

Life Group Discussion Guide

No Greater Love: In the Upper Room with Jesus
Week 1: Love Demonstrated • John 13:1-17

This week begins our new message series, **No Greater Love: In the Upper Room with Jesus**. Before we dive in, it's important to understand where we're at in John's Gospel, and why.

The Gospel of John is made up of four parts:

1. Prologue (which we studied for Advent)
2. Book 1
3. Book 2
4. Epilogue

Book 1 covers Jesus' public ministry, including some of His works of power, His teachings, and the controversies they provoked. For this series, however, we're focusing on Book 2.

"In Book 1, Jesus was out and about, moving and traveling, teaching the crowds, performing works of power. As we enter Book 2, we find a very different scene. It's nighttime and Jesus is alone with His twelve disciples, in an upper room, preparing them for His departure. While the first twelve chapters covered about 2.5 years of Jesus' public ministry, the next seven cover just 24 hours—from Jesus' evening meal with His disciples on Thursday until He was buried Friday evening."

Together, we'll spend the next four months covering only the first three or four of those final 24 hours. In contrast to the typical start of a new year—which we often frontload with expectations, plans, goals, routines, travel—this text is inviting us to *slow down*. The chapters we're wading into are intimate. The time spent is intentional. The Lord is drawing us deeper in.

- What are your top priorities as you begin this new year?
- On a practical level, what would it look like for you to *slow down* and *press in* to what God has in store? What's keeping you from doing so?
- Take time now to pray together for the grace to slow your pace. Repent of anything that's keeping you from an intentional, intimate relationship with God. Place your priority on Him, humbled to receive what He has for you over the next twelve weeks.

The first stop on our journey through Book 2 of John's Gospel is the account of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. Let's look at the shock, the significance, and the pattern of foot washing.

1. The Shock of Foot Washing

We know that Jesus consistently shocked His disciples by what He said and did and whom He associated with. And the very last act He does prior to His death is no exception.

“It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;” John 13:1-3

This passage reveals several things Jesus knew as He sat down for this Passover meal:

- a. The time had come for Him to return to the Father—to His rightful place of glory in heaven
- b. The devil had already prompted Judas to betray Him
- c. The Father had put everything under His power

With this self-understanding of His own glory and authority, Jesus’ next move is astonishing:

“So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” John 13:4-5

Jesus, who holds power over all things in heaven and on earth, humbles Himself to the task considered too lowly even for Jewish slaves. It was demeaning. Frankly, it was embarrassing. And His disciples are shocked.

- Explain in your own words why it was shocking for Jesus to wash His disciples’ feet.
- What does this tell you of Jesus’ character? Does it challenge your view of Him? How?

2. The Significance of Foot Washing

The next six verses record Peter’s fervent efforts to keep Jesus from washing his feet. Between his arguments, the words of Jesus begin to reveal the *why* behind the washing:

- a. “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” (v.7)

This gesture was about more than feet. The significance of the foot washing can only be understood in light of the cross. And although Peter couldn’t see that now, he soon would.

- b. “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” (v.8)

Again, Jesus is making it clear that this isn’t really about washing feet. It’s about the washing of our sin by the blood of Jesus, which cleanses not our body, but our soul.

- c. “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean.” (v.10)

Here, foot washing in contrast to a whole-body bath becomes a parable for the difference between (1) being cleansed by Jesus’ death and (2) the continual purifying He offers us in the Christian life. If you are in Jesus, you have been cleansed by His blood. So what do you do when you sin? You need

to wash only your feet, so to speak. That is, you need to confess your sins, so that He may forgive you and purify you.

- Put in your own words the connection between foot washing and the cross.
- How does foot washing clarify your understanding of repentance when you sin as a Christian?
- Through the act of foot washing, Jesus likens sin to the grime, filth, and excrement that caked the disciples' feet. Do you take your own sin this seriously, viewing it with such revile and disgust? What might change if you did?
- Jesus' blood has the power to purify us of even the most shameful, detestable sins—no matter how long we've been tracking them around. Take time now to repent of the sin that's clinging to your own feet, receiving the cleansing Jesus won for you on the cross.

3. The Pattern of Foot Washing

"When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. 'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord," and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.'" John 13:12–17

To a dumbfounded group of disciples, Jesus asks, "Do you understand what I have done for you?" The answer, of course, is no. They will, but not yet. One thing they do know for certain is that they will never forget Jesus' action. An action that, He tells them, is a pattern they should follow.

"The memory of their teacher, their Lord, bowing so low to demonstrate His love would never leave them. They could not repeat the cross. That was a one and done. But they could bow as low as their master did to serve one another."

Jesus' instructions point to this week's **Big Idea: Cleansed hearts bow low**. This is one of the hardest lessons of true Christianity. As Pastor Jon put it:

"Jesus is not making us into nice people. He is turning us into servants. No task is too low for a servant of the one who washed dusty, crusty, stinky feet. No task is too low for a servant of the one who went through the horrors of the cross to wash us clean."

- Describe the example of humility Jesus set for us. Other than foot washing, how else is His humility demonstrated?
- What would it look like for **you** to obey Jesus' command to "do as I have done for you"?