change. She was ‘born again’!

Imagine her attitude and actions as she left Jesus and went back into town. What do you think she said? How do you think she said it? How do you think she was feeling?

By the reaction of the of the village people, how obvious was Jesus love and acceptance of her... what was their reaction?

9) How can a sense of personal self worth, of being loved, accepted and forgiven, affect the way you relate to others?

10) Ultimately, in an unloving world, it is important that we base our ultimate worth and love in Jesus Christ and not in others. **Knowing this love of Jesus for you, who can you extend His love towards this week?**

Next time we will look at how Jesus satisfies our need for significance, purpose and meaning in life.

Periodically everyone longs to connect with and satisfy a hunger to know a “power” greater than ourselves. Something to help live beyond the limits of our ordinary experiences. That spiritual thing they are looking for is Jesus. He created us in His image with a spirit and an appetite for the spiritual. Really it is Jesus who is seeking us out to satisfy that longing.

#2 - The Hunger for Love and Acceptance in Community

The second basic need is to have meaningful relationships. In each one of us is a deep desire to be loved, accepted for who we are, without the burden of guilt weighing us down (forgiven). Most people could make it in life without riches or toys. But few if any, could survive without friends, a sense of family, and a sense of peace in our spirit.

Although we can enjoy the comfort we feel when people accept us, there is still the deep longing for forgiveness, acceptance and unconditional love that Jesus offers us. Human love pales in the light and revelation of Christ’s love for us.

#3 - The Quest for Significance

People seek to be significant. They want purpose in life, to feel they are doing something meaningful.

Most try to find meaning in one of two ways: 1) through money, or 2) experiences. People who are pursuing money admit that their drive is not so much for more money as for the meaning in life they hope it will create. People who seek experiences describe similar desires and predicted outcomes. Yet as one listens closely, we often hear them drop hints that their lives feel hollow.

God put this longing within us. It is when we realize what’s important to Him that we discover what our lives should be about. Our lives become more meaningful, more significant, when they line up to what is on His mind and heart!

Jesus Appeals to and Meets Our Needs

Jesus’ ministry appealed to these three basic needs. His core message appealed to our desire to connect with God through a personal friendship with Jesus.

Soon after Jesus began His public ministry He gathered around Him the disciples. It is what we would call today a small-group community. The inner core consisted of Peter, James, and John. In this setting Jesus appealed to their desire for healthy community allowing them to experience His love, acceptance and forgiveness.

Jesus’ call to Peter and Andrew,” ‘Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men’ (Mark 1:17), is a call to significance. He would give the disciples something extremely worthwhile to do with their fishing skills!

In the book of Acts we see these three needs clearly met in the early church. The life of the early church epitomized a relational connection with the living God, an identity found in true community, and a purpose with extreme significance. In the first description of the early church, Acts 2:42-47, we see people worshipped and prayed to God, reached out to and had significant impact on others, and grew into a healthy fellowship.

The Bible shows how Jesus satisfied these longings in the past. He has met them through the years since His incarnation and He continues to meet them today. Even though cultures and times have changed Jesus continues to meet the same needs today as in the days He walked this earth.

Leader's Notes

Session Two – John 4:4-42

EXPERIENCING LOVE, ACCEPTANCE AND FORGIVENESS

The Hunger for “Community”

We all need to have meaningful relationships. In each one of us is a deep desire to be loved and accepted for who we are without the burden of guilt weighing us down (forgiven).

What people in our lives most influence the way we feel about ourselves?

A proper understanding and appropriation of Christ's love for us will:

- Revolutionize our relationships - Impact the way we see and relate to others

Jesus Loves, Accepts & Forgives the Woman at the Well [John 4:4-42]

So he left Judea to return to Galilee.⁴ He had to go through Samaria on the way. ⁵ Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime.

⁷ Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Please give me a drink.”

⁸ He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

⁹ The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?”

¹⁰ Jesus replied, “If you only knew the gift God has for you and who I am, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.”

¹¹ “But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket,” she said, “and this is a very deep well. Where would you get this living water? ¹² And besides, are you greater than our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his cattle enjoyed?”

¹³ Jesus replied, “People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water. ¹⁴ But the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life.”

¹⁵ “Please, sir,” the woman said, “give me some of that water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to haul water.”

¹⁶ “Go and get your husband,” Jesus told her.

¹⁷ “I don't have a husband,” the woman replied. Jesus said, “You're right! You don't have a husband— ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now.”

¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “you must be a prophet.”

NOTE: This woman was: 1) a Samaritan, a member of a mixed race hated by Jews, 2) known to be promiscuous, living in sin, and 3) in a public place.

No respectable Jewish man would talk to a woman under such circumstances. But Jesus did.

1) When you were growing up, were there people you were told not to associate? Who?

2) How do you think the woman felt when Jesus, a Jew, talked to her? What thoughts might have gone through her mind?

3) Consider the hot Middle East climate. When, during a hot day, do you think you would go to fetch heavy buckets of water?

Sin can cause us to “hide”. How is that reflected in the woman getting water at high noon... why do you suppose this woman is drawing water at midday?

4) Describe the woman's reaction to Jesus' offer in verses 11-15.

CONNECTING WITH GOD

God designed us with three basic and fundamental longings and needs – the need to connect with a higher power, our Creator (God), to be loved and accepted, and to feel significant. In session one we will look at how God meets our need to connect with and know God personally.

If you were watching a TV talk show and they advertised that they would be discussing “connecting with God” what would you expect to hear?

Some phrases that help us get a handle on this are:

- To know God
- To attain a knowledge beyond what is common to man
- To experience the supernatural
- To solve the haunting void in life, or
- There must be more to life than this

The Search for a Divine Relationship

There is a great interest in “spiritual” things today... a longing to connect with or draw closer to a higher power, knowledge, or experience... whatever that might be. Most of the top-grossing films have a clear supernatural theme. Many of the great literary works deal with the human quest for God. It seems everyone, at some point in life, wants to know God – to know the “mystical” and the Divine, to solve the dilemma of life’s God-shaped vacuum.

Saint Augustine spoke of this desire. He said, “You awake us to delight in Your presence; for You made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You.”

Periodically everyone longs to connect with, to understand, to satisfy a hunger to know a “power” greater than ourselves. That spiritual thing they are looking for is Jesus. Until Jesus fills that God-shaped vacuum, the hunger pains go unsatisfied.

Can you think of a time when you sensed that longing more intensely?

Perhaps when you gazed at the stars at night, or when you held a newborn child. Maybe it was when you were searching for answers to what life was all about, or when you faced death or a time of suffering.

God Does Not Want Sin to Separate Us from Him

OPTION - It may be helpful to quickly clarify the relationship God desired with us when He first created man.

God’s Original Intent [see Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7]

We see that 1) He created man in His image, and He 2) He “breathed the breath of life” into man. What does that mean?

It means that we were created with a will, (i.e. the capacity to make choices). Just as God has a will, we also have a will. He also gave us a conscience, a moral and spiritual dimension when He “breathed the breath of life” into mankind. In doing so He gave man the capacity to not only understand but also choose, (e.g. to love vs. hate, obey vs. disobey, to create vs. destroy,) etc.

In verse 28, we clearly see God having open communication, (He “told them”) a relationship and friendship with Adam and Eve. God intended to have an open unhindered friendship with them. In chapter 2:16-17, God speaks again giving a warning saying “don’t eat of the tree of knowledge... or you shall die”. He meant that they would die physically but also die spiritually (to sever or break relationship with God).

4) How is he like people in our world today? What are people doing to connect with the supernatural or pursue spiritual curiosity?

5) Can you identify times in your life when you were more keenly thinking about God or “spiritual” things? When? Why?

6) Who along the road of life have been like Phillip, people God sent your way who sought to assist you to understand the truth about Jesus? How did you receive them? How did God use those encounters in your life?

7) In what ways does Jesus fit the picture of the one described in vv. 32, 33? (See also, Isaiah 53:5-6; 10-11.)

8) Jesus is God. He died but rose again and is alive today. His Word, the Bible is timeless. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, “Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends.”

How does Rev. 3:20 speak of Jesus’ desire to have an ongoing personal relationship with mankind? (Hint: door, meal, and friends)

9) In what sense would you describe this has happened for you?

10) What indications do you see that this became a reality for the Ethiopian?

Because this man was in charge of the treasury of Ethiopia, this man’s conversion brought Christianity into the power structures of another nation. This is the beginning of taking the Gospel “to the ends of the earth” we read in Acts 1:8.

Next time we will look at how Jesus satisfies our need to be loved, accepted and experience forgiveness in life.

Man’s Great Disconnect with God [see Genesis 3:1-8]

Adam and Eve disobey God. Their “eyes are opened” and they feel the guilt and shame of disobeying their holy, perfect Creator. It was the result of sin. But look what it did to their relationship with God. In verse 8, when they heard God they “tried” to hide from Him! That is the great disconnect that man has had to live with ever since.

How do you feel when you sin against someone? We feel guilty and want to avoid (hide) from them. Sin hinders or often breaks relationships! It does the same with our relationship with God.

However, because we have been created with a spiritual dimension, there remains a longing to connect with God... a “God sized hole” that only He can fill.

Also, take note of the devil (the “serpent”, vs. 1). He’s the one who seeks to cripple and destroy God’s original intent. He is our adversary. Be aware that he seeks to hinder a relationship with God. Verse 1 – 5 shows that he tries to be deceptive, lies, plays on our egos tempting us to choose to do that which is counter to God’s will.

God Wants You To Know Him Personally In Jesus

Jesus Christ (God in the flesh) came to reconnect us with Himself (God). He reached out to us to heal our broken relationship.

Let’s take a look at one story in the Bible where the desire to connect with God is met in Jesus.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch Acts 8:26-40

26 As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, “Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.”
27 So he did, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship,
28 and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.
29 The Holy Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and walk along beside the carriage.”
30 Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah; so he asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”
31 The man replied, “How can I, when there is no one to instruct me?” And he begged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.
32 The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this: “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth.
33 He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”
34 The eunuch asked Philip, “Was Isaiah talking about himself or someone else?”
35 So Philip began with this same Scripture and then used many others to tell him the Good News about Jesus.
36 As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?”
38 He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.
39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing.
40 Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the city of Azotus! He preached the Good News there and in every city along the way until he came to Caesarea.

1) Who are all the characters mentioned in this Bible story? (circle each one)

This Phillip was an early follower of Jesus, not to be confused with one of the 12 disciples of the same name. He seemed always alert for an opportunity to present the claims of Christ. Because he went where God sent him, Ethiopia (Africa) was opened up to the gospel. We need to follow God’s leading even when it seems strange. At first you may not understand his plans, but the results will prove that God’s way is right.

The Ethiopian was obviously very dedicated to God because he had traveled such a long distance to worship in Jerusalem. He had come to attend a festival of thanksgiving for the harvested crops.

CONNECTING WITH GOD

God designed us with the basic need to connect with a higher power or ultimate authority, i.e. God, our creator.

If you were watching a TV talk show and they advertised that they would be discussing “connecting with God” what would you expect to hear?

The Search for a Divine Relationship

There is a great interest in “spiritual” things today. It seems everyone, at some point in life, wants to know God. He created us with a spirit that is restless to reconnect with its creator.

When have you sensed this longing more intensely during your life?

God Does Not Want Sin to Separate Us from Him

God wants you to know Him personally In Jesus:

Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. John 14:9

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch Acts 8:26-40

26 As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, “Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.”
27 So he did, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.
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39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing.

1) Who are the characters mentioned in this Bible story? (Circle them)

**2) What was the Ethiopian’s social and political stature in life?
With all that, was he satisfied? What do you think he was still lacking?**

3) How do we see his longing to connect with God? What do we find him doing on his return trip?

It was called Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks. He was probably a convert to Judaism (see Acts 2:5). Although he knew of the God of the Jews, he did not know God. He still had a longing to connect with the one true God in Jesus Christ (John 17:3).

God... angel; the Holy Spirit.

- 2) What was the Ethiopian's social and political stature in life? With all that, was he satisfied... what was he still lacking?

He probably was wealthy as an important official. No doubt he wielded substantial power in that role and with his responsibilities. Yet none of these had satisfied his longings.

- 3) How do we see his longing to connect with God? What do we find him doing on his return trip?

He was reading from the Old Testament, specifically from the book of Isaiah, chapter 53. He was trying to understand a story about life and death from the Scriptures.

- 4) How is he like people in our world today? What are people doing to "connect with the supernatural" or pursue their spiritual curiosity? What are some substitutes for the "real thing"?

Crystals; New Age teachings, yoga, reading horoscopes, psychic readings, witchcraft; séances; calling up spirits from the past, etc.

- 5) Can you identify times in your life when you were more keenly thinking about God or "spiritual" things? When? Why?

- 6) Who along the road of life have been like Phillip, people God has sent your way to assist you to understand the truth about Jesus? How did you receive them? How did God use those encounters in your life?

- 7) In what ways does Jesus fit the picture of the one described in vv. 32, 33?

He was silent and did not speak while suffering. He suffered and died for the punishment we rightly deserve.

See also, Isaiah 53:5-6; 10-11. Jesus is found in the pages of both the Old and New Testaments. God's Word is applicable to all people in all ages.

8) Note - Jesus is God. He died but rose again and is alive today. His Word, the Bible is timeless. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, *"Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends."*

How does Rev. 3:20 speak of Jesus' desire to have an ongoing personal relationship with mankind? (Hint... refer to door, meal, friend)

He is God (supernatural) and can "stand" at the door of our heart (will). We can sense His calling, His desire to have a relationship with us. He allows us the freedom to "open" the door and invite Him in. In the culture of Jesus' day and for many today, eating is a social time when you get to know one another. A time to 'build relationships'.

9) In what sense would you describe this has happened for you?

10) What indications do you see that this became a reality for the Ethiopian?

He was baptized, i.e. he identified with the death and resurrection of Christ.

[Encourage this step of obedience in following Christ as appropriate]

NOTE - Because this man was in charge of the treasury of Ethiopia, his conversion brought Christianity into the power structures of another Government. This is the beginning of taking the Gospel *"to the ends of the earth"* we read in Acts 1:8. The Coptic Christian church in Ethiopia today looks back to this encounter as its beginning. This is also a fulfillment of prophecy recorded in Isaiah 56:3, *"And my blessings are for Gentiles (non-Jewish), too, when they commit themselves to the LORD. Do not let them think that I consider them second-class citizens. And my blessings are also for the eunuchs. They are as much mine as anyone else."*

Next time we will look at how Jesus satisfies our need to be loved, accepted and experience forgiveness in life.

[Take time to pray for specific needs and give thanks for God's goodness.]

[For further study see John 3:1-21 – Nicodemus, a "religious" person, is seeking to connect with God.]

Student Handouts

6) Discuss the steps (or process) involved in someone being "saved"?
(Verses 14-15... circle the verbs (action words) that identify the process)

Sent... tell... hear... believe... call

7) Discuss how the Good News has become really 'good' in your life.

8) Who are some people you know that could use this Good News?

Emphasize - It is crucial that they hear about Jesus. Because everyone is a sinner, everyone needs a Savior. We are so significant to God that He gave us the privilege and responsibility to help others come to know Him too!

Live What You Learn

[A gracious challenge for us all]

**Who can you reach out to with love and caring? Who can you share Jesus with?
Who will you come in contact with tomorrow? This week? This month?**

NOTE - *"For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others. We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, "Be reconciled to God!" (2 Corinthians 5:19, 20)*

God has entrusted you to be His representative in this world... that's how special and significant you are to Him. The Bible says, *"God has given each of you some special abilities; be sure to use them to help each other, passing on to others God's many kinds of blessings."* (1 Peter 4:10 LB)

*** Invite Jesus to inhabit your life and live through you to impact this world with His love, care, and spreading the Good News.

[End with prayer for one another]

EXPERIENCING LOVE, ACCEPTANCE AND FORGIVENESS

The Hunger for true "Community"

The second fundamental need we all have is to have meaningful relationships, the need for healthy 'community'.

In each one of us is a deep desire to be loved, accepted for who we are without the burden of guilt weighing us down (forgiven). Most people could make it in life without riches or toys, but few if any, could survive without healthy relationships, a sense of family and a general sense of peace in our spirit.

Which people in our lives most influence the way we feel about ourselves?

Although we can enjoy the comfort we feel when people accept us, there is still the deep longing for forgiveness, acceptance and unconditional (agape) love that Jesus offers us. Many people unfortunately base God's love for them on the way significant others (e.g. parents) have treated them. Often this was love based on their performance and not for who they are. Regardless, human love pales in the light and revelation of Christ's love for us.

However, a proper understanding and appropriation of Christ's love for us will revolutionize our relationships and the way we treat others. Our perspective changes dramatically when we experience God's love personally, and realize He has that same love for all those He has created.

Jesus Loves, Accepts & Forgives the Woman at the Well [John 4:4-42]

So he left Judea to return to Galilee.⁴ He had to go through Samaria on the way.

⁵ Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.

⁶ Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. ⁷ Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." ⁸ He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

⁹ The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

¹⁰ Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who I am, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

¹¹ "But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this is a very deep well. Where would you get this living water?"

¹² And besides, are you greater than our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his cattle enjoyed?"

¹³ Jesus replied, "People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water.

¹⁴ But the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life."

¹⁵ "Please, sir," the woman said, "give me some of that water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to haul water." ¹⁶ "Go and get your husband," Jesus told her. ¹⁷ "I don't have a husband," the woman replied. Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband— ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now." ¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet."

CULTURAL NOTES- This woman:

- was a Samaritan, a member of a mixed race hated by Jews,
- was known to be promiscuous, living in sin, and
- was in a public place.

In Jesus' culture it was considered the height of impropriety for a religious man to talk with a woman; but to speak to a woman of low moral standing was unheard of.

No respectable Jewish man would talk to a woman under such circumstances. But Jesus did.

The Jews hated the Samaritans because they were a mixed race. They had intermarried with foreigners compromising their religion. The Samaritans were considered as corrupt half-breeds. Consequently the Jews did everything they could to avoid traveling through Samaria.

The feeling was mutual. Samaritans often refused lodging to Jews who were traveling. The bitterness between Jews and Samaritans was at its height in Jesus' day.

1) When you were growing up, were there people you were told not to associate with? Who?

2) How do you think the woman felt when Jesus, a Jew, talked to her? What thoughts might have gone through her mind?

Jesus overlooked the deep cultural, racial and religious prejudice that Jews felt towards Samaritans.

3) Consider the hot Middle East climate. When do you think you would go to fetch heavy buckets of water?

I'd get it in the early morning when it was cool.

Sin can cause us to "hide". How is that reflected in the woman getting water at high noon... why do you suppose this woman is drawing water at midday?

She was an outcast and was trying to avoid running into others who would ridicule her, etc.

Perhaps due to low self-esteem and/or guilt and shame she got it mid-day, in the height of the heat, when she would encounter the fewest people.

4) Describe the woman's reaction to Jesus' offer in verses 11-15.

She didn't realize that Jesus was setting up a spiritual conversation.

Many spiritual functions parallel physical functions. The woman confused the two kinds of water.

Perhaps because no one had ever talked with her about her spiritual hunger and thirst before. As our bodies hunger and thirst, likewise our souls need spiritual food and water.

What does Jesus say about this "living water"? In light of the burdens of life she is carrying, why do you think that it is so appealing to her (vv. 13-14)?

Poor choices led to a difficult life. We can only imagine how this woman has been treated. She was looking for some relief from the difficulties and hardship of life. This struck a refreshing cord!

5) Jesus brings up her list of past marriages and current problematic relationships. He catches her in a lie when she responds with a half-truth saying, "I don't have a husband".

Why do you think the woman didn't give up on this conversation when Jesus told her, "Go and get your husband". What was it about her encounter with Jesus that freed her to be so transparent about her life?

He knows all about her, her past and her present lifestyle. This kind of reception is not what she would have expected!

Instead of judging, Jesus loved her; was accepting and forgiving. Jesus affirms her for answering honestly. Perhaps she was intrigued by His willingness to talk with her. He treated her with respect

5) What do you think makes a Good Samaritan really 'good'?

Who are some people you would nominate for the "Good Samaritan Award" in your neighborhood/in your life?

NOTE - Love is the stretching of ourselves for the betterment of another, whether physically, emotionally or spiritually. Its recognizing those people with needs in our network of relationships.

Mercy is reaching out to others with love and grace. Perhaps through helping physically, offering encouragement, or assisting them in their walk with the Lord. Ask often, "What Jesus, would you want to do through me?"

NOTE - Our significance lies in allowing ourselves to be a channel of His love!

Loving and caring about others in place of selfish ambition.

Caring for others serves as a great relational bridge to sharing the Good News you have received.

Our waking hours would be energized and filled with purpose by regularly asking Jesus how He would want to love others through us.

Love, Care... and SHARE

NOTE - Jesus also appeals to our need for significance by putting us on a mission. His call to fishermen Peter and Andrew, "Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17) could be understood as a call to significance because He would give the disciples something extremely worthwhile to do with their fishing skills!

At Paul's conversion, he learns that he's been called to a new purpose in life: "You must tell everyone what you have seen and heard." (Acts 22:15 CEV). He devoted the rest of his life to that cause.

One of the last things Jesus said to His followers before going to heaven was, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 20:19,20)

Obviously the new believers in the early church sensed this mission and caught Christ's passion. We see through their activity, that God "added to their number daily those who were being saved". (Acts 2:47)

Significance as a Representative of God

Let's look at another passage addressing our significance. God entrusts us with telling the Good News about Jesus to others.

11 As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." 12 Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. 13 For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? 15 And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!" (Romans 10: 11-15 NLT)

NOTE - Verse 15 is a quote from Isaiah 52:7. It refers to those who brought good news to the Israelites who were being held captive in Babylon that they were soon to be released. Here it is applied to those who share the Gospel (Good News) to release from the captivity of sin.

Jesus told a great story to communicate this truth.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan Luke 10:25-37

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

NOTE – Jews were hostile toward Samaritans and considered them as "half-breeds" both physically and spiritually because they intermarried with Gentiles.

1) Identify all the characters in this story. Just for fun, reflect on whom you most resemble. Why?

The expert in the law treated the wounded man as a 'topic for discussion'; the robbers as an 'object to exploit'; the priest as a 'problem to avoid'; and the Levite as an 'object of curiosity'. Only the Samaritan treated him as a person to love.

2) In this uncaring, unloving world, how are people 'beat up' today?

3) Discuss who you would say is your neighbor.

Anyone of any race, or social background.

People that God brings into our lives.

People with needs.

4) Jesus said the greatest commandment was: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. And the second is to love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:30.31)

Why do you think God associated these 2 verses together?

To truly love others requires that we first experience the love of God in our relationship with Him. Apart from Him we can't love the way He loves. The greater we realize His love, the more apt we are to extend that love to others. Therefore we need to put into practice the art of loving Him and acknowledging His love for us so it can overflow to others.

and she knew He spoke the truth and that He wanted to help her. Jesus was demonstrating His love and acceptance of her for who she was, not on the basis of what she had done.

23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth. 25 The woman said, "I know that the Messiah [Christ] is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." 26 Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

NOTE - Jesus was Jewish and this woman knew that the Messiah would be a Jew. Jesus points out that "true worshippers", Jews and Gentiles alike, would soon realize equality in Christ and worship Him "in spirit and truth". This was a huge admission of love and acceptance to her.

6) How do you think she felt about being treated this way by the "Messiah"?

Here she, a lowly Samaritan in the eyes of a Jew, was approached lovingly not only by a Jew but by THE Messiah!

God, in Jesus, revealed Himself to her. Melted by his love, she became a changed person. She became 'born again', a true believer!

27 Just then his disciples arrived. They were astonished to find him talking to a woman, but none of them asked him why he was doing it or what they had been discussing.

28 The woman left her water jar beside the well and went back to the village and told everyone, 29 "Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did! Can this be the Messiah?" 30 So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

39 Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, "He told me everything I ever did!" 40 When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay at their village. So he stayed for two days, 41 long enough for many of them to hear his message and believe. 42 Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe because we have heard him ourselves, not just because of what you told us. He is indeed the Savior of the world."

7) How do you think the disciples would have treated this woman as compared to Jesus? How would their attitude influence their actions?

Their reaction to Jesus shows they were prejudiced. They most likely would have smugly avoided her.

We must be careful of any prejudice we have towards others. Jesus died for them too and loves them equally as much as us.

8) This woman, who was traveling about hiding from the general public due to her sin and shame, now has an encounter with Jesus resulting in a significant change. She was 'born again'!

Describe her attitude and actions as she left Jesus and went back into town. What do you think she said? How do you think she said it? How do you think she was feeling?

It's amazing that she was set so free. Instead of avoiding and hiding from the general public, she openly wanted to share her great news. She was no longer ruled by shame. She experienced self worth and wanted others to experience the same!

By the reaction of the of the village people, how obvious was Jesus love and acceptance of her? What was their reaction?

Her change certainly caught their attention. As a result of her testimony alone, many Samaritans believed.

No doubt this newfound love in Christ overflowed in love, acceptance, and forgiveness towards her community.

9) How can a sense of personal self worth - of being loved, accepted and forgiven - affect the way you relate to others?

Most of us struggle with self-esteem. The better we feel about ourselves the easier it is to love and forgive others. That's why it is so important that our ultimate source of self worth come from a loving relationship with Jesus.

10) In an unloving world, it is important that we base our ultimate worth and love in Jesus Christ and not in others. Knowing Jesus' love for you, who can you extend His love towards this week?

Next time we will look at how Jesus satisfies our need for significance, purpose and meaning in life.

[Take time to pray for specific needs and any people mentioned above]

[For further study see Acts 2:42-47, Hebrews 10:24-25 to see how Christ's love, acceptance and forgiveness impacted the early church.]

A good verse to memorize is Romans 8:1, "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus."

The QUEST FOR SIGNIFICANCE

People seek to be significant. They desire purpose in life. To feel that they are doing something meaningful. To feel empowered to do things that make a difference; things that matter - a reason to get out of bed in the morning. You might consider asking, "What makes life worth living for this person?"

If we asked 5 people 'what makes life fulfilling', what might they say?

Most of us try to find meaning in one of two ways: 1) through money, or 2) experiences. People who are pursuing money admit that their drive is not so much for more money as for the meaning in life they hope it will create. They believe that if they have enough money, they'll somehow arrive at that point. People who seek experiences describe similar desires and predicted outcomes. Yet as one listens closely, we often hear them drop hints that their lives feel hollow.

According to a Charisma News Service article, America remains one of the highest-ranked nations in terms of reflection on the meaning and purpose of life. Why is that? The reason is that many lack a sense of significance! The things that we think will fill that void fall short of God's ultimate purpose.

And where does that hunger come from? God put that longing within us.

It is when we realize what's important to Him that we gain perspective on this matter. It is when our lives line up to what is on His mind and heart that our lives become more meaningful... and we feel more significant and experience greater fulfillment!

First, Realize Your Significance to God

YOU are important to God

The moment you were born, God was there smiling at your birth. He wanted you alive. He did not need to create you, but He chose to create you for His enjoyment!

Your significance to God is absolutely amazing. Nothing compares to His desire to have a relationship with you. God took the ultimate action for you to know Him.

Based on the following verses, how important are you to God?

"While we (you) were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Ro. 5:8)

- That's how important you are to God!!! And if you were the only person who ever lived, He would have done it for you alone! That's how much He loves you.

"Because of His love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ He would make us His children - this was His pleasure and purpose." (Eph.1: 5 TEV)

Your relationship with Jesus brings Him pleasure like nothing else He ever created. And He wants you to enjoy life, not just endure it. Now you can really live for His pleasure!

Knowing God and living for His pleasure, is the primary purpose of your life. When you fully understand this truth, you will never again have a problem with feeling insignificant. It proves your worth! If you are that important to God, (and He considers you valuable enough to keep with Him for eternity) what greater significance could you have?

Purpose Through What We Do: Love, Care...

Not only is He pleased with your newfound relationship, now He entrusts you to be His representative on earth. It may seem hard to believe, but He wants to live through you to minister to others on His behalf. He wants to let you be a channel through which His love can flow!