

What would change in your life if, when you looked at people, you saw them the way Jesus did, if you could see not only what's on the surface—their height, their hair color, their clothes—but also their worth, their value, the significance of their story?

The NFL draft is coming up in two weeks. That's the day that coaches and staff in the NFL, after evaluating all the top college players in the country, choose which ones they want on their team. They pay experts millions of dollars to evaluate the talent and choose the best ones. Twenty-six years ago, there was a quarterback in the draft. All the experts looked at him, watched his game tape, sized him up, interviewed him and asked him questions, and this was their analysis. These are direct quotes from their notes:

- Poor build. Very skinny.
- Lacks physical stature and strength.
- Lacks mobility and agility—one of the slowest quarterbacks we have ever seen.
- Lacks a strong arm; cannot drive the ball downfield.

When they looked at him, no one saw value in him, so they let him fall in the draft, and chose 198 players ahead of him. That player was Tom Brady, the winningest quarterback of all time, who went on to claim a record seven Super Bowl championships. All the experts looked at him, but none of them really saw him and understood his worth.

How often do we do that in our lives? Forbes research suggests that it takes a human being less than seven seconds to form a first impression of another person. In that blink of an eye, we've already decided most of what we think we need to know. Harvard research shows that after we have categorized someone in our minds, it's almost impossible to reassign their category, because everything we see from that point forward becomes filtered through confirmation bias or dismissed as outlier examples. If we are going to see people the way Jesus sees people, we are going to need help from Jesus.

We are kicking off a new series this week called “For the One” about living on a mission and loving like Jesus. Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). We have been called to live and love like Jesus, and to do that, we must learn to see people the way Jesus sees them. One of the best examples of the vision of Jesus is the way he saw and responded to the woman at the well. We've already heard the story read to us; now I want to point out five qualities of his interactions with her. These are qualities that we can ask God to develop in our lives so that we can see people and love people like Jesus.

*Jesus didn't rush through life; he slowed down*

John 4:4 tells us, “Jesus had to go through Samaria.” Because Jews usually took the long way around Samaria, it’s natural to assume he was in a hurry if he had to take the short cut. Even though Jesus had somewhere to be, he wasn’t in so much of a rush to speed past this person! The Bible says that when Jesus was tired from the journey, he “sat down by the well” (John 4:6). When he sat down to take a breather, he didn’t pull out his phone and bury his face in his emails. He didn’t start catching up on his texts and scroll on Instagram. He was fully present in his environment, which allowed him to make a connection with the person who was next to him. Because he slowed down and gave attention to a person, not a thing, it changed her life and her eternity.

Let me ask you a probing question: Are you able to love people well at your current speed of life? Jesus didn’t rush through life, he slowed down. If we want to live like him and love like him, we must slow down, too. If the literal savior of the world who was on a mission from God the Father to redeem all humanity could slow down and create space to have an unhurried conversation with someone, we should be able to create that margin as well.

### *Jesus didn’t label; he loved*

In every culture across the globe, people specialize in categorizing others and determining their desirability and interactability. Based on things like looks, wealth, race, class, and social standing, we, oftentimes unconsciously, assess people’s “value” and then label them accordingly. Dozens of studies have shown that more "desirable" people are hired more frequently, paid more competitively, and given preferential treatment in the classroom by their teachers, in the courtroom by a judge and jury, and even in the hospital by doctors and nurses. If people wear the labels we like, we draw close. If they don’t, we keep our distance. That’s how the world works, but that’s not how Jesus works.

This person at the well with Jesus wore labels that would have kept any other Jewish rabbi a mile away. First, she was a woman—in the ancient world, many women were treated as property, as second class citizens, as too unintelligent to have a meaningful conversation with, or as a sexual temptation that needed to be avoided. She was also a Samaritan. The Jews and the Samaritans were locked in a centuries-old family feud, sparked when the Samaritans intermarried with foreigners and established a competing temple on Mount Gerizim. To a first-century Jew, Samaritans were ethically compromised heretics. Jews and Samaritans were like the Hatfields and the McCoys, or the Capulets and the Montagues. Getting too close to a Samaritan would literally make a Jew ritually impure. But it wasn’t just that she was a woman and a Samaritan. She was a woman who had been married five times, and who was presently living with a man who was not her husband. In a culture that prized chastity and purity, she would have been labeled as immoral and promiscuous. There was a reason

she was at the well in the middle of the day, all by herself—no one else wanted to be around her.

Everyone else would have labeled this woman and kept their distance, but rather than labeling her, Jesus loved her. He didn't look at her race, her bank account, her social standing, her sin, or her past. He looked at her. He saw her. He was compelled with love for her. What might happen if we responded the same way? Every person you've ever looked at, interacted with, passed by on the street, walked past at the grocery store, is someone made in the image of God, someone for whom Jesus died. Jesus' final command wasn't for us to label others; it was to love others.

### *Jesus didn't keep a comfortable distance; he initiated*

When Jesus was at the well with this woman, he didn't just think nice things in his heart about her, smile and nod, and move on with his day; he started a conversation with her! If we want to live on mission like Jesus, we must have the courage to strike up a conversation. This can be hard, especially for introverts or people from the North. Some of you would rather have a root canal without pain medication than start a conversation with a stranger at the gas station. I get it. But can I tell you something—one of God's favorite places for you to be is outside of your comfort zone. That's where God does some of his greatest work! You don't have to put too much pressure on yourself. Trust that God is already at work in their heart—he's just inviting you to show up. Begin simply with, "Hi? What's your name?"

Jesus wasn't awkward about the conversation. He simply said: "Will you give me a drink?" Six strategic words that leveled the playing field. Jesus made himself vulnerable and shared that he had a need. He asked for help. Jesus didn't begin with a presumptuous posture of "I have something you need." He began with humility: "I have a need. Would you help me?" Jesus initiated a conversation.

### *Jesus didn't keep things on the surface; he went deeper*

Jesus began his interaction by simply asking for a drink of water, but after he initiated the conversation, in no time he started talking about the most important things of life. He said to her, "If you knew who I was, you would have asked me for water." She was confused. "Why would I ask you for water? You don't have a bucket to get it out of the well with!" Jesus said, "I have living water! If you drink it, you will never thirst again." Of course, Jesus isn't talking about the water you can get from a well; he's talking about a relationship with God that can quench the thirst of your soul. He's talking about the longing inside all of us for something deeper, something greater, something transcendent. He's talking about the purpose of life

and eternal life. Jesus is speaking to her deepest longings. CS Lewis said, “If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.” Jesus named that longing inside her for more which can only be found through a relationship with God. Jesus is the bridge, sent from heaven, to make a relationship with God possible.

Jesus took the conversation from the surface to the depths. We are great at iceberg observations. Ten percent of an iceberg is visible from the surface, while 90% is under the water. Jesus knew how to start at the surface and then go beneath the surface *without being strange*. He didn't say, “It's nice that it's finally getting warm outside. Speaking of heating up—did you know hell is forever?” That's not the iceberg method; that's the Titanic method. The best way I've learned to do this has three simple elements:

- Shared humanity—Offer a brief glimpse beneath the surface of your own life.
- Redemptive focus—Share how Jesus has been like living water to you.
- Gospel invitation—Ask if they are open to talking more.

Here are some examples of that method in action.

- When I was new in town, I found it really challenging at first. I found a great church where I was able to grow in my faith and build incredible community. If you're interested, I'd love it if you came to church with me sometime.
- My parents split up when I was young and it led to a lot of emotional pain and baggage. Years later, I learned that God is my heavenly father, and it is his love that defines my identity. From where do you receive your sense of identity?
- When a person took advantage of me and hurt me, I carried anger around for years. I couldn't get over it. With God's help, I was finally able not only to let it go, but to truly forgive them. Do you think it's possible for God to give you the ability to forgive the person in your life?

Shared humanity. Redemptive focus. Gospel invitation. The attention is only on you for a moment, then the spotlight turns to God's grace, and an invitation is made to see if they are willing to take it deeper. Sometimes they aren't. Don't force it. Sometimes they are, and that's when a sacred space opens. You might be sitting at the ball field at your kid's game, or in the lunchroom at work, or in the driveway talking to a neighbor, but those moments may become the hinge on which a person's eternity swings.

*Jesus didn't avoid the truth; he spoke it in love*

One thing that allows those deeper conversations to make a difference is when, instead of just listening, or just asking questions, or always agreeing, you find the appropriate way to speak the truth, and to do it in love. That's what we see with Jesus in this conversation. When Jesus took the conversation with this woman deeper, she tried to steer the conversation in a different direction, a less challenging direction. Jesus kept coming back to the truth, in a loving way.

- She said, "I have no husband,"
- Jesus said, "You have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband."

Jesus is not condemning or shaming her for this but calling it for what it is. "The way you've been living your life isn't working. The well you've been going to is dry. You've been searching for answers, trying to satisfy the craving of your soul with something that isn't working." Jesus is direct, but there is no healing in hiding. The truth sets people free. Jesus spoke the truth!

- She said, "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but Jews claim we must in Jerusalem."
- Jesus said, "A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth."

Jesus didn't say, "Everyone has a right to believe whatever they want. No one really knows for sure." He said, "You are focused on the entirely wrong conversation. What God cares about most is not *where* you worship him, but *how* you worship him—in spirit and in truth."

- She said, "I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."
- Jesus said, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

In other words, she was saying, "Maybe at some point in the future God, will make things clear and I'll know the answer then." Then Jesus said, "The answer is standing right in front of you. Here. Now. Today! If you want to, you can respond!"

Each time Jesus clearly stated the truth. No yelling. No condemning. No arguing. The truth, spoken in love. Many people today are good at love without truth, but that's hollow. Cotton candy might taste good for a second, but it has no substance, and everyone knows it. Others today are good at truth without love, but that's harsh. If you go see a doctor and on the first visit the initial words that come out of her mouth are, "You are seriously obese. If you don't lose weight, you're going to die soon," it could be true, but you're never going to want to see

that doctor again. Jesus didn't settle for sentimentality or brutality; he spoke the truth with love. That offers us life changing hope.

Because Jesus saw this woman in a way no one else saw her, she was ultimately open to receiving the love of God. She went into town and told everyone she could find, "Come to the well with me! I met a man who told me everything I ever did. I think he's the Messiah!" They rushed to Jesus. They pleaded with him to stay with them a few more days, so he did, and "Many more became believers" (John 4:41). Once they did, "They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world'" (John 4:42). Her life was changed, then an entire village was changed, and it all started because of the way Jesus saw people. The way Jesus saw this woman is the way Jesus sees you and it's the way he wants you to learn to see everyone else as well.

#### **Text of John 4:1-26**

1 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John— 2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. 3 So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

4 Now he had to go through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

13 Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

15 The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

16 He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

17 “I have no husband,” she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

19 “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

21 “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

25 The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

26 Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”