



LEADER GUIDE

JOHN

SIGNPOSTS OF
THE SAVIOR

THE SIGN OF HIS SERVANTHOOD

BIG IDEA: Jesus came to serve, and we can find fulfillment in following His example.

DATE: Sunday, March 8 and Wednesday March 11, 2026

SCRIPTURE: John 13:1-17

OPENING QUESTION

What are some ways you have served others, and how has that spiritually energized you?

How have others served you, and how has their service been a blessing to you?

Serving can take many shapes – like mowing a neighbor's lawn, tending to a sick family member, or caring for babies in the church Preschool Ministry. For Jesus, it included washing dirty feet.

SETTING THE STAGE

Chapter 13 begins what scholars refer to as Jesus's farewell discourse to His beloved disciples (John 13-17). A farewell discourse was a well-established biblical pattern as seen with Moses, Joshua and Paul for example. However, Jesus added a specific "action section" to His message when He washed His disciples' feet. It was an object lesson they would never forget. In this passage, we see our Lord in a three-fold relationship: to His Heavenly Father, to Simon Peter, and to His beloved disciples. (John 13:18-35 details His relationship to Judas). In each of these sections of John's Gospel, you will discover a special message, a spiritual truth to help you in your own Christian life.

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 13:1-17 (CSB)

Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.² Now when it was time for supper, the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray him.³ Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into his hands, that he had come from God, and that he was going back to God.⁴ So he got up from supper, laid aside his outer clothing, took a towel, and tied it around himself.⁵ Next, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around him.

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who asked him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I'm doing you don't realize now, but afterward you will understand."⁸ "You will never wash my feet," Peter said. Jesus replied, "If I don't wash you, you have no part with me."⁹ Simon Peter said to him,

"Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." ¹⁰ "One who has bathed," Jesus told him, "doesn't need to wash anything except his feet, but he is completely clean. You are clean, but not all of you." ¹¹ For he knew who would betray him. This is why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² When Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer clothing, he reclined again and said to them, "Do you know what I have done for you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are speaking rightly, since that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Truly I tell you, a servant is not greater than his master, and a messenger is not greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

DISCUSSION

HUMILITY: Jesus and the Father

READ: JOHN 13:1-5

In these first five verses we see that Jesus wasn't a victim of circumstances. He clearly understood the decisive end to His public ministry initiated the sequence of events leading up to the cross. The unbelieving crowds were gone, and Jesus reemphasized His love for His disciples. They would be the focus of His final teachings.

How do you see Jesus's humility lived out in verse 5?

If you want to truly gauge your group's reaction, bring out a towel and a bowl and say, "Today we are going to wash each other's feet." Then tell them, no, we aren't really, but ask them what thoughts went through their head. Was it gross? Beneath them? Embarrassing?

Have you ever been part of a foot washing service or experience? What was that like? (humbling!)

This was a private gathering so there probably weren't any servants on hand to wash feet. None of the disciples volunteered to perform what was considered a lowly task. In fact, Luke informs us that the disciples were arguing over who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God as they sat at the table. Jesus's wordless, humble gesture would have rebuked their attitudes. Also, His washing of feet was much more significant than merely meeting an immediate need. This act foreshadowed the cross – the selfless service Jesus exhibited to the point of death.

HOLINESS

READ: JOHN 13:6-11

What are your personal impressions of Peter's protests and Jesus's responses?

Peter is an all-or-nothing kind of guy. He initially opposed Jesus degrading Himself but then wanted an entire scrubbing. It's clear Peter didn't quite fathom what Jesus was doing. That's understandable, since even today scholars disagree on the meaning of Jesus's words. It seems Jesus used the washing of feet as an illustration of sanctifying spiritual cleansing.

Salvation isn't just a past experience; it's also a present reality. We have been saved from the penalty of sin (justification). We are being saved from the power of sin (sanctification), and we will be saved from the presence of sin (glorification). This picture of washing dirty feet is about holy

living - sanctification - the daily process of growing in Christ as we walk in this world. We have an ongoing need for confession, repentance, and refreshing because of our continual struggle with sin, even after we've been saved. We don't need to be saved over and over again because our relationship with God through Christ is eternally secure. We just need cleansing restoration when we break fellowship with the Lord.

Jesus knew Peter would betray him and get his feet dirty again and again. He would fail at critical moments. This washing of feet would provide hope on the other side of failure.

Where do you need cleansing today in your struggle with the power of sin? What keeps getting your feet dirty? Is it an action, a thought, an attitude?

These verses give us hope that Jesus knows about my dirty feet. He understands our bent towards sin but washes us and gives us the power to change. We will never be sinless this side of heaven, but by receiving His cleansing He restores us and reminds us of His power in us to sin *less* as we mature in our relationship with Him. He convicts and covers our sin and remembers them no more.

How does Peter's dialogue with Jesus give you hope as you consider your own sanctification process - of becoming more like Christ?

HELPING

READ: JOHN 13:12-17

What does the term "servant leadership" mean to you? Where have you seen it demonstrated?

Our 100 Day Bible Challenge comes with weekly verses to memorize. In Week 6 it was Matthew 20:28, "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Share Jesus's instructions in verses 14-15 in your own words.

Though the disciples were focused on the levels of their greatness, Jesus showed that following Him meant not being above the lowest job. Not much has changed when it comes to people seeking greatness over humility. But Jesus set the tone of servant leadership for every one of us who claimed Him as Savior. We are not here to be served but to serve.

ASK: Where are you currently serving – in your family, church, community or world? Give some time for people to share.

Have you ever considered a serving opportunity "beneath you"? How does today's lesson challenge your attitude toward that task?

Is the Lord calling you to make an attitude adjustment when it comes to serving?

What needs have you noticed around you (home, church, community, etc.) that you could meet?

LIFEGROUP LEADERS: Consider adopting one of Chets Creek Church's ministry partners as a LifeGroup. Enlist a volunteer to investigate a service project and report back next week. Serving together bonds people like nothing else. And remember Easter Eggstravaganza is coming up!

The beautiful truth is that as we humbly serve others, walk in God's paths of holiness, and do what He tells us, then we will enjoy happiness. God gives us gifts to be used to build up the body of Christ, and in using them we feel His pleasure and find our purpose.

RESPONSE

What is one tangible way you can serve a family member or friend today? The truth is, it will probably bring *you* more joy than *them*!

READING PLAN

3/8 – John 3; 3/9 – John 4; 3/10 – Isaiah 60; 3/11 – Isaiah 61; 3/12 – Luke 4; 3/13 – Genesis 32; 3/14 – Genesis 33; *Memory Verse – John 3:16-17*

COMMENTARY

Humility: Jesus and the Father John 13:1-5

Jesus knew Judas would betray Him and that His time was drawing near. What Jesus knew helped determine what Jesus did. The disciples must have been shocked when they saw their Master rise from supper, lay aside His outer garments, wrap a towel around His waist, take a basin of water, and wash their feet. Jewish servants did not wash their masters' feet, though Gentile slaves might do it. It was a menial task, and yet Jesus did it! As a special mark of affection, a host or hostess might wash a guest's feet. But it was not standard operating procedure in most homes.

Jesus knew there was a competitive spirit in the hearts of his disciples. In fact, within a few minutes, the men were disputing over which of them was the greatest. He gave them an unforgettable lesson in humility, and by His actions rebuked their selfishness and pride.

Jesus was the Sovereign, yet He took the place of a servant. He had all things in His hand, yet He picked up a towel. He was Lord and Master, yet He served His followers. It has been said that humility is not thinking *less* of yourself; it is simply thinking of yourself *less*. True humility grows out of our relationship with the Father. If our desire is to know and do the Father's will so that we might glorify His name, then we will experience the joy of following Christ's example and serving others. Jesus served His disciples because of His humility and because of His love. In the Upper Room, Jesus ministered in love to His own disciples, and they received Him and what He had to say. The Greek text says, "He loved them to the uttermost."

Holiness: Jesus and Peter John 13:6-11

As Peter watched the Lord wash his friends' feet, he became more and more disturbed and could not understand what He was doing. As you read the life of Christ in the Gospels, you cannot help

but notice how Peter often spoke impulsively out of his ignorance and had to be corrected by Jesus.

The word translated *wash* in John 13: 5-6, 8, 12, and 14 means to wash a part of the body. But the word translated *washed* in John 13:10 means "to bathe all over." The distinction is important, for Jesus was trying to teach His disciples the importance of a holy walk.

When the sinner trusts the Savior, he is "bathed all over" and his sins are washed away and forgiven. However, as the believer walks in this world, it is easy to become defiled. He does not need to be bathed all over again; He simply needs to have that defilement cleansed away. God promises to cleanse us when we confess our sins to Him. But why is it so important that we keep our feet clean? Because if we are defiled, we cannot have communion with our Lord. The word translated *part* carries the meaning here of "participation, having a share in someone or something." When God "bathes us all over" in salvation, He brings about our union with Christ; and that is a subtle relationship that cannot change. However, our communion with Christ depends on our keeping ourselves "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). If we permit unconfessed sin in our lives, we hinder our walk with the Lord; and that is when we need to have our feet washed.

Peter did not understand what his Lord was doing; but instead of waiting for an explanation, he impulsively tried to tell the Lord what to do. Then when he discovered that to refuse the Lord would mean to lose the Lord's fellowship, he went in the opposite direction and asked for a complete bath! We can learn an important lesson from Peter: don't question the Lord's will or work, and don't try to change it. He knows what He is doing. Peter had a difficult time accepting Christ's ministry to him because Peter was not yet ready to minister to the other disciples. It takes humility and grace to serve others, but it also takes humility and grace to allow others to serve us. The beautiful thing about a submissive spirit is that it can both give and receive to the glory of God.

It is a wonderful thing to deepen your fellowship with the Lord. The important thing is to be honest with Him and with ourselves and keep our feet clean.

Happiness: Jesus and the Disciples **John 13:12 – 17**

John 13:17 is the key – "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (KJV). The sequence is important: humbleness, holiness, and then happiness. Happiness is the by-product of a life that is lived in the will of God. When we humbly serve others, walking God's paths of holiness, and do what He tells us, then we will enjoy happiness.

Jesus asked His disciples if they understood what He had done, and it is not likely that they did. So, He explained it: He had given them a lesson in humble service, an example for them to follow. The world thinks that happiness is the result of others serving us, but real joy comes when we serve others in the name of Christ. The world is constantly pursuing happiness, but that is like chasing a shadow: it is always just beyond your reach.

Jesus was their Master, so He had every right to command their service. Instead, He served them! He gave them an example of true Christian ministry. On more than one occasion during the previous three years, He had taught them lessons about humility and service; but now He had *demonstrated* the lesson to them.

The servant (slave) is not greater than his master; so, if the master becomes a slave, where does that put the slave? *On the same level as the master!* **By becoming a servant, our Lord did not push us down; He lifted us up! He dignified sacrifice and service.** You must keep in mind that the Romans had no use for humility, and the Greeks despised manual labor. Jesus combined these two when He washed the disciples' feet.

Be sure to keep these lessons in their proper sequence: humbleness, holiness, and happiness (through helping). Submit to the Father, keep your life clean, and serve others. This is God's formula for true spiritual joy.

The Gospel of John: Savoring the Peace of Jesus in a Chaotic World by Melissa Spoelstra. LifeWay Press: 2024.
The Bible Exposition Commentary, Volume 1 by Warren W. Wiersbe. Victor Books: 1989.