

Pursuing God's  
Beauty

**Also by Margaret Feinberg**

*The Organic God*

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*Hearing God's Voice in Every Area of Your Life*

*Scouting the Divine:*

*My Search for God in Wine, Wool, and Wild Honey*

*Hungry for God:*

*Hearing God's Voice in the Ordinary and Everyday*

*Pursuing God's Love:*

*Stories from the Book of Genesis DVD curriculum*

SIX SESSIONS

Margaret Feinberg



# Pursuing God's Beauty

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Stories from the Gospel of  
John

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*Pursuing God's Beauty Participant's Guide*  
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# Pursuing God's Beauty

Beauty has a way of stopping us in our tracks. When we encounter something that's truly beautiful, we can't help but pause for a moment.

I've seen beautiful expressions, such as the lingering nuances of the setting sun, cause people to pause, watch, and reflect as they drink in the scene. Indeed, beauty has a way of gripping our hearts and refusing to let go.

Why pursue God's beauty?

Because the beauty of God radiates in the person of Jesus Christ—the person in whom God placed his whole heart on display for the world to see.

The Gospel of John is a book whose beauty invites us to stop in our tracks, not just because it's beautifully written, but because of the stunning portraits of Jesus found throughout. The twenty-one chapters of John tell stories of Jesus walking into people's lives and transforming them forever. Jesus knows no boundaries. The Son of God enters the lives of fishermen and centurions, the physically and spiritually blind, as well as a wide range of religious leaders and religious rejects, inviting them all to believe. Those who accept the invitation find their lives forever changed.

Despite the overwhelming presence of God's beauty, some are tempted to dismiss beauty as merely subjective because aesthetic opinions differ. Others dismiss beauty as deceptive because some have perverted beauty into unmentionables. Still others turn away from beauty because it's not essential or functional.

Yet God is the one who fills all of creation with beauty. God strings galaxies in the sky and submerges creatures in the depths of the sea—some of which have yet to be discovered. Indeed, the heavens and earth declare the glory of God. The stories found in John are ones we need to study and be reminded of because they beckon us to love God even more.

My hope and prayer is that through this study you'll be reminded of the work of God in your life and share that beautiful news with others.

Blessings,  
Margaret





# A Message for Leaders

The six sessions of *Pursuing God's Beauty* are designed to be accessible for people to grow in their knowledge of God and Scripture. Whether participants are still trying to figure out who God is or made the decision to follow Jesus decades ago, you'll find material that reaches them wherever they are in their spiritual journey.

Here are a few guidelines to help you and your group get the most out of this study.

## **Tailor the Study to Your Group**

Groups are as diverse as the unique people in them. Some groups will want to watch one DVD session each week and complete the study in six weeks. Others may want to focus on the DVD one week and continue the discussion the next, creating a twelve-week study. Some groups will want to watch the DVD and then discuss as a large group; others will prefer to watch the DVD together and then break into smaller groups to discuss. Tailor the study to what best suits your group.

## **Select an Experiential Activity or Icebreaker Question in Advance**

Each group session offers two options for getting started: an Experiential Activity or a selection of Icebreaker Questions. If your gathering is an hour or less, you may want to skip the activity or icebreaker question and dive right into the DVD so you have plenty of time for discussion. If your gathering is longer than an hour, select either the activity or one of the questions for your group.

Before the first meeting, read through all the experiential activities in the study. Select the ones you'd like to do and make a list of items you need to purchase, gather, or research. For example, if you want to buy some nard for lesson four, order it now so it arrives in plenty of time.

Consider inviting a handful of participants to organize the experiential activity each week. This will encourage involvement and develop leadership skills of the participants.

## Select Discussion Questions in Advance

Each session includes a variety of discussion questions. Some questions focus on encouraging people to open up about their lives and others focus more on wrestling with Scripture and the material presented on the DVD.

More questions are provided than time will allow for most groups—don't feel like you have to ask every question. Before you gather, highlight the questions you want to focus on during the session. Select the questions best suited to the interests and objectives of your group. You may even want to develop a few questions of your own.

As you lead the discussion, remember that silence can be a friend. You may ask a question and be greeted with silence. Allow the silence to rest for a moment and see who speaks up. If you have a participant who is particularly quiet and you're asking an open-ended question that anyone could answer, consider calling on that person by name. Gently ask, "What do you think, Josh?" Try to avoid questions that lead to "yes" and "no" answers, and stay focused on learning more about God and deepening relationships.

Throughout the study, you'll discover quotes, scholarly observations, and various insights. Invite discussion on the content of these boxes and see what develops.

## Encourage Participants to Engage in Afterhours Studies (If They Can)

Each session includes five Afterhours personal studies. The goal of Afterhours is to challenge participants to keep diving deeper into the Gospel of John. Encourage participants to engage in the personal studies, but remember that not everyone will be able to do so. Remind participants that even if they aren't able to do Afterhours, they're still welcome to be part of the study. If they can only do one personal study each week, encourage them to complete Day Five, which specifically prepares participants for the next group session.

## Stay Connected

Encourage participants to connect with Margaret on her website at [www.margaretfeinberg.com](http://www.margaretfeinberg.com), via Twitter @mafeinberg, or "fan" her on Facebook. If you get a chance, take a photo of your group and it could be posted on her website. Email your photo to [info@margaretfeinberg.com](mailto:info@margaretfeinberg.com) and include the name of your church or group.



# Encountering Jesus

## John 1–3

Each one of us has different experiences of God's beauty and different appreciations of this beauty — those inexpressible and indefinable moments that deeply touch our hearts, our minds, and all our senses. Those moments that melt our hearts when we feel the presence of God in what is beautiful. Each one of us will tell different stories of when we have heard beauty, seen beauty, smelled beauty, tasted beauty and touched beauty ... when beauty has touched our inner souls, when God has touched us.<sup>1</sup>

—Edward F. Markquart

Throughout the Gospel of John, the beauty of God radiates in the person of Jesus Christ—a person in whom God placed his whole heart on display for the world to see. It's within the person of Jesus that we find the invisible attributes of God being made visible, on display like the fine pieces of artwork in a gallery—to be enjoyed, celebrated, and reflected upon.

If we are going to be people who pursue God's beauty, who live passionately pursuing Jesus Christ, then we cannot keep the stories of what God has been doing in our lives to ourselves. Each of us is a mini-portrait of the beautiful work of God. As recipients of God's grace and love, we have the opportunity to display the beauty of God everywhere we go simply by sharing the story of God's work in our lives.

Wherever we may be on our spiritual journeys, there's something powerful and beautiful we can discover from each other's stories of meeting Jesus. Every story showcases facets of God's goodness and demonstrates how relentlessly God pursues us.



## Getting Started: Select One

(10 – 15 MINUTES)

### **Experiential Activity: When Love Comes to Town**

*What you'll need:*

- ◆ An MP3 of U2's "When Love Comes to Town"
- ◆ Printed lyrics of U2's "When Love Comes to Town" for each participant

1. Download "When Love Comes to Town."
2. Google the lyrics and print them out for each participant.
3. Play the song and allow participants to read through the lyrics.
4. Discuss the following questions:
  - What images and messages are suggested through the song?
  - What does it look like in your own life when love comes to town?
  - Have you ever seen love come to town in someone else's life? What did it look like? How were they transformed? How were you impacted from seeing the transformation?

### **Icebreaker Question**

*If you're not doing the experiential activity, choose one of the following sets of questions to begin your discussion.*

- Where did you notice beauty this week? How did it impact your relationship with God?
- Have you ever met someone famous? Describe the experience.
- Imagine for a moment that you had the opportunity to meet Jesus tomorrow morning for breakfast at a local restaurant. Where would you eat together? What would you order? What questions would you ask?



## One: Encountering Jesus

(18 MINUTES)

*As you watch the DVD, use the following outline to take notes on anything that stands out to you.*

We all have different stories, unique portraits of the ways we first encountered Jesus.

At times we will simply declare the truth of who Jesus is, and those who hear will become followers of Jesus.

We need to bring people to Jesus. What does that mean? We need to recognize that bringing people to Jesus is a journey in which we share our faith and our lives.

Sometimes when it comes to helping people encounter Jesus, all we can do is invite them to “come and see.”

Sometimes people will have encounters with God that are miraculous, mysterious, beyond human explanation, but essential for their decision to follow Jesus.

If we are going to be people who pursue God's beauty, people who want to see our magnificent God on display everywhere we go, then we cannot keep the stories of what God has been doing in our lives to ourselves.



## Group Discussion Questions

(30–45 MINUTES)

1. What caught your attention or stood out most to you on the DVD?

### **Encountering Jesus**

2. How did you first encounter Jesus? Where were you? Who were you with? What series of circumstances led to that encounter?

3. Jesus' approach to calling his disciples was revolutionary. Traditionally, disciples made the choice of which rabbi they would follow. But Jesus does the opposite. Instead of waiting for the disciples to find him, Jesus takes the initiative and pursues his followers. Read John 1:35–50 aloud. Which of the disciples' experiences most closely resembles your own experience in deciding to follow Jesus?

### **When You Can't Keep the Good News to Yourself**

4. Philip enthusiastically shares with Nathanael the good news that he has found the Messiah. Rather than share in the excitement, Nathanael asks whether any good thing can come out of Nazareth. The response isn't exactly what Philip hoped for!
  - Have you ever had someone share their faith with you? Describe your response.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Have you ever shared your faith and the response wasn't what you had hoped for? How did you handle the situation?

#### **Notable**

Jesus responds to Nathanael by acknowledging that he's an Israelite in whom there's nothing deceitful or false. The wording of the statement suggests that Nathanael is different from Jacob (before his name changed to Israel) in that he is honest and true.

5. Sometimes those who are the most cynical have the deepest hungers and desires that have gone unmet. Nathanael's response to Philip's news that he's found the Messiah is marked by cynicism.
- What are some specific situations that you've encountered in the last three months that have tempted you to respond with cynicism?
  
  - What do you think is the best way to respond to someone with cynical views of God and Christianity?
6. Are you inviting people on a regular basis, as Philip did, to "come and see" Jesus? Why or why not?
7. What compels or hinders you from sharing your faith?

**Bonus Activity**

The cover of this study bears an image of "The Sword of Orion" from the constellation Orion. To learn more about this image, go online and Google images from the Hubble Telescope as well as this constellation. Thank God for the beauty of creation.

8. Are there some ways you've seen God work to draw people to himself that make you uncomfortable or quietly think, "I wish God *didn't* work that way?" If so, describe. Are there ways in which God works to draw people closer that you love to see? If so, describe.

## **Come and See**

9. Are there any methods, techniques, or conversation starters that you've personally found effective for sharing your faith? If you were to create a "Five Best Practices" list for sharing your faith, what would you place on the list?
  
10. The Gospel of John is written so that people will not only encounter Jesus but believe in Jesus. Read John 20:30–31.
  - From this first lesson, what details, stories, or interactions would lead you to believe in Jesus?
  
  - Have you ever seen someone's life transformed in a beautiful way because they chose to believe in Jesus? If so describe.

Jesus is in the business of drawing people into a beautiful relationship with himself. We have the opportunity to share the good news of who Jesus is and all that he has done and, in the process, to bring people to Jesus so they grow in their faith and knowledge of him.



## Close in Prayer

Ask God to:

- Give you courage to share your faith both in words and actions.
- Provide opportunities to introduce people to Jesus as well as sensitivity to when those moments arrive.
- Make the good news truly *good* news in your life so that it bubbles out of you.



## Jumpstart

To get an insider's look at the Pursuing God series, bonus features, and freebies, as well as join the online discussion, visit [www.pursuinggodbiblestudy.com](http://www.pursuinggodbiblestudy.com).

To prepare for the next group session, read John 4:1–45 and tackle the After-hours personal studies.

### **Bonus Activity**

Take a quick photo! Before you close, take a picture of your group and email it to [info@margaretfleinberg.com](mailto:info@margaretfleinberg.com). Your group could be featured soon on the home page of [www.margaretfleinberg.com](http://www.margaretfleinberg.com).

# Afterhours Personal Studies

*Dive deeper into John's Gospel by engaging in these five personal studies. If you only have time for one, choose Day Five, which will prepare you specifically for the next session.*

## DAY ONE: The Uniqueness of John's Gospel

---

John 1:1–5

All four of the Gospels tell the stories of Jesus in a unique way. Matthew provides a detailed account of Jesus' actions and interactions. Mark's Gospel is short, sweet, and gets straight to the point about Jesus. Luke is written from the perspective of a doctor and businessman. If you want to dive into the miracles of Jesus or learn more about what Jesus thinks of financial issues, study the Gospel of Luke.

Then there's John, an artist who goes beyond the facts about Jesus to communicate the personality, the emotions, the very presence of Christ in history. John's Gospel adds color and vibe and hue to the gospel story. This beautifully written account is lined with distinctive snapshots of Jesus, his teaching, and his heart for our world.

All of the Gospels help people encounter Jesus in different ways. Let's look at the distinct ways each of the four Gospels begins.

1. Read Matthew 1:1–17. As a Jewish disciple of Jesus, Matthew begins by looking at the family tree of Jesus in order to emphasize Jesus as the legitimate King of Israel. What does Matthew's introduction reveal about his purpose for writing? Make a list of three to five words that describe Matthew's writing style (for example: *logical, detailed, in-depth*).

2. Read Mark 1:1–8. Directed toward a Roman audience, Mark uses a completely different method of reaching his audience than Matthew. What does Mark’s introduction reveal about his purpose for writing? Make a list of three to five words that describe Mark’s writing style.

**Quotable**

“The essence of the depth of John’s picture of Jesus is its simplicity. Light, water, bread, seed sown. Jesus is revealed through the immediate, the tangible. He left out the parables of Jesus because, for John, Jesus’ entire life was a parable; a parable of misunderstanding, of pain, of joy.”<sup>2</sup>

—Michael Card

3. Read Luke 1:1–4. Unlike Matthew, Luke traces Jesus’ lineage all the way to Adam. What does Luke’s introduction reveal about his purpose for writing? Make a list of three to five words that describe Luke’s writing style.

**Notable**

John was written significantly later than the other three Gospels. Thus, the author of John’s Gospel would have been aware of the other Gospels (especially Mark), but pointedly chose specific instances and personal interactions with Jesus to express in his Gospel.

4. Read John 1:1–5. Instead of beginning with Adam and the first human, John begins even before then. John paints a breathtakingly beautiful portrait of the reality of God incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. What does John’s introduction reveal about his purpose for writing? Make a list of three to five words that describe John’s writing style.

5. Which of these four approaches to telling the story of Jesus appeal to your own personality and learning style?

#### **Bonus Activity**

*Logos* was a term used by ancient Greek philosophers to refer to a higher power. While these philosophers only theorized that God existed, the Gospel of John uses this term to suggest that God isn't a mere theory; God not only exists but is revealed in Jesus. Spend some time researching *logos* in *Strong's Concordance* under GK 3364.

6. Why is it important to study the stories of Jesus? How has studying the stories of Jesus within the Gospels affected your faith in the past?

Spend some time asking God to whet your appetite to know God even more! Ask God to increase your hunger to study Scripture and celebrate the discoveries you make along the way.

## DAY TWO: Discovering Jesus through Images, Titles, and Roles

John 1

Throughout the first chapter of John, a wide variety of images, titles, and roles are used in order to introduce readers to Jesus. Since John's Gospel is written to a diverse audience, John describes Jesus using beautiful imagery that appeals to a wide audience—Greeks, Romans, Gentiles, and Jews. Jesus came to save all of humanity, not just a particular people group.

1. Read John 1. Use the following chart to write down the images, titles, or roles John uses to describe Jesus.

Scripture	Images, titles, or roles that describe Jesus
John 1:1	<i>Example: Word, logos</i>
John 1:4	
John 1:5, 9	
John 1:14	
John 1:15	
John 1:18	
John 1:29, 36	
John 1:34	
John 1:38	
John 1:41	
John 1:45	
John 1:49	

2. Identifying Jesus as the Word (or Logos), life, and light provides a cosmic perspective of Jesus. Jesus was not only with God in the beginning, but creation did not happen apart from Jesus. Life is found in Jesus, not just through creation, but also through the reconciliation of humanity to God through the person of Jesus.
  - According to this chapter, what role does Jesus play in creation?

- What is the significance of Jesus being incarnate—fully divine and fully human?
- How do you think your relationship with God would be different if Jesus had not been fully human?

**Notable**

Nathanael calls Jesus “the king of Israel” in John 1:49, a term that only appears in the New Testament three times, another of which is also in John’s Gospel: Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12:13). The third mention is in Matthew 27:42.

3. What do the images, titles, and roles reveal about Jesus’ relationship with God? (*Hint*: See John 1:14, 15, 18, 29, 34, 36.)
4. What do the images, titles, and roles reveal about Jesus’ role in relationship to the people of Israel? (*Hint*: See John 1:37, 41, 45, 49.)
5. What do the images, titles, and roles allude to regarding Jesus’ future death and resurrection? (*Hint*: See John 1:29, 36.)

**Notable**

John’s Gospel uses the term *king* sixteen times and almost always refers to Jesus, suggesting the importance of his royalty.

6. Of all the images, titles, and roles for Jesus mentioned in this chapter, which one is most beautiful and meaningful to you? And how is it significant for you right now?

Spend some time in prayer asking God to reveal Jesus to you in a fresh way. Ask God to open up the understanding of your mind and heart to comprehend and embrace the reality of Jesus in your life during the upcoming weeks.

### DAY THREE: Creating and Cleansing

John 2

After introducing us to Jesus, John highlights seven miracles called “signs” which point to Jesus as the much-anticipated Messiah. The first of these signs is a somewhat startling event. Jesus unexpectedly turns water into wine for a wedding celebration. The dramatic and prophetic act is meant to demonstrate Jesus’ divine power and lead the reader to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. The Greek word for the “good” wine Jesus creates is *kalos*, which can be translated “beautiful.” Thus the miracle Jesus performs is creating beautiful wine.

1. Read John 2:1 – 12. The passage begins with the words, “On the third day.” Three days seems to be significant throughout Scripture. According to the following passages, what other events happened on the third day?

Scripture	On the third day ...
Genesis 22:1 – 12	<i>Example: Abraham journeys to Mount Moriah to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. On the third day, Abraham arrives only to have an angel stop him before he can kill his son.</i>
Genesis 40:12 – 23	

Scripture	On the third day ...
Hosea 6:1 – 2	
John 2:19	
1 Corinthians 15:3–8	

Reflecting on these passages, what does the third day represent or symbolize to you?

Weddings in ancient culture lasted anywhere from three days to an entire week. Often the entire community—including friends and family—were involved in the celebration, placing a considerable burden on the host family. Jesus is attending a wedding in the small town of Cana in Galilee along with his disciples when his mother announces the hosts are out of wine.

Running out of wine in ancient culture meant public disgrace and shame. Jesus’ brusque response to the immediate need for wine suggests he isn’t overly concerned with the family’s social faux pas. Rather than call his mother by her first name, he asks, “Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come.” It is worth noting that throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus’ mother is never identified as Mary.

Mary doesn’t waiver. She has no idea what her son will do, but she trusts he will do what’s best. Mary tells the servants to do whatever Jesus instructs.

**Notable**

Though debated, some scholars suggest that running out of wine at the wedding may be symbolic of the barrenness of Judaism. They also believe the six ceremonial stone jars, rather than having the perfect number of seven, point to the imperfection and inadequacy of the Jewish law. Jesus' provision of choice wine suggests that his provision is superior to the law.

Jesus instructs the servants to fill six stone ceremonial jars totaling somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons with water. Then he asks that some be taken to the master of the banquet who has no idea of the sequence of events that led to the tasting. Like a sommelier, the master comments on the high quality of the wine and asks why they've saved the beautiful wine for now, when it should have been served first.

2. What does this story, the first of seven signs, reveal to you about Jesus?

What within this story persuades you that Jesus is the incarnate Word of God?

After the first sign or miracle of turning water into wine, Jesus, his mother and brothers, and the disciples travel to Capernaum. With Passover approaching, Jesus makes the first of three journeys to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55).

Traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate a feast was not uncommon. Jews made an annual pilgrimage for three different feasts: Passover, Tabernacles, and Weeks (Pentecost). Of all of the feasts, Passover was considered the most important. The feast celebrates God's deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. When the death angel passed over the homes, those whose doorposts had been marked with blood had their firstborn child's life spared. (For a deeper understanding of the Passover, read Exodus 12.)

Upon arrival in the temple, Jesus encounters people selling oxen, sheep, and doves as well as exchanging money. The practices were not unusual; in fact, the pilgrims needed them. Temple practices required animals for sacrifice and it was often impractical to insist people travel long distances with their animals. In addition, the required temple tax had to be paid in the local currency. While many of the travelers probably appreciated their services, Jesus has a different response.

The focus of John's Gospel isn't to create a chronological account of Jesus' life so much as it is proclaiming the life and ministry of Christ and inviting people to believe in him. While the other Gospels feature the story of Jesus overturning the tables at the close of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46), John places it at the beginning.

3. Read John 2:13–25. While salespeople and moneychangers had their place in serving the travelers to Jerusalem, they should have been conducting their business *near* the temple rather than *in* the temple. Their disregard shows contempt and irreverence for God. Instead of *helping* people worship God, their presence inside the temple *impeded* worship. How do you think onlookers responded to Jesus' reaction in the temple?
  
4. How does the image of Jesus in verses 15–16 compare and contrast with popular images of Jesus in our culture?

How does the image of Jesus in verses 15–16 compare and contrast with your own understanding and image of Jesus?

**Notable**

The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins with the Passover meal and continues for seven days (Exodus 12:18–19). In order to prepare for the feast, Jews search their homes and remove any bits of leavened bread. This cleansing of the house is essential to preparing for the Passover. This same image of cleansing is demonstrated in Jesus' actions in the temple.

Following Jesus' passionate display of cleansing the temple, the disciples reflect on Psalm 69:9. Some of the Jews watching the scene unfold ask for a sign. Jesus says that if they destroy the temple, then in three days he will raise it up (John 2:19). Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus will say many things that are misunderstood or misinterpreted.

5. What do you think Jesus' cleansing of the temple as well as the promise to rebuild the temple symbolizes?

How do Jesus' statements set the stage for his death and resurrection?

6. What areas of your heart do you feel need to be cleansed? What do you think Jesus would drive out of your heart?

Spend some time asking God if there are any areas of your life in which you need to ask forgiveness and make a change. Ask God to cleanse you from the inside out.

While the wedding at Cana offered a miraculous sign of Jesus' divinity and the overturning of the tables in the temple provided a prophetic sign, John's Gospel now offers us another glimpse of Jesus and his mission.

While still in Jerusalem, Jesus is visited by Nicodemus, a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council composed of Sadducees and Pharisees. Since John's Gospel has already revealed Jesus as the light (John 1:5), it's no small detail that Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night and engages in a conversation that changes his life forever. The only other person to approach Jesus at night is Judas Iscariot (John 13:30).

1. Read John 3. Much speculation surrounds Nicodemus' motives and character. The fact that he visits Jesus at night suggests Nicodemus is afraid of being seen by other religious leaders. What title does Nicodemus use to address Jesus? What does this reveal about Nicodemus' attitude and respect toward Jesus? (*Hint*: See John 3:2.)
  
2. What are Nicodemus' main concerns?

What does Nicodemus' response to Jesus reveal about his own spiritual life? (*Hint*: See John 3:2, 4, 9.)

3. How do you navigate situations that you find yourself in where the spiritual image you want to project is at odds with what's most true about you?

John hinted at this concept of rebirth or being born from above in the first chapter when he wrote, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right

to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12–13 NASB).

Yet this was not the only concept that was hard for Nicodemus to grasp. The idea that God loves the whole world must have been challenging as well. Jews rarely acknowledged God loving the world, only Israel. The idea that everyone is invited to believe and become a transformed child of God, empowered by the Spirit, through being born from above probably challenged Nicodemus on several levels.

**Notable**

Jesus’ reference to Moses lifting up the snake in the desert (John 3:14–15) can be found in Numbers 21:4–9 and highlights the need for Christ’s gift of salvation.

4. Why do you think the concept of being born from above is so hard for people to grasp even today? In your own words, how would you explain being born from above or born again to someone?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. According to John 3, what happens to those who choose to believe in Jesus? (*Hint*: See vv. 16, 18, 36.)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Like Nicodemus, are there any areas or situations in your life where you struggle to believe God? What makes it especially difficult for you to trust God in this area of your life?

Spend some time prayerfully acknowledging any areas of your life where you struggle to believe God. Ask God to give you the faith to believe.

Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding celebration, made a scene with moneychangers in the temple, and engaged in a nighttime theological conversation with a leading rabbi. Now John describes Jesus' encounter with a morally questionable woman at high noon at a well in Samaria. This is an unlikely meeting for multiple reasons, but John uses it to paint a beautiful portrait of redemption.

Strictly devout Jews avoided Samaria at all costs—especially when traveling from Jerusalem to Galilee—by taking the longer route around the region. Yet Jesus doesn't go around Samaria on his journey; he goes straight for it! The Scripture notes that Jesus “had to go” to Samaria (John 4:4), implying a divine leading to this region that was considered detestable by the Jews. Once he arrives, Jesus engages in a conversation with a woman who is viewed as detestable even by the Samaritans.

1. Read John 4:1–26. How does Jesus' introductory statement, “Give Me a drink” (John 4:7 NASB), set the scene for the conversation that follows?

**Quotable**

“When Jesus talks to her and begins to speak about personal things, such as her many ex-husbands, she changes the subject to something controversial: the differences in worship between her people and the Jews. The goal isn't to gain more knowledge as much as to throw the Rabbi off her trail. It's a smoke screen to change subjects once Jesus talks about her life.”<sup>3</sup>

—Bill McCready

2. How does the woman respond when Jesus tells her she has had five husbands and the man she is living with is not her husband (John 4:17–18)?

How might you have responded if Jesus, a stranger, named your past and current sins?

3. Read John 4:27–38. What parallels do you see between the disciples’ misunderstanding of food (4:31–33) and the woman’s misunderstanding of water (4:15)?

How does Jesus leverage her misunderstandings to reveal more about himself and God?

**Notable**

The Samaritans acknowledge Jesus as the “Savior of the world” (John 4:42). The only other time this expression occurs in the New Testament is 1 John 4:14. The title suggests that Jesus is the one who delivers and saves from disaster. The reference to “world” suggests that Jesus didn’t just come for one people group but for all people everywhere.

4. Read John 4:39–45. Why do you think the woman’s fellow villagers listened to her when she returned from the well and told them about Jesus?
5. The Samaritan woman’s story is a reminder that just because you may have a tarnished history in your community doesn’t mean you can’t share what God has done in your life. Sometimes the story will actually have

a bigger effect, not a lesser one. The Samaritan woman used her story (about Jesus knowing her as well as her failures and sins) to tell others about Christ. What is the one thing in your life for which you are most grateful for God's forgiveness and redemption?

6. Rather than hiding your past sins, your past failures—the things for which you have received God's forgiveness—there may be something you can share with others as a way of telling the story of what God has done for you. Who in your life might benefit from hearing your story?

Spend some time reflecting on the work God has done in your life. How can you be more intentional about reaching out and responding to God's presence in your life? Where are the modern-day wells in your community where you can go to engage people and share the love of Christ with them? Prayerfully consider how God may want you to engage others like the Samaritan woman.

