

Lesson 6

Jan. 11, 2026

Jesus: Our Example of Servanthood:

Christians are to serve one another, following Jesus' example.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

One of the most powerful moments during Jesus' final hours occurred when He washed the feet of His disciples. In this act, the Lord and Teacher embodied humility, love, and the essence of true leadership by adopting the role of a servant. This symbolic action also highlighted the need for continual spiritual cleansing in our lives. While salvation through Christ is received when we are born again, the journey of faith requires ongoing renewal from sin and growth in the grace of God. Jesus' action and words teach the importance of serving others and remind us to stay spiritually pure through His transforming work, offering an enduring example of love and humility.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Chapter 13 marks the beginning of the second major section of the Gospel of John, focusing on the events that revealed Christ's glory through His crucifixion, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances. Before this, chapter 12 recounts Jesus' arrival in Bethany six days before Passover, which was marked by Mary anointing Him. The next day is His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and His cleansing of the temple. In chapter 13, John depicts the Last Supper – the Passover meal which was shared the evening before Jesus' crucifixion. During this gathering, Jesus modeled humility by washing His disciples' feet and foretold that one among them would soon betray Him.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. OUR LORDS LOWERED HIMSELF: John 13:1-5.

- A. The Hour Has Come (1-3)
- B. Washing the Disciples' Feet (4-5)

2. HUMILITY DISPLAYED; HOLINESS REQUIRED: John 13:6-11.

- A. Peter Lacks Understanding (6-8)
- B. Jesus Desires Cleanliness (9-11)

3. INSTRUCTION FOR MAINTAINING HUMBLE RELATIONS: John 13:12-17.

- A. Reaffirming the Disciples' Belief (12-13)
- B. A Challenge from the Teacher (14-17)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. OUR LORD LOWERED HIMSELF: John 13:1-5.

A. The Hour Has Come, John 13:1-3

In the first half of John's Gospel, we are repeatedly informed that Jesus' "hour" had not yet come (2:4; 7:30; 8:20). However, by John 13:1, a significant shift occurs: "Jesus knew that his hour was come." The recurring mention of "the hour" throughout the Gospel highlights its profound spiritual importance. This reference in 13:1 means more than the literal dinner hour, despite the cultural and religious significance of the Passover meals in Jewish tradition. Instead, it marks a pivotal moment of profound importance. This was the hour when Jesus, out of deep love for His disciples, would depart from this world to be with the Father, completing His earthly mission and fulfilling divine purpose.

Knowing that He would soon give His life to take away the sins of the world, rise from the grave, and ascend to the Father, it was significant that Jesus chose to spend some of His final hours washing His disciples' feet. Verses 2 and 3 provide context for what followed. Despite knowing of His impending betrayal, Jesus was able to demonstrate self-sacrificial love in dramatic fashion. His love was manifested to the fullest extent and "unto the end" (v. 1) – all the way to his death and beyond. Second, although Jesus knew "the Father had given all things into His hands" (v. 3), He still embraced the humble act of service. Jesus was completely aware of the situation, but rather than wielding His divine authority, He washed His disciples' feet – something unheard of in Jewish rabbi-disciple relationships.

B. Washing the Disciples' Feet, John 13:4-5

Normally, feet would be washed by a servant before the owner or guest entered a home. On occasion, a wife might wash her husband's feet, or a disciple might wash his rabbi's feet as an act of devotion. Typically, washing someone's feet would have been assigned to a servant. However, it seems no servant was present for this gathering, and no disciple took the initiative to wash the feet of the Master.

In the Jewish honor-shame culture, Jesus' decision to wash His disciples' feet would have been unprecedented. While Judaism valued humility, it was also aware of traditional societal roles. Therefore, when Jesus removed His outer clothing and wrapped a towel around His waist (v. 4), Jesus was upending social norms. Jesus could have asserted His rights as the Master, "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16 NKJV), but instead He picked up a towel and poured water into a basin (John 13:5). Jesus' radical love and humility at this moment mirrored the same attitude He would take to the cross a few hours later, for He "did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant" (Philippians 2:6-7 NKJV).

Understanding the cultural significance of a rabbi washing his disciples' feet might be challenging, but the thought of Jesus humbling Himself to take on human form and live among us is much more incredible. He didn't stop there – His amazing love led Him to endure suffering and death for our sake. Such an extraordinary act of love calls for a heartfelt response! As we reflect on God's love throughout our day and week, it has the power to transform us and the way we view others. Striving daily to be more like Christ, we can draw inspiration from the profound lesson in John 13, where humility and selfless love shine as a model for how we should live.

2. HUMILITY DISPLAYED; HOLINESS REQUIRED: John 13:6-11

A. Peter Lacks Understanding, John 13:6-8

True to his outspoken nature, Peter voiced what the other disciples may have silently pondered but hesitated to say. Up to this moment, Peter had refrained from washing anyone's feet, so the idea of His Lord, whom he had proclaimed as "the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), stooping to wash his feet must have been deeply unsettling. It is possible that Peter experienced a sense of unworthiness similar to that of John the Baptist, who declared himself unfit even to untie the straps of Jesus' sandals (John 1:27). If so, Peter likely perceived himself as the lowest of servants in comparison to Jesus. Allowing the Messiah to perform such a task, one that seemed so far beneath His divine stature, would have felt profoundly inappropriate and even shameful to Peter.

Jesus declared, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this" (John 13:7 NKJV), highlighting the deeper significance of His actions that were not immediately apparent to Peter. While Peter demonstrated an understanding of the social irregularity in the situation, he failed to grasp its profound spiritual implications. The meaning behind Jesus' actions would become clear only later, particularly after His crucifixion. At the point, however, Peter and the disciples could not begin to comprehend the depth of Jesus' humility and self-sacrifice. However, to partake in fellowship with Jesus and share in His inheritance (v.8), they needed to accept these acts of service as essential to their relationship with Him. Without this acceptance, their connection with Jesus could not progress, as it hinged on embracing His example of sacrificial love and servant leadership.

B. Jesus Desires Cleanliness, John 13:9-11.

Peter deserves recognition for his change in attitude. In verse 9, he responded to Jesus by saying, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" This shift may reflect a sudden display of humility or an ongoing attempt to assert control over the situation. Regardless, Peter lacked understanding and was not fully submitting to Jesus' intentions. Consequently, in verse 10, Jesus corrected him, explaining that those who have already bathed are considered clean. While it is unclear whether Jesus was referencing a regular bath or a Jewish ceremonial washing, the statement carries a deeper spiritual meaning. Since Peter had already accepted Jesus and undergone baptism – a symbolic act foreshadowing Jesus' sacrifice on the cross – he required no further cleansing beyond the washing of his feet. Jesus reassured him by declaring, "You are clean" (v. 10 NKJV).

In this passage, the distinction between those who were "clean" (v. 10) and Judah Iscariot, who was not, reveals a profound spiritual truth. Jesus was referring to the purification from sin that occurs when individuals accept His teachings, repent, and live in obedience to Him. While Peter and the other disciples had undergone this spiritual cleansing and were in communion with Christ, Judas had not. Despite this, Jesus chose to wash Judas' feet alongside the others, exemplifying extraordinary and unconditional love. This act of humility and grace demonstrated the depth of Jesus' compassion, extending even to the one who would betray Him later that evening.

Have you ever felt uneasy or embarrassed when someone gave you a gift that seemed too extravagant? Maybe you felt like you didn't deserve it, or you couldn't help but think about the cost it took for them to give it to you. Perhaps, deep down, you wished they had chosen something simpler. Like Peter, it's also something we might unintentionally do with God. Sometimes, we limit what we allow Him to do for us, either because of our insecurities or because

we don't grasp the depth of His love for us. When we do that, we miss out on the joy and beauty of the blessings He wants to pour into our lives. To fully embrace the incredible gift of being in Christ and staying close to Him, we must let go of our doubts, humble ourselves, and allow Him to transform us from the inside out.

3. INSTRUCTION FOR MAINTAINING HUMBLE RELATIONS: John 13:12-17.

A. Reaffirming the Disciples' Belief, John 13:12-13

Jesus added another layer of meaning to His washing of the disciples' feet by turning it into a practical object lesson on Christian leadership. He asked, "Do you understand what I have done to you?" (v. 12 NKJV). Knowing they had been slow to understand His teachings in the past and with Peter's apparent confusion, Jesus, like any good teacher, endeavored to unpack the implications of what had just happened. A lesser leader might have moved on without considering the disciples' confusion over what He had just done. However, Jesus took time to help them grasp various lessons embedded in such a simple and humble act.

Jesus reassured them of His identity; His act of humility had not changed the dynamics of their relationship. He was their "Master [teacher, rabbi] and Lord" (v. 13). It was precisely because Peter recognized Jesus' status, even referring to Him as "Lord," that Peter initially refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Elsewhere in the Gospels, the disciples also regularly refer to Jesus as "Teacher," "Rabbi," "Master," or "Christ." Witnessing the Lord washing their feet may have raised some questions about the nature of His authority. Yet, Jesus affirmed their belief in Him as "Master," saying, "and ye say well; for so I am" (v. 13). By affirming His identity as Teacher and Lord, Jesus reminded the disciples of His authority and their position as His students. Even though He had humbled Himself to take on the role of a servant, He would rule in a way that the disciples had never considered.

B. A Challenge from the Teacher, John 13:14-17

After Jesus reaffirmed His identity, He took an additional step forward in this object lesson by instructing His disciples to put this lesson into practice. By saying, "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (v. 14), Jesus exposed the disciples' initial failure to serve one another when the need was presented. Instead, He graciously took it upon Himself to do what was required. More importantly, Jesus clarified that He did so even though He was their Lord and Teacher. When others in positions of authority may have presented themselves as too dignified or proud to engage in menial acts of service, Jesus humbled Himself. In other words, if washing feet was something the Savior of the world was willing to do, then the disciples of Jesus should follow His example and learn to serve one another.

By modeling the way, Jesus challenged the disciples' attitude toward what is and what is not appropriate for those who operate in positions of leadership. "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (v. 15). Washing feet and other acts of service to one another should characterize the leadership of the disciples after Jesus had gone to the right hand of the Father. Greatness in the kingdom of God will not look the way the world thinks it should, but there is a blessing in knowing and doing that which the Lord has instructed (v. 17). Jesus literally told them to "do" what He had done – wash one another's feet. This is not just an object lesson; it is a practice for those who follow Jesus.

The journey of following Jesus invites us to embrace a heart of radical humility, even when it's inconvenient. It means putting the needs of others before our own, stepping away from our personal preferences, and being willing to let go of our plans when someone, especially God, calls for our attention. This outward-focused way of living challenges us to shift from self-centeredness to selflessness, finding joy in serving and uplifting others. While it's not always easy, this path of love and grace reflects the essence of Christ's example, reminding us that true fulfillment often comes when we give generously of ourselves.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

The call today is simple and comes straight from the mouth of Jesus: "Do as I have done to you" (v. 15). The continual cleansing of Christ was represented in washing His disciples' feet.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

What can you do this week to demonstrate Christ's love to one of your brothers or sisters in Christ? This week, seek opportunities to bless others.

WORKSHEET

Jesus' Brothers Did Not Believe in Him

What May Be The Most Succinct Description of Jesus' servant-ministry are these words by the Apostle Peter: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38 NKJV).

"But although He had done so many signs [miracles] before them, they did not believe in Him" ("John 12:37 NKJV). Here, those who did not believe in Jesus were the religious leaders of the Jews (see 11:47-52).

The Religious Leaders of the Jews were not the only ones who did not believe in Jesus. "For even His brothers did not believe in Him" (John 7:5 NKJV).

The Gospels Reveal That Jesus Had Four Brothers and at least two sisters: "His brothers James, Joses [Joseph], Simon, and Judas [Jude] ... And His sisters, are they not all with us?" (Matthew 13:55-56 NKJV).

It Seems Jesus' Brothers Believed That, if Jesus was performing the miracles He was reputed to be performing, He was not using His miracles working ability to maximum advantage to convince people to believe in Him (John 7:3-4).

Blessed We Are To Know that Jesus' brothers did not continue in their failure to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. After Jesus' resurrection, the greatest of His miracles, Jesus' brothers became believers in Him.

After the Ascension of Jesus, among the 120 faithful disciples of Jesus waiting to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, were Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers (Acts 1:14-15).

In the New Testament Are Two Books Written by Brothers of Jesus: The Letter by James, Jesus' oldest brother, who was also the leader of the Church in Jerusalem (AD 44-62); and The Letter by Jude, Jesus' youngest brother.

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

- 1. In John 13:4-5, how did Jesus “speak” without saying a word? What did His actions communicate?**
- 2. How and why did Simon Peter quickly change His mind (vv. 8-9)? What can we learn from this experience?**
- 3. What does Jesus’ knowledge of Judas imply about His knowledge of us (vv. 10-11)?**
- 4. Why did Jesus refer to Himself as “Master and Lord” in verse 13?**
- 5. What can make believers “happy” (v. 17), and why?**