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## What Does God Desire? *John 4:16-26*

### **CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY 201st General Assembly**

- **TUESDAY (SESSION) @ 8:00 AM**  
**IN ROOM 203, RYAN BLDG.**
- **WEDNESDAY (SESSION) @ 1:00 PM**  
**IN LIBRARY, RYAN BLDG.**

Capitol Commission Bible studies are held on Tuesday and Wednesday. The legislator Bible study meets from 8:00-8:45 AM in Room 203, Ryan Bldg. (during session weeks). An open-to-all Bible study meets from 1:00-1:30 PM in the Library, Ryan Bldg. (during session weeks). The Bible studies are nonpartisan and non-denominational, and will focus on the Gospel of John for the 2017 General Assembly.

– Jeff Whitebread, Pennsylvania State Minister, Capitol Commission

### **John 4:16-26: “What Does God?”**

When I told my family, I was moving from Allentown to Northeast Philadelphia to work with a new church start-up in that area, needless to say, my parents were a bit alarmed.

I imagine they probably thought I had joined some sort of cult, and had been brainwashed into making such a radical move shortly after finishing school.

The truth of the matter is, if they could have seen what was in my mind, they would have realized that it indeed needed washing.

Of course, I hadn't been brainwashed. In fact, again and again - as was certainly true in my case - when people bring their total being, both their inner lives and their outer lives, into the light of King Jesus, things start to become clear.

If anything, it's our surrounding culture that brainwashes us, constantly persuading us in a thousand subtle ways that the present world is all there is, and not to take this unseen dimension of our lives to seriously. This is seldom argued. Rather, an attitude is created in which it seems so much easier to go with the flow. Now that is what brainwashing is really like. What the good news of Jesus does is administer a shock to our system, it shines a bright light, and kick-starts our brains, and our moral compass, into working for the first time.

### **Getting Rid of the Stagnant Water**

*(John 4:16)* - Often, it is just like the woman's reaction to Jesus. Intrigued by his offer of 'living water,' she asks to have some. The thing she doesn't realize, like most of us, is that if you want to take Jesus up on his offer of

running, pure water, bubbling up inside you, you will need to get rid of the stale, moldy, stagnant water that you have been choking down all this time. In her case it was her married life - or rather, her unmarried life.

*(John 4:17)* - Jesus saw right to the heart of this woman, and all that was going on. Remember, this woman's life was composed of one emotional upheaval after the other. She had enough husbands coming and going to keep all the gossips of the town going for weeks. We don't know how she sinned or was sinned against. We are not sure of the past emotional traumas that might have made it difficult for her to form lasting emotional bonds, though it is likely she was at least partly responsible. Whatever the reason, it made it harder and harder for her each time. But, she knew her life was a mess, and she knew that Jesus knew.

#### **Reflection:**

This offer of 'living water' is nothing but reorienting our lives to God and entering into the flow of his activity, no matter where we find ourselves. It is the promise of God's abiding presence through the Spirit to meet us, and helps us to increasingly become like Jesus in the quality and character of our lives.

The woman could not go back and undo the past, and Jesus' offer was not simply him asking her to put a positive spin on an unpleasant situation. The life-giving water that Jesus offers is one of redemption, it is the making of her life useful to God, his kingdom, and others. In the blink of an eye, this woman's reputation is put to a redemptive effect as she seeks to allow her life to be shaped by her growing confidence in Jesus, and his ability to refresh her weary and parched soul.

This is no less true for our lives. The masks we wear can't hide the truth of our condition to Jesus. He knows that we are a mess; and the life-giving water he is offering can't be received until we are at last confronted with our condition.

Do we live as if God has no place in our lives, or isn't concerned about the consequences we face due to our disconnection and distance from him? This is the ultimate lie. As well, this spring of water welling up in us is more than respectable behavior and right answers, but a life caught up in love for God.

It is only love for God that allows us to step into the type of life that seeks to do his will as our singular intention, even above that which is acceptable to the watching world and expedient to us personally. The heart of God weeps for his creation, he seeks to bring them back into the flow of his activity through apprenticeship to Jesus. This is a life of

# What Does God Desire? (cont'd) - John 4:16-22

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dynamic and intimate interaction with Jesus, our friend, teacher, priest, and Lord, that alone can satisfy the God-shaped hole in our hearts.

## The Seeking of True Worshippers

**(John 4:19)** - Her reaction to Jesus putting his finger on the sore spot of her life is a classic example of one who is seeking to avoid the subject. When this happens, we will start talking about anything else to avoid the subject concerning the brokenness of our lives, and the best subject for shifting the attention away from morality is, after all, religion.

The voices seeking to make excuses to avoid the subject are the same today as they were two thousand years ago.

'I was brought up believing that this mountain, in Samaria, was God's holy mountain. But you Jews think yours is the right one.' And the implication behind this statement is, we can't both be right, maybe nobody knows. Maybe nothing is for certain, and maybe (the hidden thought in this argument) that morality we were taught is equally uncertain.

Any excuses we seek to make are all equally irrelevant. God's claim on every human life is absolute, just as his offer of a new kind of life is available for all who give up their stagnant water and come to Jesus for the living kind. Our distance from God can't be avoided by our excuses, any more than Jesus claim on this woman's moral conscience could be avoided by this debate, already hundreds of years old, as to whether Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, or Mt. Gerizim in Samaria, was the true holy mountain.

**(John 4:21)** - When Solomon dedicated the Temple a thousand years earlier, he was quite clear that heaven itself was not big enough for God, so one single building could not hope to contain him. Holy buildings and holy mountains are at best signposts to the real thing. If they become substitutes for it, you're in real trouble. That is the path to idolatry, the worship of something that is not God as if it were.

The point Jesus is making is this, the true and living God isn't contained geographically or architecturally. He is spirit: he is non-bodily personal reality and power. But God is not the kind of spirit that hates the physical world, - he made it after all. But he transcends it, much like the writer or director of a play transcends the action on the stage - even though it seems as if the writer has come to play a leading role in this drama.

**(John 4:23)** - I am sure the woman didn't enjoy Jesus reasserting that 'salvation comes from the Jews.' And she probably couldn't make sense of the idea that true worship would one day have nothing to do with territory and everything to do with the internal orientation of one's life toward the truth Jesus makes known (Come to think of it, a lot of people today have trouble with that, as well.)

### Reflection:

What is God doing, and what is he working toward through Jesus - the one to which all these wonderful signposts point? Jesus says, God wants

true worshippers that will worship him in a manner that is fitting for human existence - in a manner that Jesus himself worships the Father. For us to unpack this statement, the first step is to define worshipping God. One that has been personally helpful is honoring God with extravagant love and extreme submission.

God is working toward worshippers that will honor with extravagant love and extreme submission in two ways, in spirit and in truth. Let's begin with spirit. Jesus teaches that if you make a tree good, its fruit will be good, or our inner life determines what our outer life is like. We can fake it for a while, but our character wills out, and what is on the inside makes itself known in the most inconvenient of times and ways.

What Jesus is seeking to do is orient the inner dimension of our lives, our thoughts, emotions, intentions, appetites and desires, our disposition toward others to a place in which these aspects of our human personality honor God with extravagant love and extreme submission. Might we not say, as Jesus did, the greatest command is to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. This is how we worship God in spirit, we make it our intention to fight the battle of our inner lives, and ferret out anything that would keep us from loving and submitting to God.

Now, worshipping God in truth is simply allowing the God that Jesus knows to reshape the spiritual or hidden dimension of our lives. We each have many false narratives of the world that we have accepted as true, and they run our lives without being challenged. Jesus steps into our lives and invites us to place our faith, our confidence in him, and quite simply, to believe he is right about everything, especially our understanding of God. "Jesus testifies to what he has seen and heard," says John, "but no one accepts his testimony" (John 3:32). Let this not be true of us.

As a quick example, we usually think that if we are mean enough to people they will be good. We hope to control them by threatening and punishing them. Yet that was not the way of Jesus. He let others punish him and said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth (on the cross), will draw all people to myself (John 12:32). We have an untold number of false ideas and attitudes that corrupt the spiritual dimension of our lives, these must be brought in line with the truth. Even now, God seeks those who would honor him with extravagant love and extreme submission because their inner lives have been reshaped by their confidence in Jesus.

### Book referenced:

Wright, NT. John for Everyone. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002

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Room 203 - Ryan Office Building  
**Open-To-All Bible Study:** Wednesday (Session), at 1  
PM, Library - Ryan Office Building