

Lesson 6 Notes

John 4:31-54

Focus Verse

“My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” (John 4:34)

Outline

- Feasting on God’s Will – John 4:31-34
- Focusing on God’s Harvest – John 4:35-42
- Finding God’s Healing – John 4:43-54

Engage

We experience this physical world while living in bodies of flesh. The things we see and touch often fully absorb our attention. We plan our next meal and await our next paycheck. We walk, talk, and work as the years pass by. **Daily life can utterly consume our time, energy, and focus.** How do we live in this world *and* figure out what really matters? Surely God intends more for us than an inch-deep focus on this physical world. What helps us see beyond the fleeting and visible to seek and embrace what will last forever?

Throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus sought to raise His followers’ focus from an earthly perspective to a heavenly one. When people limited His words to the physical realm, Jesus expanded and elevated their thinking. Jesus explained spiritual rebirth to Nicodemus, who puzzled over physically reentering his mother’s womb. Jesus offered the Samaritan woman living water, not just liquid water. As John 4 closes, Jesus led His disciples to see beyond physical food to spiritual food. He directed their attention to the spiritual needs of people around them and the eternal satisfaction of doing God’s will. **Eternal priorities matter more than temporal pleasures.** May the Lord lead us to see the world and measure our lives the way He does.

✦ Feasting on God’s Will – John 4:31-34

God sent His Son into the world to reveal His life-giving power to real people. Through a series of targeted encounters and meaningful conversations, Jesus engaged with people to open their hearts to truth. He spoke to Nicodemus,¹ the Samaritan woman,² and a father in desperate need.³ These encounters increasingly clarified the truth of Jesus’s identity and power.

1. Nicodemus: John 3:1-21
2. The Samaritan woman: John 4:1-26
3. Desperate father: John 4:46-54

The Disciples' Temporal Mindset – 4:31-33

When the Samaritan woman left, Jesus's disciples implored Him to eat. To their surprise, He replied, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." This perplexed the disciples, who had returned from town with purchased food. Had someone else delivered Jesus a meal? Their focus remained on the literal and physical rather than Jesus's deeper spiritual meaning.⁴ **Jesus sought to move His disciples beyond the realm of grumbling stomachs to grasp something far more important.**

Jesus had just experienced something far more satisfying than any meal. As He spoke with this outcast woman, **Jesus saw her heart soften as she absorbed and responded to His invitation. He watched her reach out to receive His gift and become a child of His eternal kingdom. And then, she eagerly shared the good news with others. This woman's budding faith and joyful response brought deep satisfaction to Jesus.**

Jesus's Eternal Mindset – 4:34

Having captured His disciples' curiosity, Jesus purposefully trained them. He invited His chosen band of developing leaders to experience the permeating joy of God's eternal work. Jesus would entrust these very men to carry on His commission when He returned to His Father. He told His disciples, **"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."** Jesus approached His earthly ministry as a divine endeavor. **He desired to finish victoriously. He lived to accomplish God's will. Jesus's greatest satisfaction came by accomplishing the very work God sent Him to do.**



Jesus spoke of spiritual sustenance and nourishment that far exceeded the temporary enjoyment afforded by any earthly pleasure. **Deep satisfaction came not through what He took in, but what He gave out to others. We often struggle to understand "God's will" for our lives but Jesus did not.** He came to earth with specific tasks God willed Him to complete. **Most importantly, Jesus came to die for the sin of humanity—a work He resolutely declared "finished" as He hung on the cross.**⁵ Jesus poured out life and light to many as He set His sights on completing the work God sent Him to accomplish. **Pleasing His Father brought Jesus untold fulfillment.**

✦ Focusing on God's Harvest – John 4:35-42

God's Harvest Explained – 4:35-38

As Jesus and His disciples traveled, they undoubtedly passed many fields—planted, growing, and awaiting harvest. Jesus again offered a **physical illustration** to teach deeper spiritual truth. He quoted a common farming proverb, "It's still four months until harvest." **Jesus graciously raised the thinking of His disciples from the expected sequence of a physical harvest to the spiritual harvest God brings in the lives of people.** Farmers prepare the soil, plant seeds, remove

4. **Literal not spiritual:** John 2:19-22; 3:4-12

5. **Finished work:** John 19:30; Hebrews 12:2

weeds, pray for rain, and eventually harvest a crop. In the spiritual realm, God's Word is sown into human hearts.⁶ Sometimes people respond in faith immediately. At other times, God's people wait patiently for a harvest of faith. Jesus wanted His disciples to open their eyes to the spiritual opportunities all around them.

The spiritual seed Jesus planted within the Samaritan woman's heart had already produced a crop ready to harvest. Jesus told His disciples, "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." Perhaps at that moment, men and women streamed out from the town of Sychar to meet the Lord. The Samaritan harvest was ready to reap. In farming the ripeness of the crop creates urgency to reap the harvest. Similarly, God calls believers to recognize both the fleeting nature and constant supply of spiritual opportunities. We never have a guarantee of more time to invest in others and sow the seed of the gospel. And yet, we live surrounded by spiritual need in people all around us.

Jesus spoke of "harvesting" people for eternal life. The "wages" those who work in the fields receive are the joyful rewards of sharing the gospel. This remained Jesus's constant focus. God orchestrates a network of workers to share the labor and privilege of reaping God's harvest. Some plant seeds of truth that others harvest.⁷ One person sows, perhaps for many years and through much prayer, while enduring hardship and great sacrifice. Then another person reaps the harvest as people come to faith and lives are changed. The harvest of a soul for Christ often incorporates the investments of many people. The teamwork and collaboration among God's people allow sower and reaper to rejoice together when God's kingdom advances.

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God's Harvest Experienced – 4:39-42

Jesus's disciples immediately witnessed the profound truth of His words. **Though the disciples themselves had not personally shared the gospel in this town, they experienced an outpouring of Samaritans who believed in Jesus.** The investment Jesus made in a lonely woman reaped an amazing harvest.

The Samaritan Woman's Testimony – 4:39

The woman Jesus gently and compassionately called to faith immediately **shared what she knew with the people in her town.** She had formerly drawn water in the noonday heat, possibly to avoid people. Now, this woman joyfully and confidently declared, "He told me everything I ever did." She did not understand or explain the full picture of all that Jesus is and what He came to do. She simply told people she knew what Jesus did for her.

Jesus's intimate knowledge of this woman and the depth of her pain touched her powerfully. She wasted no time in telling others about Jesus. **A personal account of a changed life offers a compelling witness to the truth about Jesus.** In a small village such as Sychar, this woman's reputation and past were likely common knowledge. Her testimony and transformation were so convincing that her neighbors put down their work in the middle of the day. They came out of the town to meet Jesus themselves. Many believed in Him.

6. Sowing spiritual seed: 1 Peter 1:23

7. Shared cultivation: 1 Corinthians 3:5-6

The Samaritans—Who Were They?

Samaria was the capital city of the northern tribe of Israel during the divided kingdom period in Israel's history. When Israel fell to Assyria, the majority of the people who lived in the Samaritan territory were deported. **Those who remained developed into an ethnically mixed people who practiced a hybrid religion that blended aspects of Judaism with pagan worship.**¹ They established Mount Gerizim as their primary worship site and rejected the Jerusalem temple and Levitical priesthood.

In New Testament times, Jewish people shunned the Samaritans with great disdain. They went out of their way to not set foot in Samaritan territory. **Despite this, Jesus intentionally went through Samaria to reach people there.** He reversed the perception of Jewish superiority and demonstrated that salvation was for the entire world. When Jesus commissioned His followers before He ascended to heaven, He sent them as His witnesses in the power of His Spirit to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.²

1. **Samaritan religion:** 2 Kings 17:24-33

2. **Great Commission:** Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8

Jesus's Powerful Words – 4:40-41

The people of Sychar were not content merely to hear about Jesus from this transformed woman. **These Samaritans came to Jesus and urged Him to stay in their town.** Surely Jesus rejoiced at this request and the openness of these people to receive His message. **For two days, Jesus stayed and talked with the townspeople.** **Because of Jesus's presence and words, many more came to faith.**

Believing and Receiving the Savior – 4:42

The Samaritans' faith became grounded in their own personal relationships with Jesus.

Believers share the gospel with others, but true living faith cannot be a secondhand experience. The townspeople told the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; **now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.**"

This Samaritan response presents the first large group of people to receive salvation and openly confess Jesus as Savior. These non-Jews received the truth and represented the host of people from all nations, times, and places who come to faith in Christ. **The offer of salvation came first to the Jews, but in grace, God sent His Son to save the world.**⁸ These Samaritans lacked the spiritual advantages of the Jews,⁹ **yet now boldly confessed Christ.**

The Jews, through whom the good news of salvation came, **remained largely indifferent to God's gift.** Those called "the first" ignored or despised the Savior, while "the last" pressed forward.¹⁰

8. **Savior of the world:** John 3:17

9. **Jewish advantage:** Romans 3:2; 9:4

10. **First and last:** Luke 13:29-30

God's Lavish Blessings to the Undeserving

The Doctrine of Grace

Everything God does reflects all that He is. His actions toward humanity reveal His character. By nature, God is gracious—inclined to offer blessings and favor to the undeserving. **God's grace refers to His bestowing of benefits that are not earned or merited by human effort.** By God's grace, the beauty of His creation reveals His creative power and majesty to all humanity. Believers and unbelievers alike experience sunrises, sunsets, and rain that waters dry ground. **The most powerful expression of God's grace is seen in the sacrifice of God's Son to redeem people enslaved by sin and death.** God extends grace to the unworthy by offering salvation and spiritual blessings **that cannot be earned.**

Salvation in Christ comes by grace through faith.¹ If human goodness or works could earn salvation, it would not be by grace. **Because God is the author of salvation and provides everything a sinner needs to receive eternal salvation, all the glory goes to Him.** Sinners are saved because of God's unmerited favor toward us in Christ—which cannot be earned.² **God's grace not only brings sinners salvation, but also sustains them in life and for eternity.**³


To fail to understand or appreciate God's grace means living life trying to earn God's favor or completely ignoring Him. Because the best we can offer God is flawed and inadequate, attempts to earn His favor will always come up short. **We try to feel better by comparing ourselves to others we deem worse than we are.** Without seeing God as inherently gracious, we wrongly think He is harsh and punitive rather than kind and welcoming.

God's posture toward humanity is utterly gracious. He knows the depth of our neediness. **He moves toward us to meet us where we are and give us what we need.** To relish God's grace, **we must realize we deserve nothing but judgment.** **When God opens our eyes to recognize His grace, we see His ongoing care and provision in salvation and daily life.** Proper understanding of God's grace regularly moves our hearts toward humility and worship. We experience peace because of God's grace. We depend on God's grace and trust Him for all we truly need. **By grace, when God looks at a believer, He sees only Christ's imparted righteousness, which cannot be earned. All praise and glory belong to the God of all grace!**

1. **Grace in salvation:** Romans 3:21-24; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 2:11

2. **Salvation cannot be earned:** Romans 4:1-8

3. **Sustaining grace:** John 1:16; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Hebrews 4:16; 2 Peter 3:18

In the early days of the Church, many Samaritans turned to Christ.¹¹ These two days Jesus spent in Sychar laid the foundation for the belief of many to follow. **One sinful woman's faith in Jesus as Messiah became the turning point for an entire town.** **Is it any wonder Jesus "had" to go through Samaria?**¹² 

11. **Samaritan believers:** Acts 8:5-25

12. **Through Samaria:** John 4:4

✦ Finding God's Healing – John 4:43-54

Jesus Returns to Galilee – 4:43-45

After two days, Jesus traveled to Galilee where the people welcomed Him. Jesus taught that a prophet is not honored in His own country. This inclusion probably reflects a contrast with the reception in Samaria. Many of the Galileans had witnessed all Jesus had done while in Jerusalem for the Passover feast.¹³ Though rejection escalated as Jesus's ministry progressed, the Galileans received Him at this point.

Jesus Heals the Royal Official's Son – 4:46-54

This encounter represents yet another gracious revelation from Jesus that affirms who He is and calls people to belief. John's presentation of Jesus includes relational conversations that reveal truth about Jesus.

Jesus's Conversation with a Desperate Father – 4:46-49

Jesus returned to Cana where He had turned water into wine.¹⁴ A royal official approached Jesus with an intense personal need. John's account reveals only essential facts about this man. He lived at Capernaum, roughly 20 miles (about 30 km) from Cana. A loving father, he desperately worried about his son who lay ill—seemingly with no hope for recovery. When the royal official heard that Jesus had returned to Galilee, he left his sick son and traveled to Cana to see Jesus. This father faced a need that neither his position nor power could resolve. Difficulties we cannot control strip us of pretense, pride, and independence. The man begged Jesus to come and heal his son who was near death.

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Jesus's reply to this man's desperate cry for help may seem at first strange or even harsh. Jesus answered, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe." We must realize Jesus intended to heal the boy, but His greater priority was to awaken faith in the royal official. The "you" in Jesus's statement is plural, indicating He also spoke to the unbelieving people in His presence.

The man must have felt the sympathy and compassion in Jesus's words. He persistently begged for Jesus to come to Capernaum before his son died. The cry of his heart exceeded a desire to observe miraculous wonders. Through His next words, Jesus encouraged this desperate father to take the next step of faith.

Jesus's Challenge to a Father's Faith – 4:50-54

Jesus's reply communicated His authority and healing power. He told the man, "Go, your son will live." With His answer, Jesus called this father to believe without visible proof.¹⁵ The father had to trust that Jesus could heal his son from afar. Jesus invited him to fasten his faith solely on God's word and power.

13. Passover in Jerusalem: John 2:13-25

14. Water to wine: John 2:1-11

15. Faith not sight: 2 Corinthians 5:7

The official took Jesus at His word and departed for Capernaum. His budding faith sprang into action. On his way home, the man's servants met him with news of his son's recovery. He asked when his son revived **and noted the healing occurred at the exact time Jesus spoke to him.**

This man of high standing came to Jesus with a frantic physical need. Jesus challenged his faith. **Because he trusted the Lord's promise, he experienced the joy of Jesus's power and compassion on his behalf.** **Jesus not only met an intense physical need in the royal official's family, but also met their desperate spiritual need; the man and his entire household came to saving faith in Jesus.** God often uses difficult circumstances to identify our spiritual needs and build our faith. The son's physical life was spared, and the entire family experienced spiritual new life through faith in Christ.

John recorded this miracle as **Jesus's second "sign"** after coming from Judea to Galilee. **The Gospel writer continues to make a case for Jesus's identity, power, and authority to call people to believe in Him.**

Jesus met temporary, physical needs with a constant eye on spiritual, eternal priorities. He called earthbound people to look beyond this world's joys and challenges to focus on weightier eternal matters. **Nothing is more important than doing God's will.** Jesus resolutely stayed the course to go where the Father sent Him and accomplish His plan. **Eternal priorities matter more than temporal pleasures.** **By God's grace, He turns our focus to what truly counts for eternity.**

✦ Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Jesus's disciples returned from the town of Sychar with food just as Jesus had finished His life-changing conversation with the woman at the well. The disciples offered Jesus physical nourishment, but He called them to a richer sustenance. **Jesus's "food"—His deepest source of soul satisfaction—came from doing His Father's will.** **Nothing in this world compared to the pleasure of obeying His Father and completing His assigned work.**

Jesus taught His disciples by comparing a farmer's physical harvest with the spiritual harvest of people coming to saving faith. While farmers follow an expected progression from soil to seed to harvest, the spiritual "fields" before the disciples were already ripe for reaping. Jesus raised His disciples' awareness of the spiritual needs and opportunities all around them. **He described the joy of harvesting souls for God's kingdom.** Jesus explained the collaborative efforts of those who sow and reap as people come to faith. He challenged His followers to set their sights on the spiritual investment He was calling them to make in people **with desperate spiritual needs.**

In an immediate and visible demonstration of this truth, many Samaritans came to faith in Christ. Some believed based solely on the testimony of a woman who was transformed by Jesus at the well. **Jesus stayed there two days and personally invested in the people in Sychar.** **Many more believed.**

Returning to Galilee and the town of Cana, Jesus met a royal official with a desperately ill son. This father begged Jesus to heal his dying son. Jesus spoke targeted words that stimulated this father's faith. **Jesus pronounced that the boy would live and sent the man home with newfound faith.** Indeed, the boy revived at that exact moment. **The man and his entire family came to faith in Christ because of this sign of Jesus's power and authority.**

Apply It

How have you experienced the incomparable delight of obeying God? This world offers many brands of supposed satisfaction and fulfillment. **We often seek identity and purpose in education, jobs, entertainment, positions of influence, and much more.** Jesus helps us realize **He has so much more for us than the temporary happiness and fleeting pleasure this world offers.** Jesus thrived on doing His Father's will **and He wants us to flourish by pursuing what really matters.** **While God's will for us may sometimes seem like an elusive pursuit, what He wants most is for our hearts to so long for Him that nothing else compares to pleasing Him.** In what way has God nourished your soul as you value His treasures more than this world's pleasures? What helps you keep your eyes on the higher prize when this life's cares encroach on your time and focus?

The Samaritan woman did not know everything about Jesus but boldly testified to His power in her life. Never underestimate the power of your story. How has Jesus transformed your life? In what way has the gospel entwined with your call to believe and follow Christ? **Who needs to hear what you know about Jesus? God has uniquely positioned you to proclaim boldly what you do know to people who do not know Christ.** The gospel represents the power of God to set sin's captives free. **Tell people what Jesus has done for you.** You never know what God will do with your story.

God builds His kingdom through a network of people who care about eternity and people. **God is calling you to invest in His harvest.** Whether you pray for someone for many years or offer a passing comment in a daily conversation, **God weaves our investments into His harvest in His time.** You may teach students who do not seem to listen. You may pray for family members and look for opportunities to speak into their lives. We should not take credit for what we are privileged to reap **or sense failure when visible results seem few.** What do you do if you constantly sow but never seem to reap? **Keep on sowing.** Only eternity will measure the fruit God will bring from your spiritual investments in people around you. **God can be trusted with whatever you invest in His kingdom.**

The Lord faithfully invites us into deeper faith. Jesus knew what the royal official needed to hear and experience to seek Him and grow in faith. **God may use hardship, blessings, challenges, or joys to reveal Himself.** God loves us enough to allow us to run out of human solutions so we will seek Him. What has God used in your life to rob you of self-sufficiency and draw you to Himself? What situation has revealed your desperate need for what only God could provide? As you live and pray for those you love, **ask God to use whatever it takes to build faith in Him.** God controls what we cannot. **He works in ways that reveal both our neediness and His transformative power.** When will you look to the Lord for strength you lack and answers you need? No matter what we face, our highest calling is to trust God.