

Love God

John 4

Thank you for joining us today to **Discover Oakwood!**
We are on a mission to **transform ordinary people into fully devoted followers of Christ.** [include mission w/ baseball image]

As we saw last week, the first step is just to **get in the game!** Are you committed as a follower of Jesus or are you just a fan - an enthusiastic admirer of Jesus?

Once you're on the field, on Jesus' team, wearing His jersey, your job is to **get to first base.** Whatever is going on in your life, whatever happens - day after day our job is the same (just like a baseball player's): get on base.

First base for the follower of Jesus is to **love God.** You can see the base-path that leads to first is **gathering for worship.** Our first priority as a church is to gather people to worship our almighty Creator and wonderful Savior. And your first priority as a follower of Jesus is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. An important way you do that is by coming week after week to join with God's people as we sing the praises of Jesus and invite Him to speak to us through His Word.

But Scripture is clear that God does not just want us to read words from a page and sing lyrics with our mouths - He wants sincere devotion; from the heart. John 4 tells us:

"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him." John 4:23

As Evangelical believers we are people of the Book. **We stand firm on the truth of God's Word** and do so boldly and without apology. But sometimes in our commitment to truth we lose sight of sincerity and heartfelt devotion.

One of my favorite things about Oakwood is how **everyone SINGS.** A lot of my childhood in church was **singing old hymns** with (in my perception) a bunch of old people who did not show much emotion. [singing very flat and emotionless] "And can it be... that I should gain... an interest in the Savior's blood..." I remember waiting for the song leader to announce the hymn and then groaning inside when he said, "We'll sing all five verses." "Man... can't we just do 1 and 5 and be done with it?"

Here at Oakwood, people love to sing and sing loud. This is why we gather - to express the depths of our hearts in loving devotion to our Lord and Savior. **Corporate worship** is essential to first base. **Personal devotion** is part of loving God too - of course. But "let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another!" Gathering for worship is both for you - to express your love for God - and for those around you - to encourage them to exalt Jesus with all that they are.



Now, we've just heard an important passage of Scripture in the reading of John 4. Let me make three general observations from this passage and then draw three applications.

First, as Jesus interacts with this Samaritan woman next to a well, we observe first:

1. Everyone Longs for Spiritual Life

"The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.'" John 4:15

Every person on the planet has a thirst that nothing in this world can satisfy - and we all know it. Deep down you know it, and so does your atheist brother-in-law and your grumpy old socialist (or libertarian) uncle. People try to satisfy their thirst in a million ways - but that just proves the point: they are thirsty. They want something they don't have.

- The man who pours himself into **work**, slaving for that next promotion, that next level - but never reaching it.
- The woman who gives herself to one **relationship** after another, longing for a connection that will meet her deepest needs.
- The young man in such pain that he tries to dull it with **alcohol**.
- The young girl who only **feels good about herself** when she has lost another pound, and another pound.

When is it ever ENOUGH? That's the whole point. No matter how much you work, no matter how good you look, no matter how much money you make, no matter how many people cheer for you - it will NEVER be enough. You will always walk away thirsty. You will always wake up thirsty.

Because we were made to live on a water that this world does not have. And deep down everyone knows this. That should really encourage us as we reach out to people. They are hungry for a deeper reality, a stronger fulfillment - they are just looking in the wrong places. We have found the oasis in the desert - let's LEAD PEOPLE TO IT! Second observation:

2. Everyone Seeks Life and Happiness apart from God

"Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.'" John 4:17-18

This poor Samaritan woman was so desperate for affection and acceptance that she was on at least her sixth long term relationship. No doubt there were reasons and we don't know what they were in her case. But the truth is that we all do exactly the same thing. We go from one dried up well to the next to satisfy our thirst.

This could be through overtly sinful things - like physical perversions, flagrant materialism and worldliness - or it could be through otherwise good things that we elevate to become GOD THINGS. A husband or wife is a wonderful gift from God, but if you seek all of your happiness and fulfillment from that relationship you will crush the relationship under the weight of your neediness. Your work is also a gift from God - but it cannot bear the weight of your soul's satisfaction. Nor can any friend or hobby or ministry or anything.

And yet, we all do this, every day. Jeremiah rebuked the nation of Israel:

2. Everyone Seeks Life and Happiness apart from God

*“For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, **broken cisterns that can hold no water.**” Jeremiah 2:13*

Instead of going to the overflowing source of life, love, joy and power we continually turn away to look for our soul's satisfaction in broken cisterns that can't even hold water. Think of your job - it's a broken, dried up well. Think of your husband - broken, cracked pot. Your wife - as beautiful and wonderful as she is - a jar of clay, and the cracks are showing. Your favorite hobby - empty. At the end of the day, nothing in this world can satisfy that ache deep in your soul. No matter how much you drink from other wells, your mouth will eventually get dry. Third observation:

3. Everyone needs Jesus to have True and Lasting Joy

*“Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I will give him **will never be thirsty again.** The water that I will give him will become in him **a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**’” John 4:13-14*

Jesus is the source of all life. All things were made by him and for him. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. Jesus literally sustains the universe, moment by moment, by the word of his power.

Imagine **the Trinity as triple fountain** - Father, Son and Holy Spirit constantly pouring life into one another and receiving life from one another. God is the perfect, eternal union of three persons in an unending exchange of glory, honor, love and life. The Trinity will break our brains if we try to understand it.

But it's important to understand how unendingly, ***infinitely HAPPY God is IN HIMSELF.*** God did not create the world - much less us - out of any sense of NEED or LACK. God was not lonely and in need of some company. He was not tired and in need of some servants. God is radiantly, overwhelmingly, unceasingly JOYFUL. Father, Son and Holy Spirit never stop loving, honoring and REJOICING in each other.

It's hard to understand this - but it is vitally important. Because ***GOD is the source of all joy and life.*** Jesus refers to the water he would give as a **SPRING**. Every spring must have a SOURCE. God is the source. And - hear this - the Holy Spirit who lives inside of the believer implants the source of all of life, love, power and purpose RIGHT INTO OUR HEARTS.

Oh brother, sister - why do we look for happiness and life and fulfillment and direction ANYWHERE else? Oh how foolish and ridiculous we are, like addicts sneaking back to the heroin that keeps trying to kill us, or the abused woman who keeps going back to her abuser. Why? When life and freedom and power and purpose are right in front of us?

Hear the words of Jesus - see them on the screen and feel them in your heart:

“Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’” John 4:13-14

We don't ever need to be thirsty again! Never again! Jesus offers LIVING WATER - a spring that never stops flowing and that wells up to eternal life!

Here is the summary from John 4:

1. Everyone longs for spiritual life (v. 15)
2. Everyone seeks life and happiness apart from God (v. 16-18)
3. Everyone needs Jesus to have true and lasting joy (v. 13-14)

Now let's pivot to application. This is our **First Base - to LOVE GOD**. We know that we are supposed to love God with ALL of our heart, soul, mind and strength. He doesn't want empty lip-service or lifeless, dutiful obedience. God wants wholehearted, passionate, 100% devotion. He wants us to ENJOY Him. Check out this 2 minute video from John Piper and Desiring God Ministries. Piper is the one who unlocked this door for me when I was in college. I think this video sums up beautifully and visually the connection between glorifying God and enjoying Him.

[Be Happy in God Video \(2.5 minutes\)](#)

Hear that wonderful truth:

“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” John Piper

We will come back to that in a few minutes, but that sums up the lesson for today. Do you want to love God? Enjoy Him. Do you want to honor God? Delight in Him. Make God the desire of your heart. Fan into flame your affections for the Lord. This is not emotionalism it is WORSHIP.

Three applications.

1. True Happiness is found in Worshiping God

*“Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew **the gift of God** and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink,” you would have asked him, and he would have given you **living water**.’” John 4:10*

There is a water you can drink and never be thirsty again. It is called LIVING WATER. Only Jesus has it, so only Jesus can give it out. Everything else is a false promise - false advertising. The world posts billboards everywhere that promise happiness, purpose, satisfaction and life - but every one is an empty promise.

- **Love** - romantic, physical, passionate love. That is one of the world's favorites right now. This is where to find happiness and lifelong fulfillment - LOVE. Worship this goddess and she will make you happy. The goddess of love.
- **Power** - achievement, success, fame. These are interrelated but oh how we envy those who have them and how our sinful hearts long for more recognition, more applause, more status and celebrity.

- **Money** - possessions, wealth, security, vacations, hobbies.

The world advertises life and happiness but all of those billboards are false promises hanging over deadly traps. There is only ONE source of true, living water. And we find it when we give ourselves in worship to God alone. HE is the source of life, love, joy, peace and power. Learn to ENJOY HIM and you will be happy.

Look for happiness anywhere else and you will be disappointed, frustrated and broken. Everything else is a broken cistern that simply cannot hold the kind of water you need to satisfy the deep places of your soul. **U2 was right** - if you go after the things of this world you will perform and reach the top of the global marketplace and sing: ***"I still haven't found what I'm lookin' for."***

1. True Happiness is found in Worshiping God

2. Eternal Happiness will be Focused on Worshiping God

"The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him." John 4:23

Spirit and truth. **There is no fooling God.** You can fool people with words that sound sincere but aren't really. But we can never fool God. He sees right through our empty words and hollow religious rituals. God wants us to worship in spirit and truth. Our internals lined up with our externals.

God is not a fan of hypocrisy: when the outside looks nice and spiritual and says all the "I love God" sorts of things but the inside is full of greed and envy and lust and selfishness and pride.

Think of the blessing heaven will be when all hypocrisy is finally rooted out of our hearts and lives! We will have no more conflict with remaining sin in our hearts - no more temptations or struggles. We will finally be able to worship 100% in spirit and in truth - undivided.

But Jesus wouldn't have said this to the Samaritan woman if it were completely unattainable in this life. So we can offer God sincere, authentic worship now that anticipates the completely untainted worship we will enjoy forever in heaven.

And that will be our joy fulfilled when we enter God's presence and see Him face to face. Right now since God is spirit - invisible - our knowledge of Him is limited to what we gather from His Word. Then we will see Him face to face.

One more application:

3. We Honor God Best by Enjoying Him Most

"Whoever drinks the water that I give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." John 4:14

So we come back to the central point for this morning. First base for us is to Love God. The greatest commandment in Scripture is to love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. If you want to love God, if you want to honor and glorify Him - the main thing you must learn to do is to ENJOY HIM.

God is the fountain of all of life. He is the Creator of life. He is the sustainer of life. All joy and power and peace and goodness are found in Him. God is the eternal interchange of love, joy and glory between Father, Son and Holy Spirit - our three-personal God of overflowing happiness. To quote C.S. Lewis - "If you want love and joy and peace you must get close to - even into - the One who has them."

God is the One who has limitless happiness, power and life. Get close to Him and you will be happy. You will taste a joy that nothing in this world can give you. And that will honor God more than all of your duty and discipline.

We taste this reality in our other relationships.

- **How do you honor your wife best?** By enjoying her most. It doesn't play - does it guys? - to come home with a shiny new diamond bracelet for her birthday and say, "I guess I'm supposed to give this to you 'cuz we're married. Here you go." A gift rings hollow if there isn't sincere love and enjoyment behind it.
- **How do you honor your parents best?** By enjoying them. Young people - mom and dad want you to do your chores, but do you know what's even better? For you to ENJOY doing your chores because you love and appreciate your parents and all the hard work THEY do for you!
- **How do you honor your boss best?** Not just by putting your head down and checking tasks off your list - but by happily engaging as a member of the team - by sincerely telling your boss how glad you are to be a part of what he or she is trying to get done.
- **How do you honor your friend best?** By simply enjoying him or her. Why do you want to get together this weekend? "I suppose I better - we are friends, right?"

Obligation does not honor. Duty and discipline only go so far. The best way to honor someone you love is to ENJOY being with them. The same is true with God. We honor God best when we enjoy Him most. Or, to come back to John Piper -

"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." John Piper

Let me close with **nine suggestions** to get us thinking about how to enjoy God more. These are from an inspiring book called *Sacred Pathways* by Gary Thomas. See the church blog for more on this and a link to buy the book. Thomas explains nine ways that people over the centuries have connected with God. It's very liberating to know that we are not all the same and that it's ok - even wise - to seek God as He has wired us, and not trying to be someone we are not. Here are the nine sacred pathways - see if one or two of these might help you.

Nine Sacred Pathways (Gary Thomas)

1. **Naturalists** - Experience the Creator through His Creation
2. **Sensates** - Enjoy God through your Senses and the Arts
3. **Traditionalists** - Connect with God through Rituals and Disciplines

Naturalists

Some of us feel closer to God outside. I have recently thrown a beach chair in the trunk of my car so I can find a place in the shade by a local pond and read my Bible plan somewhere surrounded by

nature. This is not nature worship - it is Bible-directed God worship, but being someplace that reminds you of the creative wonders God has made can help you experience His love for you.

Sensates

Some believers are very experiential and enjoy God by spending hours contemplating great works of art or listening to inspiring music - maybe writing music of your own. Anything that connects your senses - taste, touch, sight, smell, hearing. Jesus established a regular meal believers are to take that leverages our smell, taste and touch. We are physical beings, so don't feel bad about lighting a candle or turning on some classical music as you read your Bible.

Traditionalists

A proven method for loving and serving God is observing different seasons of the year and the rituals that believers have attached to them. Lent is the most common example, but every season has prayers and liturgies that have been written. Personally, I prefer to create my own prayers because I am a writer and speaker. But many believers love prayers like those in Valley of Vision or other collections of prayers. Take advantage of Christmas and Easter for sure - but if you like structure and traditions, explore this pathway and find some less known traditions to incorporate into your worship and enjoyment of God.

Nine Sacred Pathways (Gary Thomas)

4. ***Ascetics*** - Love God in Solitude and Simplicity
5. ***Activists*** - Work with God through Evangelism or Social Action
6. ***Caregivers*** - Serve God by Ministering to People

Ascetics

Some people are wired to be alone and you hear God's voice best when all other noises are blocked out. You have a quiet sanctuary where you can get alone with God and you like to spend extended time with Him. Many who are bent this way can read for long periods of time and keep a journal regularly. You may like to fast for one day, three days or a week. You may plan periodic retreats to have extended time away with the Lord.

Do you see how not every pathway is for everyone? We should all be familiar with all nine of the pathways and use principles from them. But I learned this one through experience. I love being with people and praying with people. So while I enjoy time alone with God I am energized by praying with other pastors and ministry leaders so at different times in my ministry I've had 2-3 group prayer meetings EVERY WEEK. I'm not saying you should do that - I'm saying that's part of my relational wiring.

Activists

Some of you are more built for action than for solitude and silence. And that's ok. Lean into your wiring and connect with God as you work for Him. There is a dependence on God that comes from stepping out to engage someone with the Gospel or to take on an injustice in the world. You may have a prophetic calling from the Lord to confront an evil - and you will experience and enjoy God most by getting after this cause and working to see it change.

I have recently learned that around 100,000 slaves are bought and sold in the United States - many of them right here in the Bay Area and over half of them CHILDREN under 18. Some of you are rightly

passionate in the battle to end abortion. Some of you are rightly involved in caring for orphans. And more of us need to take up the mantle of Wilberforce and join in the battle to end slavery in our day. You may find that something awakens in your relationship with God if you are wired to be an activist.

Caregivers

When you listen to a hurting person and pray with them and encourage them, you feel God's presence, you feel like an agent of His love and mercy. You know He is with you and you feel close to Him as you care for someone else. The good news if this describes you is that there is no shortage of hurting people in this world of ours. We've got plenty right here at Oakwood. Join a small group, connect with a few people and begin to connect with God as you minister His love to people in need.

Nine Sacred Pathways (Gary Thomas)

7. **Enthusiasts** - Experience God through Celebration and Mystery
8. **Contemplatives** - Enjoy God through Devotion and Meditation
9. **Intellectuals** - Connect with God through Study and Discussion

Enthusiasts

Some of us are more emotionally wired than others. This contrast comes out in these last three pathways. This is not a better or worse kind of thing - just different. And it shows how we need each other. Those who are more experiential and spiritually sensitive need those who are more intellectual and Biblically grounded. But the intellectuals need the spontaneity and responsiveness of the enthusiasts just as much.

Some of us love mystery and the future and wondering what God is up to right now and in the near future. You may be intrigued by dreams and visions and prophecy. There are cautions to consider for all of the pathways and Thomas identifies those. But if you are a flexible/spontaneous person who enjoys new and exciting experiences then don't deny or ignore that - stay rooted in Scripture and explore your feelings and ideas with a trusted friend.

Contemplatives

Some of us are more reflective than others. This one often goes with solitude and simplicity. Contemplatives love to meditate and journal. They love to read and study about the love of God and rest their hearts in what it means to be the Beloved of God.

Intellectuals

Finally, some people are more academic and connect with God through study - a rigorous analysis of Scripture or some topic of theology. Some of you may have elaborate charts of the end times that break down Revelation and Daniel. Some of you have detailed notes on every book of the Bible. You may have a more intellectual approach to enjoying God.

Do you see the point? "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." The point is to enjoy the Lord - to delight ourselves in Him. Don't limit yourself to only one sacred pathway - push yourself to branch out and learn from the ones that aren't really "your thing." But lean into your own personality and preferences and connect with God as He designed you.

Jesus alone offers living water we can drink and never be thirsty again. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Beware of the false promises of everything else in this world. Many things offer life, happiness, purpose and fulfillment - but all of them will come up empty and leave you still feeling thirsty. The only One who will never disappoint you is Jesus. Come to Him. Delight in Him and you will be happy. Come to the source of all life, joy, power and goodness and let Him fill you!