



## SESSION 5

# Christel and the Woman of Samaria

I remember the day fairly well. The mission my husband and I were serving had received its first few confirmed members, and together as a group we started making visits in the neighborhood. One day, we passed by a smaller one-room house where an older woman sat outside on her patio watching passersby. Walking by, I told her “Good Morning” as that is a customary and respectful thing to do in the Dominican Republic, especially with the older generation.

I had no idea that this simple greeting would open a door to many more visits. She was well-known in the community, but as time went on, we found out how much hurt and hardship filled her life.

She didn’t have much to call her own. She had a bed, a small desk, some old calendars that she hung up for decorations, and a small area for a bucket toilet and cook stove. Her house was located in front of a discotheque whose clients would throw all their trash and empty bottles at the front of her house, shooting guns and getting into fights, and sometimes rattling her flimsy wooden walls when their late-night scuffles got out of control.

She had suffered a severe fall about ten years ago and received an operation by an unexperienced doctor that left her having a difficult time walking and getting around. As you could imagine, her perspective on life was bitter and her treatment of her neighbors followed suit. She did not have much family, which is rare in the culture of the country, only a few distant nieces and nephews who seemed to be estranged. Her neighbors generally tried to keep their distance. Her default expression was a sour one and she was quick to criticize.

She always was willing to receive a visit, even though her outward behavior often seemed to suggest the contrary. After a few visits we realized that even though she “appeared” upset, she enjoyed the company. We read many Psalms to her, prayed with her, for her, for her health, her safety, for the discotheque across the street, and for the community. When we would miss

a visit, she made it clear that she didn't want us to skip her house! We invited her to church, spoke the Gospel to her, and yet she would often say, "I don't want to hear about it," even as she begged us to return soon for another visit.

After nearly two years of meeting her, she began to show signs of dementia. We would go and invite her to church services on Sunday. One of those Sundays we found her right outside her patio wanting to go "home." Had she managed to get into a public transit vehicle, she may never have found her way back. Fortunately, together with fellow church members, we were able to convince her to go into her house and receive some nutrients and rest. The church members in the community set a vigil to make sure that she didn't wander off in her confused state.

We later were assigned to serve in a different part of the country and followed up with members about her well-being. They continued to visit her and then shared she was later taken to a nursing home. Her life was probably much better there, but she was no longer a part of the community that had begun to reach out to her. The members checked in on her and visited her, but the facility was far from where she had lived.

Why do I share this story? There most definitely could be a joyous ending, but I don't know, and that's the life of a missionary. More often than not we go day-to-day sharing God's love and forgiveness. We share with many, we teach many classes, we serve alongside fellow church members in their communities with the Gospel message not knowing whether it will be received, whether we will be asked to leave, or whether we are a part of the story of how the Gospel came to that person. We know the Word will never return empty and as a missionary you have to absolutely believe that because more times than not you are in situations where there is absolutely nothing you can do but share the love of Jesus and simply be present. It's Jesus Who opens the doors for His Gospel. It is Jesus Who gives us the opportunities to serve our neighbors and show mercy to them. It is Jesus Who loved that woman enough to bring her servants from His church.

Some sow, some reap. That is the life of a missionary. The Gospel is not ours. We are only able to share it because we too have received it through Christ's body and blood on the cross. We, too, were given faith in order to believe. This is why one of the greatest joys I have experienced as a missionary is sharing with my fellow brothers and sisters around the Lord's table. When you are at the table you are reminded of how the Gospel has come to those around you, how it has come you, how it was received, and how lives have

been transformed because of it and that one day you will all be together, at the banquet feast, with the Samaritan woman, rejoicing in the Lord's incredible faithfulness.

### John 4:1-42

#### *The women at the well, to whom Christel relates.*


I love this story because Jesus meets this woman in her daily life, in her sin, at a well-known and historical place. He crosses many cultural barriers in simply being seen in public with her and yet He acknowledges her and gives her the message of salvation. In verse 26 we read, "*I who speak to you am He.*" This is what Christ does for us. He comes to us through His Word, through the waters of Baptism (referenced here in this story verse 14), and His very own body and blood. He knows our sin, He knows how messed up and unworthy we are in God's eyes; yet through Him, we are made perfect, we are forgiven, we are made right with God. The Samaritan woman can barely contain herself after this encounter and runs off (vv. 28-29) to tell everyone. We later find in verse 39 how many believed because of her testimony. That testimony happened because of Jesus. Jesus came to her, she received His Word, was forgiven, made new, and because of that was able to share that the Messiah had come. Salvation had come for all, even for a Samaritan woman. This is what being a missionary is all about. We receive the gifts God has given us in order to then go and share that with those we are called to serve. Forgiven to serve.

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## CHRISTEL'S BIO

**Christel Neuendorf,** Deaconess, and her husband Rev. James serve the Lord as missionaries in Puerto Rico. Both have served as missionaries in this region since 2008, based in Panama and then in the Dominican Republic. As a deaconess, Christel is involved in the long-term disaster relief efforts at the mission's vari-

ous Casa de Amparo y Respuesta al Desastre (House of Refuge and Disaster Response) mercy houses. James and Christel both grew up in Michigan. Christel is a native of Flushing, Mich. She also graduated from Concordia University, Ann Arbor, Mich., with a degree in business and received her deaconess certificate from Concordia



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## Discussion and Study

*What part of Christel's story touched your heart?*

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*How did the local Christian community make a difference in the woman's life?*

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*What is your congregation doing to minister to the needs of others?*

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*How can you be a catalyst in your congregation to look beyond what you are doing and seek new opportunities?*

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*Read the story of the woman at the well in John 4: 1-42. Share any new insights you gathered from the text. What surprises did you find?*

*When you meet someone from another culture, what is your reaction to that person(s)?*

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*What is the best way you can be a witness like the woman at the well? (Recall what happened in vv. 35-42)*

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**+** *Join in a prayer asking for the Lord's guidance in your service to him.*

