

Break the Chains Bible Study Session 3 Just a Sip

by Joyce Anderson-Reed

When I went to the International Christian Conference on Prostitution (ICCP) in 2006, I was overwhelmed mentally, emotionally, and spiritually by the stories I heard and the information I received. I came away filled with anguish over the issue of human trafficking and slavery. In the three years since that first immersion, I have exposed myself to more and more information on this topic: books, magazine articles, internet research, personal interviews with survivors, and interviews with those who minister in this arena. The terrain is vast. I often feel lost as I try to navigate through the pain and terror to the beacons of hope, to the discernment I am seeking of how God wants me to integrate all of this with my own life journey.

And that's when God reminds me, "Just a sip." You don't need to gulp it all down at once. Just a sip. As your soul becomes parched by this world's evil, take a sip of my living water. Let it trickle down your throat. Let it permeate each and every cell—each and every wish of your heart, into places where dreams need to be reborn, traumas healed, hope restored. And as you sip, Jesus will sit beside you, look you straight in the eye, and lovingly challenge you not only to transform yourself, but also to transform your community...from the well that never will run dry.

SCRIPTURE: Read John 4:4-42.

THE BIBLICAL STORY

The story of the Samaritan woman, or the "Woman at the Well," is a familiar one to most of us. It is one of the rare places in the Bible where almost an entire chapter is devoted to a snapshot of one woman's life. This is a woman with multiple layers, and Jesus takes the time to uncover them one by one.

In verse 9 we learn that she is a Samaritan. The Samaritans and the Jews got along like dogs and cats. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be of mixed blood. They also felt that they mixed the sacred Scriptures with the theology of surrounding cults. The Jews even went so far as to associate the Samaritans with the Devil. And if a Jew truly wanted to insult you, or curse you, he or she would call you a "Samaritan."

Nevertheless, Jesus talked with this woman who came to draw water from the well.

In verse 18, we learn from her conversation with Jesus that she is a woman that has had many relationships. She has had five spouses, and the man she lives with now is not her husband. Now maybe she married young, at the age of 12 or 13, and in this manner survived some of her subsequent husbands. However, by man #6, there is the inference that she has a problem maintaining a committed relationship. She has a stained reputation within her community. How do we know this? *Because she came to draw water in the middle of the day, and she came alone.* Normally, the women of the village would gather to draw water early in the morning, or later in the evening, during the coolest parts of the day. It would be a time to talk and catch up on each other's lives as you waited your turn to draw water. But the fact is that this Samaritan woman came alone, to draw water in the middle of the day—she was a pariah among her people. Rejected. An outcast.

Nevertheless, Jesus talked with her when she came to draw water from the well.

We also learn from the text that she was a curious woman. She engaged Jesus with questions as soon as he began a conversation with her, in spite of the fact that he was a man, a Jew, and a rabbi—all facts that should have put an instant wall between them. She has no hesitation about talking with him. She was obviously comfortable in the company of men. And her answers tell us that she was not only curious, but also intelligent. She didn't flee from a conversation about theology. In a culture where women were not educated and were prohibited from some of the religious rituals, this was significant. This woman was

thirsting for God. She might have been an outcast in her village, but she knew which themes were central to life. She was a rare and exceptional woman for her time.

Nevertheless, Jesus talked with her when she came to draw water from the well.

The story tells us that Jesus and the woman met at Jacob's well, a traditional symbol for both the Samaritans and the Jews. It was an oasis, it was life, in the middle of an arid desert. It was a place of community where tired travelers stopped. There was nothing unusual about Jesus, a tired traveler, stopping and asking a Samaritan for a drink of water. But, as we mentioned earlier, to fully appreciate this story, we must realize how extraordinary this conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman truly was. *To initiate a conversation with her, Jesus crossed over the lines of race, sex, theology, and social customs of his day.* Jesus will overcome any and all obstacles to have a face-to-face conversation! And notice that although Jesus begins a conversation with her about very ordinary water, he quickly changes the conversation to living water, the way to salvation.

He told her that this normal water was not going to quench her thirst in a decisive manner—that normal water would not satisfy the most profound needs, the deepest desires, or goals of her life. Jesus called her to recognize that some dimensions of her present life were not where God wanted her to be. Jesus pushed her to a more profound level of understanding: that living water, bubbling water, running water that comes from God is what would give her life.

He wanted her to know the fountain of life. He was saying to her, "Look, you can taste this normal water from Jacob's well, the well of tradition, but it won't give you the life you're looking for. This water is stale. The opposite of this is to drink the living water of God, from the well of the living God. God's water will quench your soul. The well of salvation will restore your relationship with God." Jesus invited her to return to God.

And she said yes.

But her story didn't end there. She ran back to her village and transformed the people in her community. Her sip of living water brought others to the well. To the Messiah. The energy at the end of this story is amazing!

APRIL'S STORY

I heard April's testimony at the 2008 ICCP gathering. She grew up in a wealthy, educated, United States family. She also grew up in a family where her grandfather and uncles threw sex parties. From an early age, she was exposed to sex games, massive amounts of pornography, and abuse. She was sold to family members in her grandfather's home. She says, "Everyone in this scenario had several university degrees. I told my mother and grandmother what was happening. They didn't intervene. It wasn't until years later that I realized that my own mother had grown up with an incestuous pedophile as her father, and she didn't have the resources to help me."

At the age of 12, April became pregnant. The family paid for her to have an overdose of the morning-after pill. Of this experience she shares, "I was all alone, aborting my first child on the floor of a beautiful, ornate bathroom that was cleaned by a maid. No one in my family ever talked to me about what happened."

To cope with the abuse, April hid behind education. She studied hard, excelling in mathematics, and by age 20 was a professor. While she never used drugs, she did become promiscuous. She didn't know what a sexually, emotionally, mentally, and physically healthy relationship looked like.

Like the woman at the well, she had few friends, was intelligent, could engage you in an educated and well-versed conversation, and had a sexual history. She felt like an outcast. She believed in God but didn't have much time for him. After all, God hadn't seemed too interested in stopping the horrors of her childhood.

And then she met Jesus at the well. April says, "I received Christ as my Savior and my transformation began. However, as a Christian, I was still abused by my grandfather until I met my husband Mike three years later. When I met Mike, the abuse stopped." Mike was a godly man, a man who treated her with respect. A man who told her he wouldn't sleep with her until their wedding day (despite all her offers). A man who stood up to her grandfather and said, "No more!" A man who loved her

more than she knew how to love herself. A man who modeled such Christ-like love that in time she too was able to embrace God fully and completely once again. April shares, "Mike's unconditional love has been a picture of the Father's love for me. God has also brought healing through counseling and His Word. It is a many-layered process, but God is faithful."

But her personal transformation is not where her story ended either. Like the Samaritan Woman, she carried her transformation back to community. She became what Henri Nouwen calls a "Wounded Healer." April started a ministry to prostituted women and girls in Nicaragua. At the conference, she told us the following statistics:

66% of prostitutes in Nicaragua start by age 11.

60% of prostitutes under the age of 16 followed in their mother's footsteps. (April knows one family that has four generations of women serving in prostitution.)

60% of prostitutes trafficked in North, Central, and South America are Nicaraguan girls.

The statistics are high due to the extreme poverty. Women get to the point where they see no other option to provide for their family. In an economy where people live on less than \$2 a day, prostitution is one way to guarantee a living to feed your kids.

April seeks to bring hope to these women and girls. She says, "In 2001, after speaking to a group of prostitutes, God began to birth a vision to help those women. The Holy Spirit confirmed the need to open a vocational center for the women and to provide them with a means to make a living and establish them in the Lord. Since that initial encounter the Lord has provided us with the land and we have built structures for job training, and housing for young girls and women with children. This ministry is called House of Hope." April is helping women and girls learn what it means to take a sip of living water from the well that never will run dry.

MARGARITA'S STORY

Since House of Hope opened, April has seen many women's lives transformed by Jesus. One "Samaritan Woman" particularly stands out in her mind. She shares:

"When I think about the 'Woman of the Well' story, one of our ladies immediately comes to mind. Margarita has lived at House of Hope for over two years, and has three children, ages 11, 9, and 7. Prior to moving to House of Hope, she lived with her kids in an extremely dangerous neighborhood under a piece of black plastic. She prostituted herself, spending all of her extra money on alcohol and drugs. Margarita was physically abusive to her children, and taught them to steal and work the streets for money.

"Since moving to House of Hope, Margarita not only found the love of Jesus, but also discovered how his Living Water can fill her up! You can now find her smiling and laughing; something that was rarely, if ever, seen when she moved in. When her family visits, they comment on the wonderful changes they can see in her. Her positive attitude, motivation, love, and kindness are contagious. The love she now shows her children is amazing, and her hunger for the Lord is reflected in everything she does and says. When she transfers back to life in the city, I think she will affect all those around her with her light and her love, even without trying. God has done awesome things inside of her, and it is extremely apparent that she will effect changes in others as she continues on her walk with the Lord."

Today, April continues to serve God in Nicaragua. She reflects, "God uses a very painful part of my childhood to bring glory to himself, and that is such a delight! My prayer is that God will continue polishing me and that my life will reflect more of him to the women and girls we have under our care."

(April Havlin shared her testimony at the International Christian Conference on Prostitution, in Green Lake, WI, September 2008. Used by permission.)

CONNECTING WITH THE STORIES

1. Over the last two years as you have been immersed in the *Breaking the Chains* focus for AB Women's Ministries, did you ever feel overwhelmed by what you were learning? Can you share a

specific example of something you saw, read, or heard that especially stands out? Did you feel a need to pace yourself with acquired information? Explain.

2. The Samaritan Woman reminds us that there are many layers to a woman who is labeled "outcast" by her society. As you studied her story again, what surprised you this time? What did you see or hear that you never considered before when studying this woman of the Bible?
3. How did you react to April's childhood experiences? Did it catch you off-guard that she came from a wealthy, educated family? Do we too often stereotype prostituted women as coming from uneducated, lower class families—"People who don't know any better"...?
4. April's personal transformation began with a godly man who listened to her and respected her. Thelma Nambu, founder of Samaritana, a ministry to prostituted women in the Philippines, says this: "The ministry's top principle is listening and having a learner's attitude, starting where the women are. Also key is understanding how God views people, what dignity entails, and what it means for these women to be born with potential. A good listener can help a woman get in touch with her God-given potential and give her hope," (from *Escaping the Devil's Bedroom* by Dawn Herzog Jewell, page 132).
 - a. Do you have people in your life who listen to and respect you? How does this transform you?
 - b. Can you think of a woman in your life that simply needs to be listened to? Is God asking you to listen to her?
 - c. Could *listening* be a way to take "just a sip"? Explain your answer.
5. Should a personal transformation always propel you towards a community transformation? (There may be a variety of responses!) Do you have an example from your own life, family, church, or community where a personal transformation did change a community?
6. What will you do differently now that you've listened to the stories of the Samaritan woman, April, and Margarita? Or, how will you *be* different?

WEBSITES TO EXPLORE:

<http://www.houseofhopenicaragua.com> (April Havlin's ministry in Nicaragua)

<http://www.samaritana.org> (Ministry to prostituted women in the Philippines)

<http://www.icapglobal.org/about.html> (International Christian Alliance on Prostitution)

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