

FROM THE DESK OF JOHN HIMMELBERGER

John 4

From Someone Else's Story to Knowing Him Yourself

Living water, true worship, and faith that takes Jesus at His word

Introduction

John 3 brought us into a nighttime conversation with Nicodemus, a religious leader who needed to discover what it meant to be born from above. John 4 brings us into a daytime conversation with a Samaritan woman whose encounter with Jesus changes the conversation of an entire community.

Their circumstances are different, but both encounter a Jesus who invites them beyond their present understanding into life with Him.

The woman begins by seeing a Jewish stranger. As the conversation unfolds, she recognizes a prophet and considers whether He could be the Messiah. Her testimony then brings others to Jesus, where they discover Him for themselves.

The chapter closes with an official who believes Jesus' word and begins his journey home before seeing evidence that his son has been healed.

Throughout John 4, the invitation is personal: receive what Jesus offers, let Him speak into your actual life, and respond to Him.

The Lens: Firsthand Faith

We are reading through the lens of moving from secondhand belief into firsthand relationship with Jesus.

Someone else's testimony can introduce us to Him. Teaching can help us recognize Him. Scripture reveals who He is. But these invitations call us into our own response of receiving, trusting, and following.

Firsthand faith does not mean faith without teachers or community. It means that what we receive through others becomes personally rooted in Jesus.

Central Question: Where is Jesus inviting me to move from what I have heard about Him into personally receiving and trusting Him?

Key Truth: Jesus meets us in the reality of our lives, offers life we cannot produce for ourselves, and invites us to know Him personally.

1. Jesus Crosses the Boundary

Scripture: John 4:1-9, AMP

Jesus leaves Judea and travels toward Galilee through Samaria. Tired from the journey, He sits beside Jacob's well and asks a Samaritan woman for a drink.

The woman immediately recognizes the boundary He is crossing. Jews and Samaritans had a deeply divided relationship, and His request surprises her.

Jesus begins with an ordinary human need. He is tired. He is thirsty. He asks for help.

Before the conversation becomes a revelation of living water, it is a personal interaction between two people at a well.

Deeper Insight: John says Jesus had to pass through Samaria. The encounter that follows helps us see this journey within His mission, although the verse itself does not explain every reason for His route.

Jesus does not allow an inherited division to prevent a meaningful conversation. The woman's background does not place her outside His willingness to engage.

For firsthand faith, this matters: we may inherit assumptions about where God works and whom He welcomes. Meeting Jesus can expose how narrow those assumptions have become.

Gold Nugget: *An inherited boundary does not determine the limits of Jesus' invitation.*

2. Knowing the Gift Changes the Conversation

Scripture: John 4:10-15, AMP

Jesus shifts the conversation from the water He requests to the living water He offers.

The woman sees practical obstacles. He has no drawing equipment, and the well is deep. She asks whether He is greater than Jacob, who gave them the well.

Her questions are understandable. She is interpreting His offer through what she already knows.

Jesus explains that ordinary water satisfies thirst temporarily. The water He gives becomes an inner spring leading to eternal life.

She asks for this water, although her response still focuses on avoiding thirst and repeated trips to the well.

Deeper Insight: Her understanding is incomplete, but Jesus continues the conversation.

We often begin in a similar place. We recognize a need and ask Jesus to address it within the framework we already have. He may use that need to introduce us to a gift larger than we understood.

The promise concerns the life He gives. It does not mean believers cease to experience emotional longing, physical needs, or difficult seasons.

Firsthand faith grows as we learn who is speaking and what He is offering.

Gold Nugget: *Jesus can begin with the need we recognize and lead us into the life we have yet to understand.*

3. Being Known Opens the Door to Honesty

Scripture: John 4:16-19, AMP

Jesus asks the woman to call her husband. She answers that she has no husband.

He affirms the truth of her answer and reveals His knowledge of her circumstances: she has had five husbands, and the man she now has is not her husband.

She recognizes that He is a prophet.

The conversation has moved from water to her actual life. She discovers that the One offering this gift already knows her story.

Deeper Insight: The passage does not tell us why her previous marriages ended. It also does not explicitly say she came at noon because the community had rejected her. We can take seriously what Jesus reveals without filling in the details John leaves unstated.

What we can see is that Jesus knows her circumstances and continues to engage her.

Being known by Him does not end the invitation. His knowledge brings truth into the conversation.

Firsthand relationship includes allowing Jesus access to the parts of our lives we might otherwise keep outside religious conversation.

Gold Nugget: *You do not have to become unknown to be welcomed by Jesus.*

4. Worship Becomes Personal

Scripture: John 4:20-24, AMP

The woman raises a longstanding disagreement: her people worship on their mountain, while the Jews identify Jerusalem as the proper place.

Jesus takes the question seriously. He acknowledges the place of the Jews in the unfolding story of salvation, then announces an approaching hour when worship will no longer be defined by either location.

The Father seeks worshipers who worship in spirit and truth.

The conversation moves beyond choosing the correct mountain into the nature of relationship with God.

Deeper Insight: Jesus does not suggest that truth is irrelevant or that every understanding of God is interchangeable. He speaks plainly about what the Samaritans and Jews know.

Yet He announces a change that neither group can reduce to ownership of a sacred location.

Worship in spirit and truth involves our inward response to God in keeping with who He truly is. It cannot be reduced to geography, inherited custom, or outward participation.

The Father seeks worshipers. That gives worship a deeply relational center: we are responding to the God who desires us to know Him.

Gold Nugget: *True worship brings your actual heart into relationship with the actual God.*

5. Jesus Makes Himself Known

Scripture: John 4:25-26, AMP

The woman says she knows the Messiah is coming and that He will explain these things. Jesus identifies Himself as the One speaking with her.

Someone she expected in the future is present in the conversation.

Her inherited expectation has brought her to a moment of personal encounter.

Deeper Insight: It is possible to know the language of expectation while struggling to recognize God's invitation in the present.

We can speak about what Jesus will do someday and overlook what He is asking us to receive today.

Here, Jesus makes Himself known directly. The woman does not arrive at recognition through religious status or an impressive background. She receives His self-disclosure in an ordinary setting.

Firsthand faith depends on who Jesus reveals Himself to be, rather than on our ability to manufacture a significant experience.

Gold Nugget: *The One you have heard about invites you to recognize Him personally.*

6. An Honest Invitation Becomes a Witness

Scripture: John 4:27-30, AMP

The disciples return and are surprised to find Jesus speaking with the woman.

She leaves her water jar, goes into town, and invites people to come see the man who knew her story. She asks whether He could be the Christ.

The people leave the town and come toward Jesus.

Her witness grows directly out of the conversation she has just experienced.

Deeper Insight: She does not offer a complete theological explanation. She shares what happened and invites others to investigate.

Her question leaves room for them to respond. She points them toward Jesus, where they can hear Him themselves.

John mentions the abandoned water jar, but does not explain all its significance. At minimum, the detail shows that her immediate attention has shifted toward telling others about Him.

Firsthand faith can produce a simple, credible witness: this is what I encountered; come and see.

Gold Nugget: *You can invite someone to Jesus before you know how to explain everything.*

7. Doing the Father's Will Nourishes Jesus

Scripture: John 4:31-34, AMP

The disciples urge Jesus to eat. He tells them He has food they do not know about.

They wonder whether someone has brought Him a meal.

Jesus explains that His food is to do the will of the One who sent Him and accomplish His work.

The disciples are focused on a legitimate physical need. Jesus uses their concern to reveal another dimension of what sustains Him.

Deeper Insight: Earlier, the woman understood living water through ordinary water. Now the disciples understand Jesus' words about food through ordinary food.

Both conversations show how easily we interpret spiritual language within familiar categories.

Jesus reveals His deep commitment to the Father's purpose. His obedience flows from that relationship.

For us, this passage invites attention to the meaning and nourishment found in participating in God's work. It does not erase our need for food, rest, or appropriate limits.

Gold Nugget: *Life with the Father includes the joy of participating in what He is doing.*

8. Lift Your Eyes to the Harvest

Scripture: John 4:35-38, AMP

Jesus tells the disciples to look at the fields and recognize that they are ready for harvest.

He describes sowers and reapers sharing in the joy of gathering fruit for eternal life. The disciples will participate in work that others have already begun.

As this teaching unfolds, the people from the Samaritan town are coming toward Him.

The setting gives His words an immediate human significance.

Deeper Insight: The disciples may see an interruption, an unexpected conversation, or an unfamiliar community. Jesus directs their attention toward opportunity.

His words also challenge the idea that any one person owns the whole process. Some sow. Others reap. Both can rejoice.

Firsthand faith opens our eyes to people and to God's work beyond our own contribution. We can participate faithfully without needing to be the beginning, center, and conclusion of someone else's story.

Gold Nugget: *You can rejoice in the harvest without claiming ownership of the field.*

9. Their Faith Becomes Their Own

Scripture: John 4:39-42, AMP

Many Samaritans initially believe because of the woman's testimony.

They then ask Jesus to stay, and He remains with them for two days. Many more believe because they hear His word.

They tell the woman that their conviction now rests on hearing Him themselves. They recognize Him as the Savior of the world.

This is the chapter's clearest picture of movement from secondhand testimony into firsthand faith.

Deeper Insight: Their personal encounter does not diminish her testimony. It fulfills the purpose of her invitation.

She helped bring them to Jesus. He became the foundation of their confidence.

Teaching, testimony, and community serve us well when they help us hear and respond to Him. A mature witness is glad when people develop a relationship with Jesus that reaches beyond dependence on the witness.

The Samaritans also arrive at a recognition larger than their own community: He is the Savior of the world.

Gold Nugget: *A fruitful testimony helps people come to know the One you are talking about.*

10. Trust Begins Before the Confirmation Arrives

Scripture: John 4:43-54, AMP

Back in Galilee, an official comes to Jesus because his son is seriously ill in Capernaum. He asks Jesus to come and heal him.

Jesus addresses the dependence on signs and wonders around Him. The official continues to plead for his child.

Jesus tells him to go home because his son lives.

The man believes Jesus' word and leaves. On the journey, his servants meet him with news of the boy's recovery. He discovers that the improvement began at the time Jesus spoke.

He and his household believe.

Deeper Insight: The official arrives with an urgent need and a particular expectation: Jesus must come with him.

Jesus responds in a way that requires the man to trust His word without His physical presence.

The man begins walking home before receiving confirmation. When the news arrives, it deepens his understanding of what Jesus has done.

This account reveals Jesus' authority and the official's trust. It does not establish a formula guaranteeing that every illness will resolve in the same way.

The invitation is to trust Jesus Himself, including when our response must begin before we can see the outcome.

Gold Nugget: *Faith can take the next step before confirmation meets you on the road.*

Bringing It Together

John 4 brings together three movements of firsthand faith:

The woman receives a personal invitation. Jesus meets her, knows her circumstances, and reveals Himself.

The community hears Him for themselves. Her testimony opens the door, and His word becomes the foundation of their belief.

The official acts on His word. He begins the journey home before seeing the evidence. Across these encounters, Jesus crosses boundaries, deepens understanding, and invites a response.

The chapter also broadens our vision of who can receive Him. A Samaritan woman, her community, and an official with a desperate family need all become part of the story.

Secondhand Faith and Firsthand Faith

Area	Secondhand faith can remain at...	Firsthand faith grows into...
Knowledge of Jesus	What others have said about Him	Personally receiving and responding to His word
Worship	Inherited places and practices	Worship in spirit and truth
Our personal story	Keeping difficult realities outside the conversation	Allowing Jesus to meet us truthfully
Testimony	Depending continually on another person’s encounter	Letting their testimony lead us to Him
God’s work	Recognizing only familiar opportunities	Seeing people and opportunities through Jesus’ invitation
Trust	Waiting for visible confirmation before responding	Taking a faithful step on the strength of His word

Discussion and Deep Activation

1. Where did your faith begin through someone else's testimony?

How has that introduction developed into your own relationship with Jesus?

2. What boundary in this chapter challenges you most?

Is there someone you have difficulty imagining as a person Jesus would willingly engage?

3. What are you asking Jesus for right now?

Could He be inviting you into something deeper through that need?

4. How do you respond to being fully known by Him?

What part of your actual life needs to become an honest conversation with Jesus?

5. What shapes your understanding of worship?

How does Jesus' teaching about spirit and truth deepen it?

6. Where might Jesus be asking you to lift your eyes?

Consider a person, relationship, or ordinary setting you have overlooked.

7. What could a simple, honest testimony sound like for you?

Describe something Jesus has done without feeling responsible to explain everything.

8. What faithful step is available before you have full confirmation?

Name a response grounded in Jesus' word rather than pressure to create an outcome.

Declaration

Jesus, You know my story, and You invite me to know You.

I receive the life You give. Teach me to worship the Father in spirit and truth, with an honest heart.

Let the testimonies of others lead me into a relationship with You that becomes personally rooted and lived.

Open my eyes to the people You are drawing. Help me participate joyfully in Your work and point others toward You.

As I hear Your word, teach me to trust You and take the next faithful step.

Final Thought

The woman's testimony brought the town to Jesus. His presence and His word gave them their own reason to believe.

That is a beautiful purpose for our teaching, conversations, and witness: helping people come close enough to hear Him themselves.

What have I heard about Jesus that He is inviting me to personally receive, trust, and live?