

SIX-FOLD TEST FOR MULTIETHNIC MINISTRY

SERMON SERIES: **POPULATION** | PARTICIPATION | POWER | PACE-SETTING | PURPOSEFUL NARRATIVE | PRACTICING SOLIDARITY

JOHN FANOUS

# Population

#1. Is the Covenant reaching increasing numbers of people among increasing numbers of populations?

## John 4:1-42, NIV

### JESUS TALKS WITH A SAMARITAN WOMAN

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

### THE DISCIPLES REJOIN JESUS

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me



**and to finish his work. Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."**

### **MANY SAMARITANS BELIEVE**

**Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.**

**They said to 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."**

Hello, everyone. My name is John Fanous. I'm the lead pastor of University Covenant Church in Davis, California, and I want to thank you for welcoming me into your space to talk about our multiethnic goals of population. Are we reaching more people of more diverse populations through our local church?

Now, at first this sounds very idealistic and good, but this is one of the hardest things to accomplish, and it will not happen if God is not involved.

There are reasons we want to see this happen. One: it's biblical. We see in Ephesians that Paul is writing to a group of believers who are trying to make one new people group out of two diverse groups who have been divided historically. Research shows that the more you are in regular proximity with people who are different from you, the less likely you are to have stereotypical or racist impressions of them. Nothing beats proximity. Nothing beats being close to one another. And we know Jesus's heart is to reach all people, all nations, with the good news.

How does this look in the local church? I just want to share that this is not easy. We're coming from all kinds of different contexts. Some of you are in urban churches where diversity is an easy thing. Some of you are in rural

churches where it's hard to find anyone different from you. Some of you are in very segmented society. Some of you are in very integrated society.

There are no simple, easy answers. What we do have is a God whom we love, who loves us, who wants to see this happen, and who is at work to bring people groups together.

Today I want to look at John 4, the passage of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well.

First of all, I want to let you know a little bit about me. My parents emigrated from Egypt. I was brought up in a fairly affluent suburban town that was originally all Caucasian, but during my years growing up it was becoming more and more Asian American. I witnessed, especially in my high school years, increasing racial tensions between the white and primarily Chinese American populations.

My wife's family is originally British, but five generations ago they immigrated to Mexico City. My mother-in-law was born and raised in Mexico City and spoke Spanish fluently. And so we both have this bicultural feel in us. This was really triggered when I got into college, and most of the ministries I've led since then have been fairly multiethnic where we've been trying to reach more populations and more diverse areas of our world.

I've been trying to think through what are some lessons I can pass on? So let's take a look at this passage and see what we can find out. And then let's step back and ask, Jesus, what are some lessons we can learn from you about this idea of reaching more populations?

Let's look at John 4:1-42. I will pause along the way to talk about what we see happening in this passage.

So Jesus is traveling from Judea (southern Israel) to Galilee (northern Israel), and a curious verse comes up that makes us pause because the language is so strong.

Verse 4 says this: "Now he had to go through Samaria." This word "had" is actually in the Greek. He must; he was obligated. He was almost forced to go through Samaria. But what we find out is, that's not actually true. Most Jews when they made this journey purposely averted Samaria. There were roads that went around Samaria. Why? Samaria was a different ethnic group, a different religious group that historically had tensions with the Jewish people. So Jewish people, when they traveled from one area of Israel to the northern side or vice versa, would purposely avert Samaria. But when Jesus made



the trip, it says he “had” to go through Samaria. So hold onto that because Jesus is doing something very countercultural.

It goes on in verse 5: “So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.”

Now, we need to understand here that Jesus was traveling with his disciples, but in this moment, he is alone. He’s tired. It’s noon. It’s hot. He’s exhausted. So he sits by this well.

Verse 7: “When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’ (His disciples had gone into town to buy food.)”

There’s a dynamic here that I want you to catch. Jesus is at this well. He is thirsty and tired. His disciples aren’t with him. A woman comes from the town of Sychar to get water. Now, understand the context here—it’s very rare for women to go alone to the well and very rare for women to go at noon; they usually go earlier during the cool of the day. So this woman is kind of a loner, and she’s coming out of the town that his disciples just went into. So you’ve got this switcheroo going on. Jesus’s disciples have gone into this town, and the Samaritan woman has left the town to gather water where the well is—where Jesus is sitting, tired and thirsty.

Verse 9: “The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’” Why is this a big question? It goes on: “For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.” This woman pauses and says, “There’s some weird stuff going on here. You’re in my town. Why are you talking to me? I am both a Samaritan and a woman. We have two things that would cause us not to relate. What are you doing? You are breaking societal norms. You are breaking some societal taboos. You are talking to me.” So she’s like, “What are you doing? This is weird. This is awkward.”

It goes on: “Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water’” (v. 10). He’s like, “Hey, you’re thinking about the wrong questions. If you knew who I was, you would be amazed. You wouldn’t be asking what you can do for me; you’d be asking what I could do for you. You’d be asking for living water.”

This is a little cryptic, so she replies: “‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep’” (v. 11). In other words, “Jesus, you have nothing to offer me.”

“Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” (vv. 11-12). She’s basically saying, “Jesus, who do you think you are? I’m the one with the bucket here. You have nothing. Do you feel like you’re greater than the person who gave us this well?”

“Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life’” (vv. 13-14). So now the woman gets it: “Jesus, you’re talking in cryptic language. We’re not talking about real water here, but you’re saying I will never get thirsty again. And not only will I not get thirsty, but it will actually lead to eternal life—it actually exudes out of me.” So she asked what we would probably ask: “The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water’” (v. 15).

You almost feel like she’s asking a deeper question. Again, we know that she’s alone, which says something about how she’s doing with the other women from her town. We know she’s coming at noon when it’s hot, which also says that she’s socially isolated. So there’s almost this plea in her, like, “If I can just avoid the shame of coming here alone day after day in the afternoon because of my thirst and you can give me something that will solve that problem, I would love that. Provide relief for my predicament.”

Jesus is ready to give this water to her, but there’s a problem. For him to give her this kind of water, some layers need to be peeled. So he begins to go for the dive and hit where she’s really thirsty.

“He told her, ‘Go call your husband and come back.’ ‘I have no husband,’ she replied. Jesus said to her, ‘You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is you have had five husbands. And the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true’” (vv. 16-18).

Jesus begins to peel back the layers of this woman’s life. We realize that maybe she’s isolated because of her life in town—that she seems to be passed from man to



man. No man has treated her with respect. In that society to go through five husbands was not something to be proud of. And now she's living with a guy in probably a very socially conservative environment. She's an outcast, and Jesus knows she's thirsty. She is spiritually thirsty. So he begins to ask prodding questions of what's going on for her. And he reveals, "I know this about you. This is your pain point."

Now she's been exposed. It's almost like she wasn't ready to go there. She feels more vulnerable than she meant to. She asked for this water. Jesus wants to give this living water to her, but to get there he had to pull back some pain.

But she wasn't ready for that. So she responds and begins to sidetrack the conversation. Watch what she does: "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet" (v. 19). You just revealed things about me that you should not know. And then she switches it to a theological thing. This is like a protection mechanism. You hit the heart, but I'm gonna go with the head real quick: "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem" (v. 20). So she begins to bring up the ethnic tensions between them: "Let's talk theology for a moment. Where is the right place to worship? We say it's right here—on our mountain, in our town. You Jews say on your mountain in Jerusalem. Who's right?"

"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (v. 21). There is going to be a time where this question is not relevant anymore.

"You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews" (v. 22). He makes some clarifying statements. He's not afraid to introduce conflict. He says, "Hey, there are some things you don't know. You only focus on a certain part of the Scriptures." We couldn't get into what the Samaritans believed, but he says, "The Jews have the whole Scripture. And let me just say salvation is going to come from the lineage of the Jews."

"Yet a time is coming," he says, "and has now come"—we're actually experiencing it—"when true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (v. 23). Jesus is saying, "There's a point where location isn't going to be the big question. It's not going to matter where

we worship, but God the Father is looking for a different type of worship that worships in spirit." It's less about where we worship and more about how we worship and with what spirit we worship. And then he adds, "And my Father in heaven is seeking worshipers like this."

"God is spirit," he says, "and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" (v. 24).

It's interesting that Jesus says that his Father is seeking worshipers. Perhaps this is why Jesus *had* to go through Samaria. Could it be possible that God is seeking more worshipers who aren't based in the where, aren't based in the ethnic divisions, but he's looking for worshipers who worship in spirit and truth? God is looking for those types of people.

So Jesus takes this theological sidetrack and brings it back to say, "My Father isn't looking for a worshiper as to where that worship's going to be, but he's looking for a worshiper who's transformed from the inside. This is what I'm trying to get at with you."

"The woman said, 'I know that the Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us'" (v. 25). She says, "Here's one thing we have in common: We both believe in a coming Messiah and this coming Messiah is going to make things clear to me because what you're bringing up is new, and I'm waiting for the person who's going to make it clear."

"Then Jesus declared, 'I, the one speaking to you—I am he'" (v. 26). This person you're longing for to address the pain you're feeling, this person that you're longing for to address the social isolation and brokenness and past behaviors, past decisions you've made, past decisions that have been made for you, that put you in a victim stance—all these things you're longing for, this living water, you're speaking to the source of that person right now.

This is a beautiful moment where Jesus peels back the layers and says, "Your pain, the healing of your pain, the source of your life—you're looking at him right now." Jesus had to go through Samaria because the Father is seeking worshipers who worship in Spirit and truth.

It's a beautiful moment, but then something awkward happens. This beautiful moment between a Jew and a Samaritan, between a male and a female, it's a beautiful "God—heaven on Earth" moment—and then reality hits and something awkward happens. Take a look: "Just then the disciples returned and were surprised to find



him talking with a woman. But no one asked, ‘What do you want?’” (to the woman, I presume.) “Or, ‘Why are you talking with her?’” (to Jesus, I presume) (v. 27).

This is an interesting situation. Remember how the woman left town to get to the well at the same time the disciples were leaving Jesus to go into town? Well, now the disciples have come back from town. They went shopping for food and now they’re back. They left town and they return and they enter into this very awkward situation. We have a Jewish and a Samaritan person together, and we have a man and a woman together; and everything is weird. “What is she doing here? What does she want?” And, “Jesus, what are you doing talking to her?”

But how do they do this? They actually just are quiet. They say nothing. No one asked for this one socially awkward moment. Can you imagine?

They’re sitting here having this powerful, spiritual conversation—Jesus and this woman. Twelve guys show up, and they just stand there looking awkward and saying nothing. What would you do if you were this woman? What would you say?

This is what she does: “Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?’ They came out of the town and made their way toward him” (vv. 28-30).

This woman feels this awkward moment. And I don’t know what she’s thinking. Maybe she’s like, “I had a great experience with Jesus. This is awkward with these guys. I’m going back to my town to tell people about my experience with Jesus.” She’s so enamored with Jesus she leaves her water jar behind. It’s like the symbol of her life, the symbol of her shame, the symbol of this behavior she had to do every day that reminded her of her brokenness and her sense of being an outcast. She leaves it behind. And she goes back to the town that the disciples just left, and she begins to tell them, “You won’t believe this conversation I just had.” She’s like, “Could this guy I met be the Messiah?”

Now, I don’t know exactly how the townspeople viewed her. But obviously her enthusiasm swayed them, so a group of people from the town are coming back to the well. This is one of those cartoon things where people are going back and forth between two locations. Track with me for a little bit. Jesus and the disciples

show up the well. The disciples go to town to get food. The woman is coming from town to get water. The disciples come back from the town to the well. They freak out the woman. The woman goes back to the town and tells her townspeople, “I met this guy,” and now she’s bringing all of them back to the well. We’re going back and forth between points A and B. This is crazy.

But as they are coming back, before the townspeople come to the well, Jesus has a conversation with his disciples. Verse 31 says, “Meanwhile, his disciples urged him, ‘Rabbi, eat something.’” We went all the way into this town that we normally avoid to get you food. Please eat some food.

Verse 32: “But Jesus said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you know nothing about.’”

Have you ever done something with God, for God, in partnership with God and sensed God’s favor, and sensed that God is doing something? It is so fulfilling. I think Jesus just came out of this experience where he knows his Father in heaven is seeking worshipers, and he got to go straight to the core and meet a woman of Samaria who clearly was in pain. He pulled back the layers of her pain and met her directly and said, “I have living water to offer you.” And she is enamored with him, and he is so full. And they’re like, “Hey, do you want a cheeseburger?” He’s like, “You know what? I have food that I am saving up that you know nothing about right now.”

So disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him some food?” (v. 33). Maybe this woman gave him food.

He responds, “My food...is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (v. 34). Jesus is living in a great moment right now. He is doing the work of his Father in heaven and he is fulfilled. He is satisfied.

And then he switches the topic to his disciples. I think he’s sensing their awkwardness about this whole dynamic. They just went into town and they left; they’re ready to get out. And Jesus wants to share something. He begins to use an agriculture analogy. He says this: “Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until the harvest?’” (v. 35). What he’s doing here is saying, “Hey, you’re agricultural people; you’re fishermen, you get the earth. And this is how you work: when you plant a seed, it takes some time for the crop to come. It’s a normal thing to plant seed and say, ‘But the harvest is four months away.’ In other words, there’s a time lapse



between planting and reaping. There's a normal time line. Don't you know that there's a time lapse between when you plant a seed and you actually get the fruit from it?"

But he said, "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (v. 35). Jesus was telling the disciples, "Look, normally there is a gap between when you plant a seed and when you reap the harvest." But he says, "Something's happening that's really different right now. I just had an interaction with a woman where the time lapse between planting the seed and reaping the harvest has shrunk." And he says, "Open your eyes and look at the field." I wonder if this is what Jesus was doing that moment. Maybe he was actually pointing to the town and saying, "Open your eyes and look at the field." He takes the disciples' point of focus from him to the town they just left, and they all turn their eyes that way.

They look toward the town that they just left. And what do they see? They see a group of townspeople, led by this Samaritan woman, on their way back to him. He said, "This is amazing. The fields are ripe for harvest now."

He says, "Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work and you have reaped the benefits of their labor" (vv. 36-38).

What's going on here? Let's keep reading, and we'll go back to this.

"Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days" (vv. 39-40). Where did he stay? With them—back in Sychar, back in the town disciples just left. In other words, we have another movement between these two locations. Now the disciples and Jesus are going from the well back to town with the townspeople and the Samaritan woman.

"And because of his words many more became believers. They said to 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'" (v. 41-42).

The reason I mention all the back-and-forthing is this: Jesus saw a harvest. He saw openness in this woman, and he uses interaction to reach out to her; and this woman reached out to her town—the same town (I want you to catch this), the same town the disciples were just in.

When they came back from that town, they had no stories to report. I'm guessing they were thinking, "We just need to get in this town and out as quick as possible. We're hungry. We're going to go in, get food, and come back out." Jesus is trying to change their mindset. He says, "Don't you understand that I'm here because the Father is seeking worshipers cross-ethnically? You just went to this town and did nothing. Someone else did all this work. The Samaritan woman, she did all the work. She was actually the sower. She was the one who went in and sowed the seed, and the harvest is coming our way."

And he says, "You guys get to be the harvesters, but you did no work for this at all. But here's what's going to happen: the sower (the Samaritan woman) and the reaper (you all, the people that are going to reap the harvest) are going to come together and work together. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor. But together we have the sower and the reaper together, between this woman and you, and now you're all together in this town."

So that's the story. The question we ask now is: "Jesus, that was a specific moment in time. What do we need to learn today? And your passion—the Father's passion—to seek worshipers in all nations who are worshiping in spirit and truth that bring the sower and the reaper, two different ethnic groups, together in one moment, Jesus, what does that mean for us today?"

Here's the thing I want you to remember as we get into this: be a goer and pray for sowers. **Be a goer and pray for sowers.**

Here's what I mean. Jesus had to go through Samaria. He had to go there. That was something he could do. And many of you are in places right now where you have places you can go that would put you in a different ethnic demographic. And you don't have to go that far. Some of you are in multiethnic towns right now, and it's really simple: "I need to go to this restaurant," "I need go to this part of town," "I need to go into these relationships,"—whatever it is. But here's what I want you



to think through: Where are you on regular basis where you are crossing ethnic lines that you normally would just walk through and walk out? You might be like the disciples, “Let me get into town and let me get out. I need to get my food and leave.” But Jesus had a different agenda.

Some of you have natural places. And some of you don’t have natural places like that. Everywhere you go is mono-ethnic. So I want to ask you to think through where in your circle of geography are there pockets of ethnic difference? It might be another part of town. It might be a supermarket. There are areas where there are pockets of different ethnicities, and you might need to go into part of those towns to run errands. But I want to challenge you to be not just a passer-through to get by but that you have the same mindset as Jesus. You would actually be a goer and actually, intentionally, go there and have eyes that the Lord you worship is purposely seeking more people to worship him. Where is there diversity?

I once was talking to a Hispanic friend who was going to a primarily white church, and I asked how that was for him because he had come from a much more diverse church. He said, “Well, I talked to the pastor; and even though there’s a large Hispanic community in this town, there aren’t many Hispanic people in the church. So I asked him about that. And the pastor’s response was, ‘You know, we’ve always been open to Hispanic population in our church, but they just never seemed to come.’” I think sometimes, that’s our attitude: “We’re open. If people came, we would be open to that. It’s just that they don’t.”

I want to say that Jesus’s mindset is very different. It’s not, “Hey, we’re open if people come,” which is a great attitude, but there’s a recognition that if we’re going to reach more populations, there has to be a sense of going, not just waiting and receiving. There’s got to be a sense of going in order to build relationship.

How do you do that? Part of it is just going and sitting. What I mean is this: when you go to places that have different ethnic makeups, don’t just see yourself as a passerby, but find ways just to be and sit. Jesus chose to sit at a well and just wait. I want to use that as a symbolic way of asking, How do I spend time in areas that might be different from what I’m normally comfortable with?

This is where it’s very hard because we have different

contexts. For some of you, it might be certain groups you’re part of because of your kids that are different ethnic demographics. For some of you, it might be restaurants. I don’t know how to name what it is in your society, in your area. But you want to be asking, Where is there difference? And rather than just passing by, how do I actually sit? What would that look like?

I also want to challenge you not to just be waiting for populations to come your way, but to do what Jesus did. He realized that his Father is seeking worshipers and trying to combine sower and reaper into the same community, where they’re all hanging out. And so he had it in his mind that he had to go to Samaria. My question for you is: **Where do you have to go if you’re going to be part of your church reaching more people of diversity?** There’s no one right answer here, but there’s something you have in your circle of influence where you can say, “I can do this. And I am going to choose just to sit and be.” That’s the first half.

So be a goer and pray for sowers. And this is the part where you don’t have control: The second part is to **pray for sowers**. Pray for people who can actually reach into a large demographic that you’re not able to on your own. And this, I want to say, is a God-send. This is something you cannot control. This is not something you can manipulate. This is not something you could contrive. This is an act of God. God, will you provide the right people?

When I say, “pray for sowers,” what I mean is that sowers are bridge-builders. Let me give you an example with this story that we just read of Jesus’s life. This Samaritan woman was able to bond with Jesus, and Jesus was able to bond with her; and they both had the ability to bond with their own people (Jesus with Jewish people and the woman with her Samaritan people). But they also were bridge-builders—they were both willing to enter a conversation and bond. This bridge building, this idea of being a sower, this Samaritan woman had it. She was able to relate to Jesus and relate to her people group. It’s possible—and we don’t know this for sure—that if Jesus went straight to Samaria and spoke to the crowds, he may not have had as much influence as this woman did because she was one of their own. But Jesus and this woman were able to bond and she had trust with her people group—it was through her that people came to see Jesus. She was a sower; sometimes it’s called being a bridge-builder.



We see this when Jesus sends out the disciples, two by two. He said, “Go find people and wish peace on them. If they wish you peace back, stay in that house.” Jesus was sending people to diverse areas, and he said, “You have to find a house of people from that area where you are not familiar. Find those people. If they like you and they put peace on you and you put peace on them, stay in that house because they are your bridge. They are your source. They have trust with their people group that you don’t have. They will be the bridge between you and the people group.”

There are some of you who are bridge-builders. Some of you are sowers. And some of you know that’s not you, and you need to pray that God provides those right people. I find that with sowers, God actually does something in their background to make them sowers. For example, there are people I know who grew up in Black environments but went to a white college, so they are able to be bridge-builders between those two communities. I know one woman who grew up in a Hispanic household on a Native American reservation. So she’s able to navigate those two cultures really well. These aren’t things that you choose, but as you look at the things that God has brought you through, you’re able to be comfortable, or at least to have a foot in more than one culture. You are a bridge-builder.

I have found that when it comes to multiethnic congregations, in my experience, it’s because there has been a couple bridge-builders—one that comes from the dominant people group (let’s say you’re in a white church) and one that comes from an ethnic people group—and those two people bond, and they end up being the resource to their respective communities. The Samaritan woman was one of those people. She was able to bring a whole town to Jesus because she had trust with that culture that Jesus and the disciples didn’t. And so you want to pray for those kinds of people. My experience is that those are gifts from heaven that you cannot control. You can ask Jesus to provide them and he will at some point, but those are things you can’t do on your own.

So be a goer. Learn to just sit and stay. Look for ethnic pockets that you’re normally just passing through, and sit at the well and build relationships. Pray for bridge-builders. Pray for people of peace. Pray for sowers—people who have trust with communities that

you may not have trust with. And celebrate that they’re able to reach people you couldn’t reach on your own. You need those bridge-builders in your church.

The third thing I want to say is that **your church is going to need to adjust—you won’t be able to do things the same way you’re used to doing.** The story ends with the Samaritans inviting the disciples to their town. I imagine that Jesus and his disciples were eating Samaritan food. I imagine Jesus and his disciples for two days were just living in their culture, doing things that their town would do. They weren’t insisting that they had to be Jewish in that town. If your church is going to grow in more populations, not only do you need to be goers; you need to be praying for sowers.

When those bridges are built and more people from diversity come into your church, it’s going to require some adjustment. Now, I am not saying that you’re going to totally switch cultures; you’re always going to be your church. But you’re going to need to make space for people of different ethnicities to shape the direction of your church, shape how you do things. That’s going to be tough at first; but if you want to grow in more populations, that’s going to happen.

So my prayer for you, church, is that you would be a goer and you would pray that God would send sowers in your midst. I want to thank you for introducing this topic and seeing that Jesus had to go through Samaria. And we as believers, if we’re followers of Jesus, have to go through Samaria too. And I pray that you’ll be more like Jesus, who learned to sit and build relationships in those other areas, and not be like the disciples who just did the minimum—to pass through and get food and come back. Jesus was in this mix of going from point A to point B and seeing that bond build more and more and more—until there is an invitation to sit with them in Samaria. That is amazing news.

And when this happens, it’s a beautiful thing. It’s a God-thing because we are fighting societal and sociological norms that push against this. But God is big, and he yearns to seek for worshipers. It doesn’t matter where they’re worshiping, but they’re worshiping in spirit and truth; and that crosses ethnic barriers. God bless you guys. Let’s pray for God’s ethnic mosaic to move forward.