



Water for Life, Water of Life:

(based on Sustainable Development Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation)

LIVING WATER

Bible Study based on John 4:1–14 and John 7:37–38 (Carolyn Lawrence)

Introduction

Water facts: How much water do you think is used for each of the following (in litres)?

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|-----------------------|--------|----------------------------|---------|------------------------|-----|
| Washing your face | 2 | Having a deep bath | 60 | Having a shower | 20 |
| Flushing the loo | 10 | Boiling the kettle | 1 | Washing machine | 100 |
| Car wash | 400 | Making one litre of petrol | 70 | Making a pair of shoes | 160 |
| Making a ton of steel | 20,000 | Making a small car | 450,000 | Garden hose (1 hour) | 540 |

In the UK we use about 150 litres of water each per day; in Uganda the average is 9 litres as the people have to carry it.

In our Bible study, we are going to think about the spiritual aspect of water and how Jesus promised to be the living water to all those who receive him, based on the readings from the gospel of John.

Water is a common image used in the Bible to symbolise cleansing, spiritual life, fullness of life, life with God. Just as plants without water dry out and wilt, so too we wilt spiritually if we are not constantly allowing the spirit of God to refresh and cleanse us. And if we try to quench our spiritual ‘thirst’ with things other than the living water we do not thrive but shrivel up.

Bible reading John 4:1–15: Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well.

~ **Verses 1–6:** Jesus travels from Judea to Galilee through Samaria. He sits down by the well – the woman comes to draw water in the heat of the day.

She had obviously led an immoral life and may have come at that time as there would have been no-one around to gossip about her and hurl insults at her. It seems that this was the time of day that outcasts from society regularly went to collect their water. Jesus went to where she was. If he’d waited for her to come to him she would never have met him.

How often do we expect people to come to us and meet us on our own terms instead of going out into the world to tell others about Jesus? Christians often huddle together and have a ghetto mentality. We need to get involved in our communities and take the light of Christ to the dark places.

~ **Verses 7–9:** She was a Samaritan and a woman – Jesus shouldn’t really have even spoken to her, let alone ask for a drink of water.

Jesus initiated the conversation and started by talking about something ordinary. He wasn’t afraid of what people thought about him – he cared for everyone no matter who they were or what they had done.

Is there anyone we avoid speaking to or associating with? Are we prejudiced against any group of people because of their denomination, colour, age, race, upbringing, education or family background?

It’s easy to lump people together and give them labels but it’s a dangerous thing to do. I’m sure none of us would like to be stereotyped by others but we so often do it ourselves. E.g. Stereotype of a minister’s wife!

It’s God’s job to judge. It’s Jesus’s job to save. It’s the Holy Spirit’s job to convict of sin. It’s our job to love.

~ **Verses 10–12:** Jesus speaks about giving her ‘living water’ but she doesn’t understand and takes him literally.

Do people understand what we are trying to tell them? Often in church we use our own churchy jargon that means nothing to ‘un-churched’ people. How alien is it for people who walk in to our services who have no experience of church? And when we share our faith with others, do we keep our language clear and simple in a way people can understand?

We need to make sure we are speaking the same language when we tell others what God has done for us and make it easy to understand.

~ **Verses 13–15:** When Jesus speaks about the water he gives, she asks for some of it – thinking it would save her having to collect water every day!

She was interested in Jesus’s message as she thought he could make her life easier. She thought her problem was a dry bucket but in fact the problem was a dry heart.

Sometimes people think that if they become a Christian it will make their lives easy, profitable and free from trouble. Jesus never promised an easy, cushy life. In fact he said that if we want to follow him we would need to daily take up our cross and follow him.

As Christians we will face the same pressures, problems and temptations as everyone else and probably a few extra ones too, but we know that Jesus has promised that he will never leave us and that he will give us the strength we need to get through even the worst of times, if we walk closely with him.

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Carry on through this chapter we see that Jesus knows all about this woman and the complex life she has led but he saw her deeper need and still valued and loved her. He also knows all about our lives and loves us warts and all.

He goes on to reveal to her that he is in fact the Messiah she has been waiting for and she goes on to be the first evangelist as she tells her community about Jesus and what he has done for her. She was so excited to tell people about him that she left her jar at the well and ran back to her town!

Despite her reputation the people of her town listened to her and many came to know Jesus as a result. The end result is that the people believe in Jesus not just because of what she has said but have come to believe for themselves.

Drinking the living water and not salt water

Many people are searching for happiness and a meaning and purpose to their lives – looking to fill a void in their hearts, to find peace. Within each person there is a thirst which only Jesus can satisfy. The woman in the story thought she could get what she needed to quench her thirst from the hole in the ground but the actual ‘well’ of living water was talking to her. Just like her, we need to come to the actual ‘well’ and not just look into the hole in the ground!

Many try to satisfy that thirst with things that don’t quench thirst but make the thirst worse. It’s a bit like drinking salt water to try to quench our thirst – salt water is not bad – it sustains life in the seas, is beautiful to look at, good for leisure and we can get salt from it but if we drink it, it would just make us thirstier.

What are some of the types of ‘salt water’ that we drink to try to satisfy our thirst?

- Money (lottery tickets!)
- Religion
- Power, status, control
- Sex
- Comfort
- Busyness, good works
- Perfectionism
- Education
- Possessions – bigger, better, more
- Politicians
- Sport
- Family life/relationships
- Scientists

These things are not bad in themselves and can be gifts to enhance our lives but they are not meant to quench our thirst. We have a problem when we turn what was intended as a good gift from God, into a god in itself – the bible calls this idolatry – when we put anything other than Jesus in first place in our hearts and lives.

What do we learn about living water from this story?

1. Jesus is the source of the living water.

Jesus is the living water and when we know him we can know true happiness and contentment and keep all the other aspects of our lives in their proper perspective. Jesus said, in speaking about worrying about daily provision of food and clothing, ‘Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you as well.’ We won’t find living water in any of the things with which we seek to quench our spiritual thirst – only in Jesus.

2. The water is offered to anybody.

As we’ve seen, the woman in this story is the least likely candidate to receive this living water – a Samaritan, a woman, with dubious lifestyle choices. Jesus offers living water to everyone no matter who they are or what they have done in their lives.

3. The water is received by faith.

We don’t receive the living water by following rules, by being religious, a church goer or doing good works – we receive the living water Jesus offers only by faith. The woman had no merits of her own but by trusting in what Jesus said to her, came to receive the living water for herself. By putting our trust and faith in Jesus and asking for his grace, mercy and forgiveness – submitting to him and asking him into our hearts and lives.

4. The living water will satisfy our thirst.

As the Holy Spirit of Jesus fills our hearts and lives he begins to change us into the people that God intended us to be – to change our attitudes, our desires, our priorities into those that make us more like Jesus. As we draw closer to Jesus the things of the world that once seemed so important will lose their hold and desire for us.

5. Living water leads to eternal life.

The water Jesus offers us is not just for this life on earth, but when we accept Jesus into our hearts and lives, eternal life begins now – we can begin living in the light of eternity and we know that one day, we will enter into the immediate presence of Jesus where there will be no more crying, pain, sadness, disease or death. It’s hard to imagine how amazing heaven will be but it will be better than any of the things that we place so much store by in this life and we will be with God forever.

6. We are given living water to be a blessing to others.

The woman was so excited at meeting Jesus she couldn’t wait to tell others about him. Once we come to know Jesus then we have to allow the water of his spirit to flow through us to others.

We can become stagnant if we don’t allow the Holy Spirit to flow in and out of our lives. As he flows out from us others will see the evidence of his presence in our lives and will be drawn to him because of what they see in us.

Even when we have tasted the living water, it is tempting to be drawn back to sipping saltwater and we are constantly surrounded by temptations to put other things before Jesus in our lives. Keeping Jesus as Lord of all of our lives is not a once off decision but a daily decision, a moment by moment decision to keep being refreshed by the living water and not one of the alternatives that can bring harm instead of life and refreshing.

Let us ask God’s help as we seek the living water in our lives and the abundant life he gives, and allow him to help us reach out to others as the well of living water flows up and from us.