

THE JESUS I WANT TO KNOW:  
THE LOVING FRIEND  
John 4:1-15

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With apologies to Carole King, I'd like to describe my friendship with Jesus Christ in a paraphrase of a popular song:

When you're down and troubled  
And you need someone to care  
And nothing, no nothing, is going right,  
Close your eyes and think of him  
And soon he will be there  
To brighten up even your darkest night.

You just call out his name  
And you know wherever he is  
He'll come running, to see you again.  
Winter, spring, summer or fall  
All you've got to do is call  
And he'll be there, yes he will.  
You've got a friend.

The Jesus I want to know is a loving friend. The longest conversation recorded in the Bible is this dialogue between Jesus and the woman at the well. It's a story of spiritual transformation couched in the context of living water. It is an illustration of divine friendship that cuts across culture and transcends time. Come, let us take a closer look.

**A FRIEND COMES IN AS THE REST OF THE WORLD IS GOING OUT.**

When the Pharisees started comparing the number of baptisms that John was having with the number of baptisms that Jesus was having, Jesus decides to leave Judea and go back to Galilee. And in verse 4 it says that He had to go through Samaria.

Perhaps a little geography lesson will help us. Use your imagination. Judea is in Southern Palestine; Galilee is in Northern Palestine. In between lies the area that is known as Samaria. To the east is the Jordan River connecting the Sea of Galilee with the Dead Sea. While the direct route from Judea to Galilee is through Samaria, Jews never traveled that way. They took the long route across the Jordan River and then north through Jordan and then crossed back over into the area of Galilee where the fishing is good and the grass is green. So the disciples had to drop their faces and jaws and lips and wonder "What are you saying Jesus? I have to go through Samaria?"

So why did Jesus have to go through Samaria? Well, you figure it out. I'm not sure I've got the answer. But as the story unfolds we sense a spiritual significance to that decision of Jesus to travel through Samaria in order to get to Galilee.

At Jacob's well, outside the town of Sychar, while His disciples have gone into town to buy bread, Jesus encounters this woman who comes to draw water. The barriers between them were greater than Mt. Gerizim which stands tall behind them. Jesus is a man. She is a woman. Jewish men got out of bed every morning and thanked God they were not born a woman. Jesus is a Jew. She is a Samaritan. The feud had been going on for seven centuries, when the Samaritans intermarried with the Assyrians bringing down the scandal of the Jews. Jews had nothing to do with Samaritans. In fact, when the Samaritans came down and offered to help rebuild the Temple they told them to 'go back home, you don't belong among us, we don't want you here at all.' And so they did.

Jews worshipped at Jerusalem. The rejected Samaritans built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim and developed their own rules and rituals. By gender, by race, by religion these two people are dramatically different, but Jesus has a way of breaking every barrier down. Today at Jacob's well, they are two people in need of each other. Jesus needs a drink and has no bucket from which to draw water. This woman whose name we do not know was thirsty for living water. Isn't that the nature of Jesus? In fact, Paul said in Galatians 3:28 — *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ.* Friends come in as the rest of the world is going out. Isn't that what friends are for?

One of my favorite poets is Robert Frost. Of all his writings, my favorite is "Mending Wall." It's the story of two New England farmers who go out each spring to mend the rock fences that have fallen down over the winter. They do it every spring, under the belief that "good fences make good neighbors." But this particular spring, one farmer is beginning to question that long held assumption. As they work their respective sides of the fence, wearing their fingers raw with the rocks, he begins to reason. "He is all pine and I am all apple orchard. My apple trees will never get across and eat the cones under his pines. Why is it that we need to build these fences back every spring?" Then he says this:

Before I built a wall, I'd ask to know  
What I am walling in or walling out  
And to whom I am like to give an offense  
For something there is that doesn't love a wall  
That wants it down.

Friends come in when the rest of the world is going out. And this day Jesus stopped to befriend the woman at the well. That's like the Jesus I want to know. Do you know Him? Really?

What transformed this woman could transform the world. The woman at the well was despised by her village, which was despised by the Judeans, whose

ancestors had been humiliated by the Babylonians. From generation to generation humiliation, resentment, and violence were passed down by people keeping the score so they could seek to get even. Then Jesus comes and sets aside score keeping and by treating all as if all were forgiven, he makes forgiveness possible.

**A FRIEND ASKS “HOW ARE YOU?” THEN HANGS AROUND LONG ENOUGH TO HEAR THE ANSWER.**

Do you know what I mean? Hundreds of people ask ‘how are you?’ They’ll ask you that ten times a day, twenty times, at church and not many of us stay around long enough to hear the answer. But a real friend will ask, ‘how are you doing?’ and then they will look you in the face and open their ears and want to hear the real answer of your life.

Verse 6 tells us it was the 6th hour — high noon. Women do not come to draw water at high noon. It’s too hot. You get your water in the morning or evening. Like watering holes of our time, it’s an occasion to socialize, catch up on the news, perpetuate the community gossip. All is fine when talk is cheap unless you are the subject of the rumor mills. Then it’s another matter. It hurts. It’s painful. It’s a problem. You’ve got to sense that somehow, some way this woman has finally given up coming at the normal time to draw her water. She comes at high noon when she is all alone. It just feels better to fetch your water alone.

What’s going on here? I’m not sure we really know. Except that in Verse 16 — *Jesus says to her, “Go, call your husband.” She replies, “I have no husband.” Jesus says, “You are right when you say ‘I have no husband.’ The fact is you have had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband.”*

What’s happening here? Suddenly we have moved from cultural struggles to personal pain. Her thirst for living water was real. What was her situation? I used to think I knew, but I was a lot smarter when I was younger than I am now. I’m not sure what was going on.

Evangelists like to describe her as promiscuous. In some people’s mind the brighter the nails, the darker the mascara, the shorter the skirt the greater her conversion. They could be right.

What if her five previous husbands died? What if she found herself widowed five times? Can you imagine the pain she felt or the grief she experienced? What if she was going through the pain and grief of losing the closest person to her again and again and again? It would leave you thirsting.

Or, what if five husbands had divorced her? After all, she had no say about divorce. It was the husband’s prerogative in every case and circumstance of her life. What if five times she had gotten a letter that said ‘you are no longer my wife and you are out of here?’ Maybe she was abused for burning the toast, or deserted for not bearing children. What if five times she had been rejected by five

different people? It would leave you thirsting. It really will. We do not know the source of her thirst, and it probably doesn't matter.

We do know that our peace is often forfeited, and there are pains we have to bear. We do know we have trials and temptations. Sometimes there seems to be trouble everywhere. We, too, are thirsty, are we not?

Sometimes we've felt that no one cares or understands us. We've looked for unconditional love and wound up brokenhearted. We've needed to be comforted and no one was there. The cares of this world have left us lonely and empty.

Like the woman at the well we are seeking for things that do not satisfy. We are thirsty. Only the Lord can quench this thirsting of our souls. Somebody said a good mother listens to your problems until you are bored with them. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere, with whom I may think out loud without fear."

Jesus said to his disciples in John 15:15 — *I no longer call you a servant...instead I call you my friends.*

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear.  
What a privilege to carry,  
Everything to God in prayer.

Friends ask "How are you doing?" and then they stay around long enough for you to answer them. And Jesus Christ is that kind of friend.

### **A FRIEND KNOWS US THE BEST THAT LOVES US THE MOST.**

A group of elementary students were asked "What is a good friend?" Their number one answer was "Someone you can depend on." Barbara Walters asked singer Elton John his greatest fear. Without hesitation the great musician replied "That I will not be loved." Another movie star was asked to define her greatest need. She replied "My greatest need is to have someone know me, really know me, and not go away."

*The Samaritan woman, leaving her water jar, ran back to the village exclaiming to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did, could this be the Christ?"* Friends are like that, you know. They know us the best and they love us the most.

Back in the late 1800's, George Matheson was deeply in love with a woman he planned to marry. But something happened between them. She called off the wedding. George, of course, was brokenhearted. In the midst of that grief he wrote a hymn that is in our hymnal. It goes something like this:

O Love that will not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in thee;

I give thee back the life I owe,  
That in thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.

After a rather crude encounter with Lucy in a *Peanuts* cartoon, Charlie Brown walks away sadly muttering, "I need all the friends I can get." So do I, Charlie Brown, so do I.

A loyal friend laughs at your jokes when they are not so funny and sympathizes with your problems when they are not so bad. Friends pick us up when we are down. They hold us accountable when we run around. Friends offer help. Friends give us hope. Friends come in when the world is going out. They ask "How are you?" and wait for an answer. They are the people who know us best and love us most.

Do you know Jesus Christ as a friend? Are you thirsty for living water? Do you feel empty today? Could you use a filling that only Christ can give? The Jesus I want to know is a friend like that.

Fill my cup, Lord, fill it up,  
Come and quench this thirsting of my soul.

Amen.











