



Modeling Spiritual Care John 4:1-42

For Christian nurses, care of the spirit is a high priority. We start by addressing our own spiritual needs and then look for ways to care for the spiritual needs of others. In this story, Jesus identifies and addresses spiritual thirst in a marginalized person. As you begin, reflect on a time in your life when you were spiritually dry or thirsty. What did this feel like? See how Jesus offers life-giving water to thirsty souls.

Hearing the Word

As you read [John 4:1-42](#), notice the clues given by the woman that indicate areas of need in her life, and the manner in which Jesus relates with her.

Background information: Jews and Samaritans detested one another. Because of this tension, the Jews avoided Samaria in their travels. It was the custom for women to get water from the public well early in the morning (before it became too hot) and socialize with one another. Also, it was not considered proper for a Jewish man to talk with a woman in public. The “sixth hour” is around noon.

1. What do you observe about the woman in this story? What may be some reasons she came to the well alone, and how may she have felt about this?
2. Imagine what this woman’s life was like. What may have been some of her emotional and spiritual needs? (Spiritual needs include love, purpose, hope, and meaning in life.)

In what ways is the woman like us, our peers, or people we serve in healthcare? Give examples.

3. Note how Jesus creates the setting for his conversation with the woman. Describe the scene. How does Jesus begin to build trust when they were so different?

Think about your nursing practice. What are ways you can be “real” in personal and professional relationships to avoid communicating an attitude of superiority or judgment? How can you demonstrate that everyone has value and something to offer?

4. Throughout their conversation, how does Jesus help the woman stay engaged?

Discuss ways in which you can initiate and carry out conversations about spiritual issues with people you know, especially in your healthcare setting.

How can we learn from Jesus about not getting defensive when people challenge us?

5. Why do you think Jesus said what he did in vv. 16-18? How did he respond to the woman's unwillingness to share the entire truth about herself?

How can we learn to help another person identify and express his or her real need?

6. What does Jesus do when the woman gets off the subject in the conversation?

Some people may talk about "religion" rather than their actual spiritual concerns. How can we direct the conversation to the real need?

7. Look at vv. 39-42 and describe some of the effects from this woman's encounter with Jesus.

Pray this example will help us see "fields ripe for harvest" (v. 35).

Responding to the Word

Summarize this story by listing some principles that Jesus demonstrated for relating with people.

What do we learn about evangelism and witness through Jesus' example?

How can we apply Jesus' example to spiritual care of patients?

Pray for specific people you know who may be "thirsty," but are not yet followers of Jesus. Identify steps you will take to share the "living water" of Jesus with them.

Share your plans with a friend who will support you in prayer and accountability.

Resources on Spiritual Care

When Jesus interacted with the woman at the well in Samaria ([John 4:1-42](#)), he provided a role model for identifying and addressing spiritual needs in others. Here are some principles for spiritual care that follow the example of Jesus:

- Jesus *became involved* and skillfully crossed barriers of race, gender, religion and culture.
- Jesus *was authentic* by admitting his physical thirst and need for water.
- Jesus *communicated availability* to talk by sitting down in the woman's presence.
- Jesus *provided privacy* for the conversation by sending the disciples away.
- Jesus *communicated worth and acceptance* of the woman by receiving what she could give.
- Jesus *used dialogue* to develop trust and break down barriers to the relationship.
- Jesus began the conversation on *common ground*: the need for water.
- Jesus *avoided defensiveness and condemnation*.
- Jesus recognized that *areas difficult to discuss* indicated underlying needs.
- Jesus *guided the conversation* to identify and meet the woman's spiritual needs.

A Word About Spiritual Care

"Spiritual care means putting people in touch with God through compassionate presence, active listening, witness, prayer, Bible reading and partnering with the body of Christ (the church community and clergy). It is never coercive or rude."

--by Judith A. Shelly and Arlene B. Miller, [Called to Care: A Christian Worldview for Nursing](#), p. 265.

A Word About Spiritual Needs

"A spiritual need is anything required to establish and maintain a dynamic personal relationship with God. Examples of basic spiritual needs:

- to be loved and to love in return
- to experience forgiveness and extend it to others
- to find meaning and purpose in life and hope for the future.

Spiritual needs are ultimately met only by God, but when we receive from him, the benefits overflow into our human relationships. We become channels of God's love, forgiveness and hope."

--by Judith A. Shelly, [Spiritual Care: A Guide for Caregivers](#), p. 29-30.

[Spiritual Care: A JCN Collection](#)

Care of the spirit, a hallmark of good nursing, is a high priority for Christian nurses. What is known about spirituality and spiritual care? How do nurses go about offering spiritual care? Learn from the [Journal of Christian Nursing](#) what researchers, patients, and other experts say makes for good spiritual care. See the JCN collection of articles on [Spirituality and Spiritual Care](#) which are free for [NCF members](#) and [JCN subscribers](#). Also available for purchase.

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