

SERVING LOVE

DEVOTIONAL READING: [John 15:18–16:4a](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [John 13:1–35](#)

JOHN 13:1–15, 34–35

¹ 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.

² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ 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.

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸ "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹ "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰ Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

¹² 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. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

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³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

KEY VERSE

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. —[John 13:15](#)

LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

Unit 3: Godly Love Among Believers

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the ways that Jesus shows his love for the disciples at the last supper.
2. Explain the connection between loving others and serving others.
3. Volunteer with a ministry that serves humbly in the church or community.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

A. Dirty Jobs

B. Lesson Context

- I. Clean Feet (John 13:1–11)
 - A. Enduring (v. 1)
 - B. Betraying (v. 2)
 - C. Washing (vv. 3–11)
- II. Clean Lives (John 13:12–15, 34–35)
 - A. Serving (vv. 12–15)
Literal Foot Washing
 - B. Loving (vv. 34–35)
Service to the Bride

Conclusion

- A. A Matter of Heart
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Iscariot Iss-care-ee-ut.

Judas Joo-dus.

Introduction

A. Dirty Jobs

A popular cable television show with a different twist is *Dirty Jobs* (and its later version *Somebody's Gotta Do It*). In each episode of this show, the host finds himself embedded in a job circumstance that includes disgusting or dangerous elements. Situations have included sewer inspector, pig farmer, hot-tar roofer, bat guano collector, roadkill cleaner, and sausage maker.

There are many dirty jobs in our world. The circumstances of these jobs make a difference in our willingness to tackle them. But when we consider a job to be below us, are we really honoring Jesus?

B. Lesson Context

The apostle John was one of Jesus' closest associates. Jesus trusted him enough to task him with the care of Jesus' own mother, Mary, at the cross ([John 19:26–27](#)). Church tradition says that John later moved to the great city of Ephesus, taking Mary with him. There he ministered for many years, dying sometime between AD 95 and 100. His exile to Patmos is also well known ([Revelation 1:9](#)).

There are five books in the Bible written by John: the Gospel, 1-3 John, and Revelation. The other three Gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels because they share much of the same perspective (as shown in the amount of shared material). John's stands alone, with much unique content. It was written after the other three, likely between

AD 90 and 94, though dates both earlier and later have been suggested.

All four Gospels include a retelling of the last supper, but the earliest surviving account is from Paul. He shared a description of the supper, material he learned from the Lord (1 [Corinthians 11:23a](#)), about 25 years after the actual event. While the accounts from [Matthew 26:17–30](#); [Mark 14:12–26](#); [Luke 22:7–39](#); and [1 Corinthians 11:23b–26](#) are similar, the way John records the story is quite different. The focus of the other accounts (the bread and cup) are in the background of John's last supper. Rather than the institution of the elements of the Lord's Supper, John includes two things the other accounts leave out. The first is the content of our lesson today. The second is nearly five chapters of Jesus' oral teaching and a lengthy prayer ([John 13–17](#)), mostly unique material found nowhere else in the New Testament.

I. Clean Feet ([JOHN 13:1–11](#))

A. Enduring (v. 1)

1a. It was just before the Passover Festival.

The Jewish people of Jesus' day saw *the Passover* as one of the most important annual feasts. It commemorated the exodus events, when the Lord "passed over" ([Exodus 12:27](#)) the homes of the people of Israel that were obediently marked with blood on the doorposts and lintels of their homes ([12:7](#),

[23](#)). The unmarked Egyptian homes suffered the final of 10 plagues, death of the firstborn ([12:29–30](#)). This led Pharaoh to relent and allow the people of Israel to leave Egypt and its oppression ([12:31–32](#)).

Passover, then, had both spiritual and physical themes for Jewish people like Jesus and his disciples, which likely resonated harshly because of the oppression of the Romans in Jerusalem and all of Judea. In Jesus' day, celebration of the Passover was already more than 1,000 years old. The feast was (and remains) a pilgrimage festival. In Jesus' time, this meant that Jewish believers from all over Judea and further abroad attempted to be in Jerusalem itself for the weeklong celebration. This was partly so the Passover lamb could be slaughtered in the temple precincts by a priest. Jesus and his disciples were Galileans, from an area about 100 miles north of Jerusalem. Passover was their reason for being in the city.

1b. 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.

Several times in the Gospel of John, it is said that Jesus' time was not complete (see [John 7:6, 8, 30](#); [8:20](#)), meaning he was not finished with his earthly work. This verse represents a turning point. Jesus' *hour had come* because all that remained were the events leading up to and including his crucifixion ([John 18–19](#)), resurrection ([20:1–10](#)), and appearances thereafter ([20:11–21:23](#)). After completing his mission, Jesus would return to his *Father* in Heaven. His death was

imminent, but he did not leave work early. Rather than just saying goodbyes, Jesus used this occasion to show his love for his disciples.



Visual for Lesson 9. Use this visual to discuss opportunities for loving service that includes neighbors, enemies, and fellow Christians.

B. Betraying (v. 2)

2. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.

Luke and John both stated that the prompting of *the devil* motivated *Judas* (see [Luke 22:3](#), which says Satan “entered” Judas). Matthew indicates that Judas betrayed Jesus because of Judas’s love of money ([Matthew 26:15](#); see [John 12:6](#)). These two causes, Satan and money-loving, are not incompatible. Satan may tempt us at our weakest point, just as his first temptation for Jesus was to use Jesus’ power to create bread for himself when he was extremely hungry ([Luke 4:2–3](#)). Further, the love of money pits a

person against the Lord ([Matthew 6:24](#); [Luke 16:13](#)).

Betrayal is working against someone who trusts you. Jesus’ long-running controversy with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had escalated to the point where they sought to kill him ([John 11:53](#)). This required some plotting, however, for these leaders feared Jesus’ popularity with the common people. They needed an isolated place and time to seize him, an opportunity best identified by one of Jesus’ closest followers. Judas’s betrayal of Jesus would provide this opportunity for Jesus’ enemies.

John gives us a glimpse into the spiritual battle being waged that evening. Satan seemed to think Jesus’ death would be a victory (consider the victory of the disciples’ falling away; [Matthew 26:31–35](#)). Satan did not understand how Jesus’ sacrificial death would serve the Father’s purposes ([John 1:29, 36](#)). Jesus’ subsequent resurrection from the dead thwarted all of Satan’s plans. As Paul proclaimed, “Where, O death, is your victory?” ([1 Corinthians 15:55](#)). Judas’s act of betrayal surely pleased Satan, but God used that evil to further his own plan.

C. Washing (vv. 3–11)

3. 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 gives three insights into the state of mind of Jesus at this critical time. First, *Jesus* was fully aware of *his power* and authority.

He was in control of *all things*, including what would happen to him next. Nothing compelled him to act as a servant but his own decision and desire.

Second, Jesus was aware of his origin in *God*. John often presents Jesus this way, as one on a mission from God (example: [John 5:30](#)). Third, Jesus was aware that he would return to the Father when all things were accomplished. He was ready and prepared for what lay ahead.

4–5. 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.

Without a word, Jesus rose from the table, surely causing every disciple present to wonder what he was doing. The participants at the meal would have been on couches in a semi-reclining position. Jesus removed *his outer clothing* (both for more mobility and to keep his robe clean), for what he was about to do was grimy work.

The necessities for washing *feet* were present. The *towel* was a substantial piece of cloth, long enough for Jesus to wrap it *around his waist* and have a yard or so hanging out to use for washing the *disciples’ feet*. The *basin* was a large bowl, big enough to submerge feet in *water*.

Foot washing was a filthy job. Jerusalem was a hot and dusty city. People either wore sandal-type shoes that allowed dirt in easily or walked barefoot without any protection. Because they walked almost everywhere,

people frequently stepped in mud and other undesirable flotsam on the streets and pathways. A good host would provide guests with a servant to wash their feet. This foot-washer was the lowest of the household servants who likely took no pleasure in such a demeaning task. It was this dirty job that our Lord Jesus chose to illustrate what it meant to be a servant in his service.

What Do You Think?

In what ways have you discovered that shared meals offer witnessing or service opportunities today not available at other times?

Digging Deeper

Going the other way, what witnessing or service opportunities are best not initiated at mealtimes? Why?

6. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

The washing proceeded one at a time, perhaps in silent embarrassment from the disciples. Jesus was their esteemed *Lord*, their master and teacher (see [John 13:13](#), below), and such an honored person should never be expected to wash feet!

Simon Peter may have been last in line (and certainly wasn’t first). If it took a couple of minutes to do each pair of feet, we can imagine that over 20 minutes passed, probably with little conversation and all eyes fixed on Jesus. Peter broke the silence to protest. It was not that Peter’s feet didn’t need washing, but that it was demeaning for Jesus to do so,

and Peter did not intend to allow it.

7. Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

Jesus’ response to Peter’s refusal was somewhat cryptic, implying that there was more to the situation than Peter understood. He would *understand* in the future, but Jesus wasn’t concerned about clearing up the matter all at once. *Later* is more than just the finishing of foot washing. It points to the horrible night of agony, betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion, but also to the coming triumph of the empty tomb and the resurrection.

8a. “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”

Peter was emboldened by this answer and underlined his refusal, maybe raising his voice as he did so.

8b. Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

This response seems as cryptic as Jesus’ first. His warning that Peter’s refusal would mean the disciple had *no part with* him does not mean that Jesus would disown him. Instead, Peter would cut himself off from Jesus and his blessings. Jesus connected the meaning of this foot washing to his mission of cleansing souls.

Generations before, David asked the Lord to create in him a clean heart ([Psalm 51:10](#)). He had committed grievous sins: adultery and murder. He had covered them up, and the result was that he knew his heart was dirty with hidden, spiritual filth. David begged the Lord not to take the Holy Spirit from him ([51:11](#)), for he understood that

cleansing came from God’s presence. David knew he must offer God a “broken spirit” and a “contrite heart” ([51:17](#)) to be forgiven, to be clean. We can pray David’s words, asking Jesus to wash us so that we will not be separated from him.

What Do You Think?

In what ways have you seen people argue with Jesus today?

Digging Deeper

How do you know when to counter those arguments as you think Jesus would versus simply remaining silent?

9. “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”

In an instant, *Peter* shifted from outright refusal to a desire for both *hands* and *head*—his entire being—to be made clean. Peter glimpsed that Jesus the servant is also Jesus the Lamb, who cleanses us of sin ([Revelation 7:14](#)). Jesus’ great intersection of humility, service to others, and the cleaning away of dirt points us directly to the coming cross.

10. Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.”

Jesus corrected Peter’s zeal by saying that one who is fully washed does not need to take a second *bath*, only to wash his feet. This seems to be saying that one who comes to faith and is covered by the cleansing blood of Jesus is spiritually clean, counted innocent

in the eyes of God. This is the essence of the atonement, the satisfaction of the penalty for our sins through the sacrifice of Jesus. But as the Jewish visitors to the temple knew, even after they took a purification bath before entering, their feet became dirty from walking. Symbolically, we are saved from our sins (the bath) but still commit sins (dirty feet). We all need a repeated washing of our spiritual feet. This process is often referred to as sanctification, the ongoing process of learning through the Holy Spirit and growing in our relationship with Christ.

What Do You Think?

Which of these “wash” texts influences you most to live as one who models Christ: [Acts 22:16](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9–11](#); [1 Timothy 5:9–10](#); [Titus 3:3–7](#); [Hebrews 10:20–24](#)? Why?

Digging Deeper

What seems to tempt Christians to forget their state of having been washed? Why?

11. For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

Jesus *knew*, however, that not everyone in the room would have the spiritual bath. One in their midst was not *clean*. Judas might have sat quietly while the Master washed the filth from his feet, but his heart was set on doing Satan’s will, giving himself no hope of spiritual cleansing (see [John 6:70–71](#); [18:2–3](#)). He was a betrayer. Peter, when he understood, had allowed Jesus to wash his

feet.

II. Clean Lives ([John 13:12–15](#), [34–35](#))

A. Serving (vv. [12–15](#))

12. 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.

Jesus, ever the teacher, calmly *put* his dinner *clothes* back *on* and resumed his spot at the table. The question is rhetorical, shown by the fact that Jesus went straight into explanation without waiting for answers.

13. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.

Jesus asserted his rightful position among them. *Teacher* indicates that Jesus was the one to whom they listened and from whom they learned (see [John 13:6](#), above, regarding *Lord*). His service to them did not change his authority over them.

14. “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.

When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper with others in our church, we partially reenact the final meal Jesus shared with his disciples. Our practices center around eating a piece of bread and tasting the fruit of the vine. Some churches include John’s foot-washing example as part of their annual events, often on Maundy Thursday (the Thursday before Easter Sunday).

Some might ask why all churches don't reenact the foot washing every time we take the Lord's Supper. The answer is addressed by the next verse.

What Do You Think?

Comparing the lesson text with [Luke 7:44](#) and [1 Timothy 5:9–10](#), what would be some modern equivalents to the foot-washing practice of the first century AD?

Digging Deeper

What would have to happen for you to begin demonstrating love to others in one such way?

15. “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

While there would be nothing wrong with foot washing in and of itself, history tells us it was not practiced in the first-century church as witnessed by the book of Acts and other early Christian sources. The reason is that Jesus lifted up his action as *an example* of humble service. He was not introducing a new custom among the people of Israel. Rather, the command is for all disciples of Jesus to be servants of one another ([Mark 10:42–45](#)). This is the very essence of following Jesus. We honor his words in seeing the bread as a symbol of his body and the fruit of the vine as a symbol of his blood ([Mark 14:22–24](#)). Therein, our celebration of the Lord's Supper is a remembrance of Christ's sacrificial and atoning death for our sins on the cross. But an example of service is just that.

Jesus' conclusion is remarkable when we consider the setting of the last supper. Jesus knew that torture and death loomed shortly. He knew his disciples were going to be scattered, confused, and discouraged. But the *example* he gave sums up his entire ministry. They needed to do more than remember his words. They were called to servanthood just as he had modeled for them. To the very end of the book and even now, Jesus calls for us to follow (see [John 21:22](#)).

LITERAL FOOT WASHING

For several years I was part of a group that practiced literal foot washing. In the early days of the Protestant Reformation, members of this tradition first experienced foot washing in homes and later included it in observances of the Lord's Supper. The churches I was part of practiced foot washing on a day leading up to Easter.

Since I hadn't grown up with foot washing, I initially recoiled at the practice. I could *definitely* relate to Peter's reluctance to allow Jesus to wash his feet. But as I experienced foot washing firsthand (“firstfoot”), I was impressed and inspired by its significance. It was more than a mere symbol; I appreciated the bond of unity and mutual humility that foot washing fostered.

It's been many years now since I've participated in a foot washing ritual. So I ask myself: *What are other tangible ways that I am submitting to Jesus' example of being a servant?* How about you?

—A. S.

What Do You Think?

What visual aspects of today's text are practical to work into your church's communion service?

Digging Deeper

What would be the benefit in doing so?

B. Loving (vv. 34–35)

34. “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

A few verses later, Jesus framed the foot-washing lesson in a different way. He gave the *command* for his disciples to *love*, a command with important qualifications. First, this love is to be mutual. His disciples should form a community where every member is loved by every other member without exception. Second, Jesus pointed to his own example of service as the best way to understand this love. Mutual love might involve some short-term tasks such as cleaning feet, but for Jesus it extended to giving up his life for those he *loved* (see [John 15:12–13](#)).

35. “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

This loving community will be noticed by others. The old chorus stated, “They will know we are Christians by our love.” Such a loving community is unlike anything naturally occurring in the world. For *everyone* to see the difference in Jesus’ *disciples*, our *love* must not look like worldly love (example:

[Luke 6:27–36](#); see lesson 6). The church is intentional and empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit to love as Jesus loves. A local church might be known for many things: its building, its summer VBS, its worship music, its preaching, its mission trips, etc. It should always be known for its love.

SERVICE TO THE BRIDE

Little did I know when Ardith and I got married 40 years ago that my vow “to have and to hold” her “in sickness” would be seriously tested. Just a few years later, she developed chronic headaches that became much more than an interruption in routine—and that have gotten progressively worse. This reality has left me with what, from the outside, might look like an unfair share of responsibility for shopping and cleaning.

Our service is still very much mutual. I am exempted from cooking and laundry duty. And Ardith’s companionship and encouragement constitute an invaluable pillar of support and strength in my life. We delight in serving each other—and in thanking and affirming each other for doing so.

My wife and I both have the calling and privilege to serve—and be served by—one another. What acts of service delight you to offer to Christ’s bride, the church?

—A. S.

Conclusion

A. A Matter of Heart

Is your “whole body ... clean” but you still have dirty feet from pride and lack of love? Is your heart, your inner being, truly clean? Washing your feet or your hands will not clean your heart. No doctor prescribes handwashing for heart disease. Jesus does not seek people with hard, dirty spirits who have immaculate personal hygiene. He wants those with “clean hands and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:4; contrast Matthew 23:25–26).

Jesus bids us to take action. As we serve others, we follow Jesus. When we humble ourselves, our hearts are changed. Loving service will help our hearts stay clean. Can you think of someone you can serve this week? Remember, they will not know you by your love if you do not show your love in service.

B. Prayer

Father, you sent your Son to die for us because of your great love. Cleanse our hearts that we may model that love! In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Show your love!

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the

[NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Read aloud the following job description:

Roadkill Collector: Must be able to work long hours braving oncoming traffic while picking up creatures of various sizes and breeds in various states of decay. Benefits include working outdoors. Strong stomach a plus.

Call for a show of hands of those who would be willing to take this job. Ask if anyone has held a “dirtier” job than this.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “John’s Gospel tells the story of Jesus’ willingness to take on a dirty job in order to teach an important lesson to his disciples. Let’s see what it was.”

Into the Word

Ask a participant to read aloud the lesson text of [John 13:1–15, 34–35](#). Then divide the class into four groups, and distribute assignments on handouts (you prepare) to groups as follows.

Background Group: Summarize [John 13:1–3](#) in terms of setting the backdrop against which the story that follows is cast.

Process Group: Explain why [John 13:4–5](#) is such a shock, even today, when seen against the backdrop of [13:1–3](#).

Dialogue Group: Condense the conversation between Peter and Jesus in [John 13:6–11](#) to half as many words each. Since the text

has Peter speaking 29 words and Jesus speaking 51, your condensed summary will have no more than 14 words for Peter and 25 for Jesus.

Lesson Group: Explain the connection between [John 13:12–15](#) and [John 13:34–35](#). Determine how the word *example* functions in helping do this.

After an appropriate amount of time, reconvene for whole-class presentation of each group's results in turn. Use the commentary to clarify and to correct misconceptions. Conclude each of the four presentations and discussions by asking learners what they found surprising and why.

Option 1. To help learners see broader connections with other parts of Jesus' earthly ministry, form learners into study pairs as you give them handouts (you create) titled "The Big Picture." Under that title have the following questions listed:

- 1—What connection(s) do you see between [John 13:1](#) and [Luke 2:41](#); [John 5:1](#); [6:4](#); [11:55](#)?
- 2—What connection(s) do you see between [John 13:4–5](#) and [Mark 10:45](#); [Luke 22:27](#) and [Philippians 2:7](#)?
- 3—How is the "new command" of [John 13:34](#) related to the "old command" of [1 John 2:7–8](#), if at all?

Be prepared to offer your own conclusions to these questions.

Option 2. If your learners need help grasping the difference between literal and figurative language, distribute copies of the "What Does the Context Imply?" exercise from the

activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in groups of three to reach understanding.

Into Life

Ask class members to name jobs that some people might consider "beneath" them; jot responses on the board. Remind the class that Jesus' action to wash feet was considered a menial job fit only for servants to perform.

Take an opinion poll vote regarding which job listed on the board the class members consider to be least desirable. Follow by brainstorming how to turn that task into a class service project; make a definite plan to do so.

Option. Conclude the class with a few minutes of silent reflection by distributing copies of the "My (Un)Willingness" exercise from the activity page. Ask learners to complete this individually. Assure them that their written responses are theirs alone to keep—you will not collect them.

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(November 1: Serving Love\)](#)
