

Crossing Barriers with JESUS



Title: Crossing Barriers with Jesus
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by Lee Bee Teik, used with permission.]

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About the “Byte Size Solid Food Series”

Why Byte Size?

A byte is a unit of information storage in computer chips which is already an accepted means of messaging technology since the late 20th century in Malaysia. *Byte size* also has the same sound as *bite size*, which is to imply that the BSSF Series is to reach readers with small chewable and digestible amounts of the sharing of God’s word. The Reconre Team prays that you will have an enjoyable meal as you ponder on His word while reading through each title in the series.

Why Solid Food?

Living in a developing nation has its advantages and disadvantages, if hindsight assessment of more developed nations may be a guide. We are glad to discover more of God’s creativity through mankind. However, in our hectic rush to advance in technological research, we may forget the One who alone has endowed us with the means to use and enjoy the fruits of our research. Therefore, this series of small books are the result of an effort to feed not only the minds but also the hearts and souls of readers so that they may fulfill God’s vision of remaking them into His image. For this, we need the solid study and meditation of His word from the Bible, and not only the drinking of the milk of the first teaching when we first trusted Christ to be our Saviour and Lord.

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us in 5:11-14...

“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

Reconre hopes that many other home grown writers and publishers will surface to contribute their solid food through the written word so that God’s people in Malaysia will not remain or become spiritually anaemic. That the pen is mightier than the sword still holds true in many ways, I believe.

Finally, let us proclaim with Jude in :24...now,

“To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only wise God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen.”

How to Use this Book

- Take your time to read through the book.
- Pause to ponder in between.
- You may use the main text and later reflections for Personal/Group Study or during your Quiet Times alone with God.
- If used in a group, meet weekly or at any regular interval to share, pray and apply what you have learnt together.
- Suggestion for Personal Reflection

Spend 30 minutes or more daily [depending on your nutritional deficiency or appetite] meditating on what you have read and talk to Him about it. Better still, take a few days off work and ponder on the reflections with Him by Your side. If you need a venue for this purpose, contact Reconre staff at www.reconre.org in Malaysia.

Come...

Let us Read...

Let us Listen...

Let us Ponder...

Let us Pray...

Let us Love & Obey...

JESUS!

Crossing Barriers with Jesus

The Woman by the Well According to John 4:1-42

The Story Begins

Let us consider the background of the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met. The Samaritans were a mixed race descended partly from the ten tribes of Israel, and partly from non-Jewish immigrants, the Assyrians. They inherited the central Palestine of Bible times, between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north.

Their faith and daily life was based on the first five books of the Old Testament alone. They rejected the rest of the other Jewish Scriptures. Consequently, due to their partial understanding of God's ways with His people, they looked forward to see, with a great deal of speculation, who the prophet mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:18 could be.

Therefore, conflict points arose in the Samaritan woman's mind when she talked with Jesus, a male Jew from Judah's line.

Significant Conflict Points

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Firstly, the Rabbis or Jewish teachers would not hold a conversation with *women*; the latter being commonly considered as second class citizens in their sight.

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Secondly, Jews, especially men, were scrupulous about contracting *defilement* or impurity from others, especially if the “others” were not of pure Jewish blood. Impure objects used for food or drink needed to be purified before they could use them. But, Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink...from her vessel, presumably.

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Thirdly, whereas Jews regarded the Jerusalem temple as the Temple of God, the Samaritans regarded Mount Gerazim, in Samaria, as the place of worship. Gerazim was a part of a scene of great solemnity when Israel finally entered Canaan. On Mount Gerazim the twelve tribes were blessed (Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:12)

Jesus, however, showed her and His disciples, that everyone needed His sacrifice for reconciliation with God (commonly called salvation). He expressly included the Samaritans with the Gentles (that’s most of our readers) and Jews in His commission to preach the gospel of God’s redemption of the world (Acts 1:8).

The Samaritan woman’s beliefs, influenced by her religious, cultural and racial background, were that:

...God was particular about where His people should worship Him. He was a sort of perfectionist, fussy about outward details and political correctness.

...she was of less value to God than the Jewish men, both because she was not of pure Jewish blood, and also because she was a woman.

...she should be shamed of being herself, even among her kinsfolk, because of her having been divorced five times already, and was then living with another man whom she had not married yet.

...morally, her kinsfolk were better than she was. She could have felt that they had true friends while she had none. Who could understand her silent loneliness? They were unfair to her for not listening to her side of the stories behind all those five divorces. How then could they blame her for not being able to be faithful in her relationships? She probably hated men, generally.

Then, Jesus of Nazareth walked into the outskirts of the woman's village, probably wondering what His Father had in store for Him...so quiet...so hot...so dry...It was about noon when Jesus, tired out by the long journey from Judea while on His way to Galilee, sat by the popular Jacob's well. He was watching and listening to what God had to say to Him. When a local woman came nearer, already, His heart of truth and compassion was seeking to identify with her longings of her heart. Why did she walk out to get water in the heat of the day? Who were in her household to let her do that?

Shhhh...

Let us listen to the running commentary on John 4:1-42 (in bold letters and with some additions by the author)

“One day, Jesus had to go through Samaria to get to Galilee. Soon He came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well.

It was about noon. His disciples had gone into the town to buy food when a Samaritan women came to draw water.”

It was hot and quiet by the well. Why did she choose such a time to draw water? Didn’t she like to meet the other women from town? Was it her normal routine?

“Jesus said to her...’Will you give Me a drink?’”

Jesus’ request doesn’t sound unusual unless we understand her background.

“The Samaritan woman said to Him...’You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’”

She did not hesitate to verbalise her low self-esteem. It had already been part of her self-view for so long. Jesus, on His side, seemed to be breaking all religious, racial and cultural norms! He had better watch out!

“Jesus answered her...’If you knew the gift of God and who it is who asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water!’”

Jesus was quick to catch the opportunity to lift the conversation to a higher plane by hinting at His identity and linking it to living water.

“The woman said...’Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?’”

At first playfully suggesting that Jesus was talking rubbish, she then tried to boost her self-esteem by identifying herself as a descendant of Jacob, third in line from Abraham. She thus had the guts to challenge Jesus about His identity.

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

Jesus, sensing that her self-defence mechanism was on the alert, refused to be dragged into a fruitless argument as to whether Jews or Samaritans were more favoured by God. Instead, He brought her back to the theme of living water...while at the same time using her jestful language...“*gushing up to eternal life*” (Jesus probably had both hands gesticulating to demonstrate the fountain of living water)!

The woman said to Him

“Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to get water!”

Flowing along in a relaxed mood, she cynically asked for that living water (that will never run out) and might have half-hoped that it could and would be real. It was not a joke to have to tire herself by walking to draw and carry water in the hot sunshine all alone. No one was around to help or to banter with. She had her own private reason for avoiding her town’s folk. But loneliness was her price. Then Jesus came...and...told her...

“Go call your husband and come back!”

Of course, any other stranger might have said the same! Jesus matter-of-factly told her to get help from her husband if she was so fed-up with her daily chores. To His surprise, the woman immediately snapped back...

“I have no husband!!”

The boil in her life had been touched...how could He mention that word “*husband*”? Suddenly, her inner feelings of anger and hatred were aroused and her truer self surfaced. Jesus then confirmed that her word were true and told her why.

“You are right when you say you have no husband. 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.”

Once she regained her composure, she continued her banter...

“Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where you must worship is in Jerusalem...”

This opened the door for Jesus to declare,

“Believe Me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

Feeling trapped, perhaps, and sensing that Jesus was some sort of prophet, the woman instinctively went off at a tangent, posing a question about the place of worship. Was she trying to distract herself and Jesus from touching on a sensitive point in her inner life? Was she avoiding having to face up to her own needs or was she, after so long, genuinely interested in spiritual matters? The mention of religious activities, such as worship, probably brought her a whiff of nostalgia in days before things went dreadfully wrong for her.

However, Jesus, on seizing the golden opportunity, immediately used her point of contention and turned it into a clarification of who the Father really is...He is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit (sincerely)

and in truth (according to His revelation of Himself, not what we think He is).

“Then the woman, shrugging her shoulders, said...‘I know that Messiah, called Christ, is coming...’”

Again she tried hard to postpone having to face the truth about God’s holiness...in case he punished her for her sins...for if she had not received mercy from her own family and friends, how could she receive mercy from the holy God? As yet, her idea of God was still distorted, out of shape. Hence, she dismissed this strange prophet’s revelation of her sin by appealing to the Higher Authority who had not come yet...the Messiah! She could postpone having to be confronted by God Himself.

“Then Jesus declare...(probably slowly so that she would not be overcome by hysteria)...‘I who speak to you am He...!’”

Completely beyond her expectations, this stranger told her in the most gentle and gracious manner, with eyes full of compassion, forgiveness and total acceptance (not like those who usually accused her),

“I am He...I am the Messiah...and I have forgiven you all your sins...I will also heal your wounded heart so that you can live the life God gives you all over again...God’s way...not Jacob’s way or Jerusalem’s way or your way...but the true God’s way!”

Then the disciples returned. What an anti-climax! However, the Samaritan woman, stunned by the young Jewish man’s revelation, forgot about her water jar!

John recorded that “she *went* back” and not “she *ran* back”. She must have been thinking hard (she had not done that for ages) as she took her time to walk back to her former friends, her familiar neighbours and her old lifestyle.

“What should I do now?” she pondered.

The real Messiah came as a man to her...so humble, so pure...and yet He needed her to give Him a drink. He did not punish her, He did not look down on her, did not take advantage of her...but accepted her as a woman with the added promise of eternal life! This line of reasoning could have led to her telling her people about what had just happened, as fast as she could.

“If I tell them later, they won’t believe me...they seldom do...and it will be near impossible to live a new life here...the place I love...my home...But if I tell them now, they can see and hear for themselves...It would be good for them if they knew the Messiah as I have known Him now!”

With the last thought, she shouted to the townsfolk,

“Come, everyone, ...come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!”

(Aside: “Who cares what they think of me now. The Messiah has forgiven me!”)

“He cannot be the Messiah our ancestors talk about, can He?!” she continued to shout.

Oh, was not their curiosity instantly aroused!

“Everything she has ever done? What is it that we have not heard before in her colourful life? Let’s go and hear for ourselves!”

Hence, they actually left the city to look for Jesus. So different from many of our evangelistic campaigns!

Pause and Ponder...

Meanwhile, Jesus was talking to His disciples about doing His Father’s will, that it was food to Him...and about a ready harvest. However, His friends did not understand what He was talking about...till later...

What about the townsfolk who rushed out to see Jesus? John wrote that they initially believed that Jesus was the Messiah because of what their woman friend’s testimony...fantastic, we might say. But, after spending two days with Jesus in their own home town, her fellow Samaritans told her emphatically,

“We no longer believe that He is the Messiah because of what you told us...but because of what He has told us!”

One can only imagine what Jesus told them about themselves (word of knowledge and prophecy in action for God’s glory)! They essentially affirmed their individual and group findings with the proclamation,

“This young man is Really the Saviour of the World!”

This was even more fantastic for the woman by the well that day, for one who was so grateful to the Saviour for having completely forgiven her all her sins and accepted her into His Father’s house!

Pause

Using the lyric of the hymn below as our prayer, let us worship our Father as we ponder on the story above...

Let us return our lives back to the Messiah who came to reconcile man to God and man to man...

Fill My Cup, Lord!

1. Like the woman at the well I was seeking
for things that could not satisfy.
And then I heard my Savior speaking;
“Draw from my well that never shall run dry.”
2. There are millions in this world who are craving
the pleasure earthly things afford.
But none can match the wondrous treasure
That I find in Jesus Christ, my Lord.
3. So, my brother/ sister, if the things this world gave you
Leave hungers that won’t pass away.
My blessed Lord will come and save you
If you kneel to Him and humbly pray.

Chorus: Fill my cup, Lord, I lift it up, Lord
come and quench this thirsting of my soul.
Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more,
Fill it up and make me whole.

Richard Blanchard

For Personal Reflection

1. Think about some lessons gleaned from the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

a. The significance of Jacob's well:

Jacob represents the old and partial understanding of who God is...He was very strict...His people were to obey His laws 100% or they could not partake of His promises.

b. Well water represents stagnant water, even though it comes from underground streams or reserves. It is limited in its ability to keep supplying us with a drink in order that we may continue to live.

In contrast to Jacob and well water:

Jesus represents the new and complete understanding of who God is. He is the Almighty and holy God who knows that His people have spoilt their own lives by sinning against Him and will never, on their own, be able to please Him 100% again (like the first man and woman did before they fell). Yet, He loves them so much that He sent Jesus, His only begotten Son, to come and die in their place, so that He could save them from their sins and bring them back home to His Father and live with them forever. God is our true and everlasting Father when our childhood is restored through Jesus' death and resurrection!

It is this intimate and continuous knowledge of God as our Father, through His one and only begotten Son, Jesus' atonement for our sins, which constitutes the living water that Jesus talks about. The Holy Spirit who dwells in His believing children ensures that we live in the security of His covenant love all the time. This is also what abundant life is all about, starting from our earthly life. It is not what many of us assume it is: a life of continuous leisure, comfort, pleasure, wealth and health (John 17:3) which come and go in our damaged and unstable world.

He is the holy God of truth and justice; at the same time, He is the God of grace (undeserved and un-earnable mercy). Such is the real character of God that Jesus showed to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well over 2000 years ago in our space-time world.

2. Let us read the chart below which shows a summary of the Samaritan woman's perceptions before, during and after the encounter with Jesus, the Son of God made flesh as Son of Man.

	<u>Old Self</u>	<u>Meets Jesus</u>	<u>New Self</u>
<u>Views of God</u>	Distant Perfectionist	Received kind attention, respect & consideration	Holy, Pure, Truthful, Forgiving, Unassuming & Personal
<u>Views of Others</u>	Unkind Unjust Too busy for her Disgusting Hated them	All who believe in Him are included in the truth of God's grace	All need God's forgiveness & reconciliation
<u>Views of Self</u>	Of little value Ashamed Abused Trapped Guilty Lonely	Valued Cleansed Befriended Respected Forgiven Released	Born again Purposeful Joyful Loved Valued Empowered

Two things happened to the Samaritan woman after she received God's eternal friendship and the renewal of her understanding of God:

a.

She was no longer afraid of others' unfair treatment of her, others' slander and jeers or their rude comments about her past life. Her hatred of men turned into hope that they too would meet her Saviour!

A person is not able to sincerely wish and or pray for the good of the person who has hurt her without first taking the step of forgiveness. She has to forgive even though she may still have negative feelings towards the other person. God will change these to positive feelings after she has decided to forgive even though it may take a longer time for the change to come. However, the will to forgive has to come from the person who has been wronged.

The Samaritan woman decided to forgive. God had forgiven her so much that for her to forgive those men was so small an action in comparison.

b.

She did what she could to influence the townsfolk, some of whom had wronged her badly, so that they could meet Jesus for themselves. Imagine what would have happened if she had decided not to tell them about the Messiah so that they would not be saved? Served them right? No, no! After having been forgiven by the Messiah, she forgave those who had wronged her.

As she walked towards all who knew her, deep in thought, she decided to share her new found Saviour with them so

that they might rejoice also! She no longer wanted to attract attention to herself but to the Messiah!

3. Ask yourself these questions:

“Am I using all my God given gifts, natural and spiritual, to influence others for God...so that they will be attracted to Him and not to me?”

a.

If so, give all praise and thanks to Him always!

You may want to express your love to God through the following song...

*I will serve You because I love You;
You have given life to me.
I was nothing until You found me,
You have given life to me.*

*Heartaches, broken people,
Ruined lives are why You died on Calvary;
Your touch is what I long for,
You have given life to me.*

b. If not, then the next questions are:

“Is there something that I have not sorted out in my life that is preventing me from sharing Him with others?”

“Is He teaching me to take life one step at a time...not according to my own agenda, but according to His agenda?”

c.

*“Do I love Him enough to become vulnerable for Him in the ministry of reconciliation in our society today?
(2 Corinthians 5)”*

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