

Love to the End: The Lord With the Towel (John 13:1-17)

JOHN 13:1-17 (BSB) · TEACHER GUIDE · DIGDEEPER.AI

THE BIG IDEA · SAY IT AT LEAST FIVE TIMES

The Lord of all knelt to wash you before asking you to kneel.

Open with it, bring it back after every section, close with it. By the end they should be able to finish the sentence for you.

- Before this passage (day 18): John 12:20-36, The Grain of Wheat. Its big idea: Jesus goes down like a seed to draw everyone to himself.
- After this passage (day 20): John 13:36-38, Before the Rooster. Its big idea: Jesus knows you better than your promises do.

Open

Last time, in John 12, Jesus said a grain of wheat must fall and die to bear fruit. Tonight he starts going down. Ask: “Who has done a job for you that you would never have dared to ask for?” Take two or three answers. Read John 13:1-5 aloud, slowly. Then say the big idea: The Lord of all knelt to wash you before asking you to kneel. Ask one person what stuck from last time.

Run Sheet

1. The Lord Gets Down on the Floor (John 13:1-5, about 13 min)

The one thing: Jesus knows exactly who he is, and that is why he kneels.

Ask: If you had all things in your hands, what would you do first? What does Jesus do?

2. Peter Refuses to Be Washed (John 13:6-11, about 13 min)

The one thing: You cannot belong to Jesus without first letting him wash you.

Ask: Why is it sometimes harder to be served than to serve?

3. “Do You Know What I Have Done for You?” (John 13:12-17, about 14 min)

The one thing: Those washed by the Lord are sent to wash one another.

Ask: What would “washing feet” look like between the people in this room?

Close (never cut it)

Picture the Lord of all on his knees with a towel. Read v.12 and let his question, “Do you know what I have done for you?” sit in silence. Then read v.17. The washing came first, and his promise is blessing for those who do what he did.

PROTECT THE ENDING

If section 3 starts late, skip its discussion question and go straight from v.14-17 to Jesus’ question in the close.

KIDS SIDE ANSWERS

Story order: 5, 2, 1, 3, 4 (top to bottom) · Feelings: Jesus happy, Peter worried, The disciples worried, Peter after Jesus explained happy · Code: HE LOVED THEM

Act it out: Wrap a towel around your waist and kneel. Gently wipe each child’s hands with a damp cloth. Then ask: How did it feel to have the teacher serve you?

1. The Lord Gets Down on the Floor

JOHN 13:1-5 · ABOUT 13 MIN · SECTION 1 OF 3

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- Jesus knew his hour had come.
- He knew all things were in his hands.
- So he picked up a towel and a basin.

Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the very END.

He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' FEET.

Discuss: If you had all things in your hands, what would you do first? What does Jesus do?

Jesus knows exactly who he is, and that is why he kneels.

MUST COVER

- v.3 comes before v.4: knowing the Father gave him "all things," he gets up and serves.
- v.1: this is love "to the very end," shown hours before the cross.

IF THERE'S TIME

- Guests reclined on low couches, feet stretched out behind. Washing meant crouching at each man's dusty feet.
- Footwashing was the lowest servant's job. Hosts usually just set out water for guests.

Illustration idea: A company owner who shows up after a flood and starts mopping the break room floor himself, before anyone asks.

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: "Fix the world / take charge / prove myself."
- Listen for: "He did the dirtiest job in the room."

If it drifts: If talk turns to Judas in v.2, note that Jesus knew and knelt anyway, then say that story comes later. Point back to v.3: what did Jesus know about himself?

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

He had everything in his hands, and he used them to wash feet.

Short on time? Drop the reclining-at-table background; keep the v.3-to-v.4 link.

Bridge → One man in the row does not want his feet touched.

2. Peter Refuses to Be Washed

JOHN 13:6-11 · ABOUT 13 MIN · SECTION 2 OF 3

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- Peter protests: “Never!”
- Jesus: being washed is not optional.
- Peter swings to “wash all of me.”

You do not realize now what I am doing, but LATER you will understand.

Unless I wash you, you have no PART with Me.

Discuss: Why is it sometimes harder to be served than to serve?

You cannot belong to Jesus without first letting him wash you.

MUST COVER

- v.8: “no part with Me.” Being washed by Jesus is how you come to share in him.
- v.7: Peter will understand “later.” The full meaning lies ahead, at the cross.

IF THERE'S TIME

- v.10: someone already bathed only needs his feet washed. Jesus cleans us once, then keeps cleaning the dust of each day.
- Peter’s “Never!” sounds humble, but it is really him deciding the terms.

Illustration idea: Someone just out of surgery who insists on getting their own glass of water, and ends up on the floor.

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: “It makes me feel weak or in debt.”
- Listen for: “I don’t want anyone seeing my mess.”

If it drifts: If people start debating baptism or sacraments, set it aside. Ask: what did Jesus say happens if Peter won’t be washed? (v.8)

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

Before he asks anything of you, he kneels and says, “Let me wash you.”

Short on time? Skip the v.10 bathed-versus-feet point; keep v.8.

Bridge → Jesus puts his robe back on, sits down, and asks them a question.

3. “Do You Know What I Have Done for You?”

JOHN 13:12-17 · ABOUT 14 MIN · SECTION 3 OF 3

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- Jesus really is Teacher and Lord.
- He is also our example.
- Knowing it is not enough. Blessing comes in doing it.

I have set you an EXAMPLE so that you should do as I have done for you.

If you know these things, you will be BLESSED if you do them.

Discuss: What would “washing feet” look like between the people in this room?

Those washed by the Lord are sent to wash one another.

MUST COVER

- v.13-14: the order is “Lord and Teacher” first, then “you also should.” Grace comes first, then the task.
- v.16-17: no servant is above his master. The blessing is for doing, not just knowing.

IF THERE'S TIME

• Luke 22:24-27 (another Gospel’s account of this night): the disciples argued over who was greatest. Jesus answers here with a towel.

- Philippians 2:5-8 (Paul’s letter): Jesus took “the form of a servant,” all the way to the cross.

Illustration idea: Quietly taking the job no one volunteers for: the clogged sink, the dishes after the potluck, the long drive to the airport.

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: Practical chores: helping, cleaning, driving.
- Listen for: Humbler things: forgiving, listening, not needing credit.

If it drifts: If it becomes a list of rules or guilt, go back to v.12. Jesus asks what he has done before he says what we should do.

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

Do you know what he has done for you? That is where the towel in your hand comes from.

Short on time? Drop the optional cross-references; keep v.14-17.

Bridge → Let Jesus’ question hang in the room as we close.

With One Friend, Over Coffee

ABOUT 30 MINUTES · FOR A FRIEND WHO IS CURIOUS, OR NOT SURE

1. Picture the room. Explain that foot-washing was the lowest servant's job. Dusty roads, open sandals, men reclining with their feet stretched out. Then read John 13:1-5 together.
2. Notice verse 3. Jesus washes feet because he knows he came from God and is going back to God. John tells us who is kneeling before telling us what he did.
3. Take Peter's side. Read v.6-9. Ask if they would have reacted like Peter. Point out that Jesus says, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me." A merely kind man doesn't say that.
4. Face the objection. Good people are humble, yes. But humble people don't claim that belonging to them depends on being washed by them, or say "Teacher and Lord, and rightly so." Humility together with that claim is what makes this unusual.
5. Leave his question. Read v.12 and leave it with them: "Do you know what I have done for you?" No need to answer now. Let them keep turning it over.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY HEAR

"Isn't this just a nice example of humility?"

It is an example. Jesus says so in v.15. But he also says being washed by him decides whether you have a part with him. That is a much bigger claim than being a good example.

"Why did Peter refuse?"

It felt wrong for his Lord to do a slave's job. Many of us feel the same way: we would rather earn it than receive it.

"What does being 'clean' mean here?"

More than clean feet. John points to a cleansing only Jesus gives, which Peter would understand "later," after the cross.

"Do I have to literally wash feet?"

Some churches do. The heart of it is serving others the way he served, without looking for status.

Evergreen Principles

Four standards every week. The rest rotate: each lesson brings the few that fit its passage best.

EVERY LESSON

1. Pray before you prepare

Teaching the Bible is spiritual work first (John 15:5).

If you're new: Pray for your class by name during the week.

If you've taught for years: Pray for the one person you find hardest to reach.

2. Study the text first

Understand the passage yourself before any help.

If you're new: Read it in two translations; write your own questions first.

If you've taught for years: Don't lean on old notes. What did you miss last time?

3. Teach one big idea

People remember one sentence, not four points.

If you're new: Write it in 12 words or fewer before anything else.

If you've taught for years: Test every story against it. If it doesn't serve it, cut it.

4. Point to Christ

All of Scripture points to him (Luke 24:27).

If you're new: Ask: what does this show about Jesus?

If you've taught for years: Show grace as the reason for obedience, not just the rule.

FOR THIS LESSON

1. Let the Bible do the talking

The scene is vivid enough to carry the lesson.

If you're new: Read v.1-5 slowly and let the actions sink in before explaining anything.

If you've taught for years: Resist adding Calvary parallels too early. Let v.7's "later" create the anticipation.

2. Make it concrete

Foot-washing is physical, so the application should be physical too.

If you're new: Bring a towel and a basin and set them on the table.

If you've taught for years: Push past vague answers like "be humble" to name actual jobs and people.

3. Let the passage land the way it lands

It shows who Jesus is first, then gives its own task.

If you're new: End on Jesus' question and v.17, not on a homework list.

If you've taught for years: Keep grace before calling, just as the order of v.12-15 does.

BEFORE CLASS

- ☐ Read the passage three times
- ☐ Big idea in one sentence
- ☐ Opening and close chosen
- ☐ Know what you'll cut
- ☐ Handouts, pens, extra Bibles
- ☐ Prayed for the class by name

Openings, Closings & Hard Moments

Pick one opening and one close; rotate so class doesn't get predictable.

OPENINGS

- ask a real-life question: Who has done a job for you that you'd never have dared to ask for?

- use an object: Set a basin and towel on the table in silence, then read v.4-5.
- start in the text: Read v.3 and ask: if you knew this about yourself, what would you do next?

CLOSINGS

- allow quiet reflection: Read v.12 and give the class 30 seconds of quiet with Jesus' question.
- call back to the opening: Earlier we named people who served us. Now picture Jesus kneeling at your feet.
- send them out with a verse: Read v.17: "If you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

WHEN CLASS GETS HARD

- Someone asks why Jesus washed Judas's feet if he knew.: Say plainly that v.11 shows he knew and washed him anyway. That is how far this love goes. Save the betrayal itself for later and return to v.3.
- A drifted believer says, "I used to have a part with him, and I blew it.": Point gently to v.10. Jesus keeps washing the dust of each day. Admit this is tender ground, and don't rush past it. Offer to talk afterward.
- Silence after a question: Wait. Then rephrase simpler, or ask them to talk to a neighbor first.
- One person dominates: "Thanks. Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet." Talk privately if it continues.
- A question you can't answer: Say so, write it down, bring an answer next week.
- A tangent takes over: "Great question. Let's catch it after class so we can finish the passage."

READ THIS WEEK

- Philippians 2:5-11
- Luke 22:24-27
- 1 John 1:5-9

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/john/13-1-17/lesson

Love to the End: The Lord With the Towel (John 13:1-17)

JOHN 13:1-17 (BSB) · WHO DO YOU SAY I AM? · DIGDEEPER.AI

Key verse: "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the very end." John 13:1

THE BIG IDEA

The Lord of all knelt to wash you before asking you to kneel.

1. THE LORD GETS DOWN ON THE FLOOR · JOHN 13:1-5

- Jesus knew his hour had come.
- He knew all things were in his hands.
- So he picked up a towel and a basin.

Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the very _____.

He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' _____.

Discuss: If you had all things in your hands, what would you do first? What does Jesus do?

2. PETER REFUSES TO BE WASHED · JOHN 13:6-11

- Peter protests: "Never!"
- Jesus: being washed is not optional.
- Peter swings to "wash all of me."

You do not realize now what I am doing, but _____ you will understand.

Unless I wash you, you have no _____ with Me.

Discuss: Why is it sometimes harder to be served than to serve?

3. "DO YOU KNOW WHAT I HAVE DONE FOR YOU?" · JOHN 13:12-17

- Jesus really is Teacher and Lord.
- He is also our example.
- Knowing it is not enough. Blessing comes in doing it.

I have set you an _____ so that you should do as I have done for you.

If you know these things, you will be _____ if you do them.

Discuss: What would "washing feet" look like between the people in this room?

Read this week: Philippians 2:5-11 · Luke 22:24-27 · 1 John 1:5-9

For Kids: Love to the End: The Lord With the Towel (John 13:1-17)

JOHN 13:1-17 · NAME: _____

Big idea: Jesus the King served his friends.

1. PUT THE STORY IN ORDER! NUMBER THE BOXES.

- ☐ Jesus washes feet, then teaches them.
- ☐ Jesus ties a towel around his waist.
- ☐ Jesus and friends eat supper.
- ☐ He pours water into a bowl.
- ☐ Peter says, "Never wash my feet!"

2. HOW DID THEY FEEL? CIRCLE ONE.

Jesus: happy · sad · worried

Peter: happy · sad · worried

The disciples: happy · sad · worried

Peter after Jesus explained: happy · sad · worried

3. WORD SEARCH

S G P E T E R H S
F E E T R P S D H
F R K F Y W E G H
D M B D C A R S C
K A A S T T V U H
O S S B O E A P U
N T I G W R N P N
K E N N E H T E H
N R B B L H R R K

TOWEL · BASIN · WATER · FEET · PETER · SUPPER · SERVANT · MASTER

4. SECRET CODE

1=D 2=E 3=H 4=L 5=M 6=O 7=T 8=V

3 2 4 6 8 2 1 7 3 2 5

5. DRAW IT!

Draw Jesus kneeling with a towel and a bowl of water.

6. MEMORY VERSE

"He loved them to the very end." John 13:1 Say it to a grown-up: ☐ ☐ ☐

Jesus served his friends, so I can serve ____ by ____.