

Angela Pound

Identity, Purpose, Belonging / Matthew 18:1–5; John 4:4–26; Mark 10:13–16; Mark 9:33–37;
Matthew 18:1–10

Notes

See chapter 5 in Who Am I Lord?

Conclusion in Who Am I Lord?

Practicing the Way pg. xiii-xvii

Practicing the Way pg. 10

Pg. 14 Practicing the Way

Pg 22-23 Practicing The Way

pg 24 Practicing the way

pg. 73-78, 81, 97-100 Practicing the way

The year was 2015. A woman with Jesus walked into a church. The woman came to do something she had done on and off for years, but this time it was different. She didn't yet know that it was different, but life would never be the same. Sure, she had been used to going to places where she didn't know anyone, and she knew that Jesus was always with her wherever she went, or at least that's what she was always told growing up, but did she REALLY know? Like deep down in her soul know, feel God's presence everywhere you go know. I don't think she did, but God always saw her potential. And then she started to hear the voice of God.

The passage for today, John 4:5-30, tells about the Samaritan woman at the well and her encounter with Jesus. To go from Judea to Galilee meant going through a

territory known as Samaria. Jews would often do anything they could to avoid travelling through Samaria because of the tension between the Samaritans and the Jews. After the northern kingdom, with its capital of Samaria, fell to the Assyrians, many Jews were deported to Assyria with foreigners being brought in to keep peace and settle the land. The intermarriages between these foreigners and the remaining Jews of the northern region resulted in a mixed race, the Samaritans, who were considered impure by the Jews in the southern kingdom. The Jews in the southern kingdom believed that the Jews in the northern region by intermixing with another race were betraying their people and nation. The route, however, through Samaria was shorter and Jesus took this route.

While the end of this passage speaks to the deity of Jesus, the beginning equally asserts the humanity of Jesus. Jesus was human. He experienced the bodily weaknesses of being human, even though he did not suffer the human curse of sin. The journey for Jesus up to that point obviously had been a tiring experience, and the text indicates that being exhausted, he sat down by the well both tired and thirsty. Hebrews 2:17 “Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.” Jesus experienced human life. Jesus

knew what it was like to live in a dark and fallen world, including many of life's hardships.

Wells were often found outside the city along the main road. Women were the ones from the family sent to draw water at these wells, which would usually happen in the mornings and evenings, when the sun wasn't at its strongest. The well was an opportunity for women to get together, chat about their family, the happenings going on in the city, while getting the water they needed. Very much a place for social interactions. For this woman to be at the well around noon implies that she was probably an outcast of her society. She potentially came at noon to avoid meeting people who knew her reputation.

It is not exactly known why this woman had had five husbands, however her world would look negatively on her situation. Given their cultural beliefs, most would assume that she had done something wrong to be deprived of so many husbands; this was true if she was widowed and even more significant if she was divorced. That she was living with a man who was not her husband would be even more directly problematic for both Jews and Samaritans.

The marginalized amongst the marginalized. The most lonely place to find yourself. "It's this person who then strives for affection, instead of finding the truth about themselves. It's in this type of person where we see the magnification of our own depravity when placed in the

crucible or societal acceptedness.” This woman was deemed unacceptable, practically invisible, getting water when no one else was around, but Jesus sees her, and not only sees her, but he talks to her, asks her for a drink, and in the end reveals his own identity to her. Jesus showed her that she wasn’t alone, and not only that she wasn’t alone but He talked to her, he saw her.

You see we currently live in a society where people struggle to know who they are, where they belong, and what purpose they have in life, from the most affluent to the most marginalized, or they listen to those around them for this information. The journey of navigating and negotiating life’s challenges and opportunities constantly throws instabilities into our life. We especially experience instability when our aspirations stretch us or when difficulties are thrust upon us. Whether these are intentional pursuits or life-altering instances (e.g. death of someone close, marriage, moving, divorce, losing a job, medical emergency, etc.) or less dramatic moments (family disagreements, work stress, etc.) they can upset a person’s equilibrium. As adults we sometimes try to help youth through this by providing ways to avoid this disequilibrium such as by protecting them or distracting them or simplifying their experiences by downplaying their concerns or offering pat answers, which results in youth feeling spiritual dissonance. They feel ill equipped to

successfully navigate the twists and turns of life. Instead the focus needs to be on helping them acknowledge and negotiate their instability. The core to young people's lives are questions surrounding their identity ("Who am I?"), their sense of belonging ("Where do I belong?") and their purpose ("What difference do I make?"). And while much research has been going into this question for youth, this isn't just a youth struggle, but a human struggle, and it has been going on since Adam and Eve. Sure, as we get older, we have a bit more of life under our belt, but think back to some of your struggles over the years and ask yourself was any of it because you forgot whose you are, where you belong, and your purpose in this world. Adam and Eve looked to the serpent for truth instead of God and the human population has often been looking outside of God for this information ever since. Have you ever forgotten what God says about you?

Matthew records the disciples arguing about who would be the greatest, at which point Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Mark records Jesus saying, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter

it.”

People often ignore those who have no influence and treat with favour those who do. We rub shoulders with the great in order to boost our own ego and status in the eyes of others. Jesus calls us to humble ourselves. Jesus doesn't call people to childish behaviour but to childlike faith. We should care nothing about the world's status symbols because the true way to greatness is humility. The kingdom of God is not earned by human effort but is received in childlike trust as a gift of the mercy and grace of God.

The disciples may have believed that children were annoying, or interruptions, distractions from what Jesus was there to do. Some, including the disciples, thought Jesus should be spending more time with important leaders and the devout because this was the way to improve his status within the community and avoid criticism. But Jesus didn't need to improve his position. Jesus always had time for children, he saw them as models of innocence, humility and trust.

Something happens as we get older and we lose this innocence, humility, and trust. We start and continue to listen to what others have to say about us, what society has to say, not what God has to say. Yet it is through Christ that we are to find our identity, purpose, and belonging.

The woman at the well had listened to society about who

she was. As she says to Jesus, “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). Not only that, but she would have been alarmed since men didn’t speak to women in public. According to Rabbinic Law a man talking to a woman in public brings evil upon himself. The Samaritan woman had found herself in a triple faux pas, afternoon well time, speaking to a man, and most scandalously, speaking to a Jew. And again, not only did Jesus talk to her but he asked her for something; a drink.

So, why this passage, and childlike faith? You see, this past Spring I really struggled when things got shaken up here. I had just taken a leap of faith, gave my notice at work the previous month and less than a month later my September no longer looked like I thought it was going to look. I was losing part of my working ministry team here and I felt really alone. I was really struggling. It was a Saturday and I had lied down on and off all day for a nap and just couldn’t fall asleep. Then something happened, a voice. I don’t know if I knew exactly what it meant before I fell asleep but it gave me an incredible peace that I instantly fell asleep after longing for sleep for days, being woken up by children hovering over top of my bed two hours later wondering what we were having for supper. I then knew exactly what it meant. Someone then mentioned to me, had I thought about taking over the position at church, which I knew was

exactly what the presence was, God's voice that said, "This opportunity is for you." I was like, no way God, I'm still in my degree, I don't know how to do this. I kept talking to God, I have no idea what to do with this. And God kept talking. On my bike ride into work that Monday morning I'm crying and praying to God about what to do, and a verse keeps repeating in my head. You were made for such a time as this, from the story of Queen Esther. You know how sometimes you think you're hearing God's voice, but then you question, is that God, or just me thinking that? But I'm like, why that verse....that's not a verse I would ever repeat to myself. When I got to school I had an email from my Bible App, which I get all the time, but I never read them, it's like when you subscribe to something and you keep getting the emails, but I would never open them, but just hit delete, but I felt an urge to open Monday's and this is what it said.

Quote: You were made for this. And I heard the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." ISAIAH 6:8

Do you ever wish you were a part of something more? We all want our lives to be meaningful, but despite our best efforts, it's easy to feel unfulfilled and unable to make an impact. What if we could partner with God to live our lives with purpose? End quote.

I prayed to God, I'm not strong enough to do this, and He

said, I know you're not, but I am.

It all that aloneness, I felt God and heard him, and was still shocked when he asked something of me. I had no idea how to write sermons all the time, come up with a series, when God pointed me towards what I was already doing with the children and I was reminded in Scripture about childlike faith. I had just picked out a book series for the younger Sunday School class called With Jesus, I Am... about claiming our identity with Jesus and so became the series for the fall....Identity Theft: Do You Know Whose You Are? Following along with Scripture and who Jesus calls us to be. Discovering our identity, belonging and purpose in Christ.

I realized Jesus believed in me. Before I believed in myself, Jesus believed in me. Before I even believed in Jesus, he believed in me. How much does our identity get wrapped up in everything and everyone around us, how we measure up or don't, when instead we need to turn to Jesus. The woman at the well was a woman longing to be loved and who had it ripped away each time she thought she had found it. Whatever it was that had caused the hurt, death or divorce, it had caused deep shame within her that was reinforced by her community each and every day. Despite her deflection, Jesus continued to go deep and spoke to her heart, --- spoke to the pain---spoke of equality, belonging, and freedom. John 4:21–24 “Jesus said to her,

“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”” As she responds, “I know that Messiah is coming, when he comes he will explain everything to us,” she meant absolutely everything. What would it mean to the woman to worship in the Spirit and in truth, to not have to hide, to not have to put on a face, to not compensate for her brokenness, but just to be true. It would mean freedom. To live, move, and breathe in what truth is. How freeing that would be to not pretend anymore.

The woman believed that what is true was coming. She didn't realize that He was already there with her and this is the struggle we can all have. Jesus is here in Spirit and truth, yet we look for others and to others. As we look for purpose, meaning, and acceptance through the different relationships and faces around us, Jesus stands before us and says, “I, the one speaking to you---I am he.” Suddenly this woman realized the shame of her past didn't matter. It didn't matter what people had done to her or what they had said about her, it had all become unimportant. For the

God of eternity loved her enough to send the Messiah, Himself, to meet her at a well, in the heat of the day, to talk to her, to tell her that she was free. She realized Jesus believed in her.

God doesn't see you as choices, a past, or circumstances as the woman at the well probably often found society seeing her as. He wants you to take off all the masks that you wear and be who he created you to be, His child, born with an identity, purpose, and belonging. Jesus sees and wants you, every imperfect, broken piece. Society had discredited the woman at the well, but as John continues into verse 39 (John 4:39) "Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." Her testimony became a way for so many Samaritans to come to know and experience Christ as can yours. A female Samaritan that society had cast away to get water on her own was a person Jesus chose to reveal himself to and because of her belief, saved many.

It was 2015 when I walked into Billtown with Jesus to play for a congregation. Something that I had done since the age of 16. But I didn't realize how different this time would be. I knew of Jesus, and thought I knew Him, but I had been hiding under so many masks. It wasn't until I realized that Jesus not only sees me but wants every imperfect, broken piece of me, that I began to truly know and hear

God, whose image I bear, as you do too. Let your testimony become a way so that everyone who knows you can know and experience Christ. You are never alone, you belong, you have a purpose. Never forget that Jesus believes in you. He died on the cross for you. Jesus stands before you and says, “I, the one speaking to you---I am he.”