

OUTCAST: On the Outside

Large Group Talk 1

**Don't forget to start with the intro found in the Large Group Talk Outlines folder.*

Objective:

The goal of this large group session is to help students see what makes someone an outsider or feel like they are on the fringes of community. Students will take a look at the Samaritan woman at the well from the Gospel of John to discover why she was an outcast. From there, students will begin to identify who the outsiders are in their own communities so that they can begin to follow in Jesus' footsteps and reach out to invite them back in.

Transition to On the Outside Large Group Talk:

Ask: *What makes someone an outsider in our society? What makes someone an outsider in your youth group?*

Say Something Like: *Think about the different circles that make up the communities you interact with all day. You have your family circle (parents, siblings), your school circle (teachers, administrators, students), your friend circle (old and new), maybe an extracurricular circle (teammates, band members, cast members), and a youth group circle. For most of these, it's pretty easy to tell who is on the inside and who is on the outside—teammates wear the same jerseys and classmates all sit in desks together. But sometimes that line can become blurred. Just because someone shows up to youth group every week doesn't mean they feel like an insider. What are the things that draw people inside those circles? What pushes them to the fringes? Let's spend some time looking at someone Jesus encountered who had been pushed outside of every circle she used to belong to.*

Tell the story of the woman at the well, found in John 4:1-30. It's pretty long, so you may wish to summarize the story for your students first then read the actual verses as you teach through the passage throughout all four large group sessions.

Optional Illustration: There are several creative ways that people have told the story of the woman at the well from spoken word to movies about the life of Christ that depict this scene. Consider doing a short internet search of "John 4 the woman at the well" to show students this story in a different way.

Teaching:**1. Different**

Say Something Like: *Jesus was definitely stepping outside the box by having a conversation with a Samaritan woman. He was traveling from Judea to Galilee, but to get there, he had to pass through Samaria. It was not common for Samaritans to associate with Jews. In fact, Samaritans were viewed as rejects. The Jews saw themselves as pure, but the Samaritans had married people from other cultures and had mixed other religions with their own. So Jews believed they would become tainted or unclean just by sharing dinner with Samaritans.*

But you probably know the term Samaritan from another story: the Good Samaritan. A Jewish man is beaten by robbers, but several Jewish religious leaders wouldn't even cross the road to help him. In the end, it was a Samaritan—not a Jew—who helped him. Now you know why that story was so radical to Jesus' Jewish audience. The holiest Jews wouldn't help a man in need, but a lowly, tainted Samaritan would? Yeah, right. So you can see that the Samaritan woman at the well was the victim of some pretty extreme cultural prejudices.

Optional Illustration: To us, it may seem crazy that a culture would see a whole group of people as unclean, rejected, and outcast. But it happens all the time in our world on a small scale (like cliques that push others out) to a large scale like the Dalits in India. You may know that in India people fit into a caste system, a hierarchy that everyone is born into. Some castes are considered lowly, and some are seen as higher. But the Dalits are so low that they don't even fit in the caste system at all. They're called "untouchables" because people believe being around them is enough to be made unclean—so they are left out of schools and medical facilities and given the lowliest jobs in the communities (like dealing with dead bodies or human waste), jobs considered perfect for the "untouchables."

Say Something Like: *The truth is that Jesus may have raised a few eyebrows by talking with a Samaritan, but it wasn't unheard of. At least he wasn't sharing a meal with one. But it was extremely shocking that he'd talk to her for another reason: she was a woman. Men rarely spoke to women outside of their homes because during Jesus' day women were seen as second-class citizens in many parts of the world. But Jesus wasn't just any man—he was a Rabbi, a teacher. He was given the very special task of teaching people about God and his law. That was a privilege Rabbis couldn't take lightly. It was his job to teach men at all times (and his time was very valuable). Teaching women was believed to be a waste of time for Rabbis. As you can see, Jesus was breaking a ton of cultural and gender rules by having a discussion with the woman at the well.*

2. Rejected

Say Something Like: *Even in her own culture, this woman was a loner. The Jews looked down on her because she was a Samaritan, and the men looked down on her because she was a woman, but surely she could find acceptance among other Samaritan women. Everyone, no matter how different they are, must have someone who is like them, right? Yet when she arrives at the well, she's alone. This*

might not seem like a big deal to us—people go shopping by themselves all the time, but in her culture, the fact that this woman was alone spoke volumes.

Optional Illustration 1: Help students identify some of the ways that people are rejected in their own worlds because of mistakes, associations, or sin. For example, how is a pregnant teen or teen mom treated differently in school? What kinds of things are said about her when she shows up at a football game? What kinds of invitations are extended (or not extended) to her? How likely is she to make new friends in school or be accepted by new people?

Optional Illustration 2: In a lighthearted way, sports team allegiances can define who is rejected and who is accepted. Imagine if a bunch of the high school football team is hanging out at the local greasy spoon after practice and the quarter back from the biggest rival high school walked in (even worse, wearing his jersey!). What would be the reaction of the team? What kinds of things would they say? And the quarterback would probably be regretting his decision to grab some food at this particular place and time. Even though they all have a lot in common (like playing football, being in high school, living in the same area, grueling hours of conditioning, and the stress of passing tests in their worst classes), the “mistake” of playing for the wrong team is the elephant in the room that prevents anyone from making a move to eat together. (Based on your location, you could even tell stories about how fans of professional or college sports teams treat fans from rival teams).

Say Something Like: *That’s what it was like for this woman to come to the well alone. The well was the social gathering spot for the whole community, and women would always get water in groups. The only reason she’d be there by herself is if she had done something shameful, something that meant no one else wanted to be associated with her. It turns out that this woman had been married several times.*

So what? People get remarried all the time. It’s not like this woman murdered someone. Why would getting remarried cause her entire community to shun her?

In Jesus’ day, being married more than once was a huge problem. In fact, it was almost unheard of. Yet this woman hadn’t just remarried once; she had been married to five different men, and the man she was currently living with wasn’t her husband. That’s like messing up in a major way times five—plus a big, ugly cherry on top. She couldn’t claim that she’d just made a mistake because she was a repeat offender. What this woman had done was enough to brand her as sleazy. People had been stoned to death for less! That’s why she was ostracized by all the other women in her culture, the only other people who could really relate to her. If there was a rock bottom socially, she wasn’t far from it.

3. Valuable

Say Something Like: *Despite all of this, Jesus starts talking to this woman, not in a secluded house or a back alley but right at the well. By choosing the well as his backdrop, Jesus is making it very clear that he is not concerned how people will judge him. He's way more concerned with showing this woman that she matters, that she has value. But why? From every angle, this woman shouldn't have any value. She's a Samaritan woman who disgraced herself, an outcast in every way.*

Ask: *Why do you think Jesus saw this woman as valuable? What gave her value despite her cultural situation and her mistakes?*

Illustration: Tell the students that you're going to play The Price is Right game. Show pictures of the following series of objects on a screen (you can Google generic pictures of the items) or just tell students each item on the list. Ask students to write down how much they think each object is worth. Once they've guessed the price of everything on the list, reveal that each object actually belonged to a celebrity, making it far more valuable than it would have been otherwise. Be sure not to reveal the secret until students have guessed the price for each common item.

1. **A piece of French toast.** (Someone bought Justin Timberlake's partly eaten breakfast for \$1,025.)
2. **A pink toilet.** (After Jerry Garcia, lead singer of the Grateful Dead, died, his toilet sold for \$2,550.)
3. **A trampoline.** (Katy Perry auctioned off her cupcake trampoline from her "California Dreams" video for \$5,000.)
4. **A used tissue.** (Scarlett Johansson blew her nose when she appeared on "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno." The tissue—contents and all—sold for \$5,300.)
5. **A black, acrylic nail.** (Lady Gaga lost a fake nail on stage in Dublin. It sold for \$13,000.)
6. A piece of chewing gum. (Britney Spears chewed and spit out a piece of gum that sold for \$14,000.)
7. **A microphone.** (Morning radio host Dave Ryan bought Bob Barker's skinny microphone from "The Price is Right" for \$19,919.)
8. **A broken cell phone.** (A man accidentally dropped and broke his phone at a basketball game, but Rihanna signed the back of it so it could be sold on eBay for \$66,500.)
9. **A pair of gloves.** (A year after Michael Jackson's death, his gloves were auctioned off for \$190,000.)
10. **A white piano.** (British pop star George Michael purchased the white piano John Lennon used to write the song "Imagine" for over \$2 million.)

Say Something Like: *Did anyone come close with your guesses? How could any of these fairly common items be worth what people actually paid for them? Even the expensive things (like a piano) sold for way more than they're worth. They're valuable because of the celebrities who owned them or signed them. Things that shouldn't cost much (or nothing at all) skyrocket in value because they're associated with the right people. Take the broken cell phone, for example. For all intents and purposes, the phone was worthless. But when Rihanna associated herself with it by signing it, the phone became outrageously valuable.*

The truth is that the woman at the well, you, me, and every other human being are broken and outcast. We're rejected because of our cultures, our genders, or our personalities. We've done things we aren't proud of, and we've hurt people we should have loved. Based on those things, we should be worthless. But we're not. In fact, we're unbelievably valuable—priceless. Why? Because of the One who associates himself with us. We're God's creations, and he made us in his image. That means we were created to represent him to the world in a unique way. You could almost think of God's image as his autograph on us that marks us for life as outrageously valuable. And there's no level of brokenness or mistreatment that could ever take away that value. Just how valuable are we to God? We're so valuable that he sent his son, Jesus, to die a terrible death on a cross to defeat death and rebuild a relationship with us. While the rest of the world rejected the woman at the well, Jesus showed her that she was valuable by reaching past the outcast status and having a conversation with her. And not long after this day, he showed that she was valuable again—in a greater way—by dying on the cross for her and for us.

Putting It All Together:

Say Something Like: *Apart from anything he actually said to her, Jesus showed the woman at the well that she was valuable by actually engaging her in conversation. She had more than her fair share of baggage and brokenness, and she'd clearly been rejected by numerous people. But Jesus looked past those issues and connected with her. He didn't see a reject, an outcast, or an untouchable. He saw her as a valuable child of God, someone worth taking the time to see, know, and ultimately die for.*

Looking Forward:

[Speaker's Note: The questions below will be discussed in the Small Group Session that follows this lesson. Remember to pose these questions and encourage students to write down their responses on **page 4** of the Student Book.]

Question 1: Can you think of a time when your heart drifted from God (maybe even now)? How did that happen? What are some other things your heart has been drawn to instead of God?

Question 2: Why does God care more about our hearts than our outside appearances?

Need to Know: Let the students know that the next lesson will dive into the specific ways Jesus interacted with the woman at the well, building on all the things we talked about during this first lesson. Be sure to give them any instructions (or schedule info) they might need to go from here.

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