



LESSON 13 ~ LET ME BE YOUR SERVANT! John 13

DISCUSSION STARTER

- What is your idea of great customer service?

INTRODUCTION

The setting of **John 13** is in a borrowed room where Jesus and his disciples are having a Passover meal together – the meal we call the **Last Supper**. In the Middle East, proper etiquette taught that guests, dirty and grimy from traveling in the dusty streets, should, on arrival to a home, have their feet washed by a slave or servant. This was a particularly humble and lowly task. In fact, in Jesus' culture, if the slave happened to be Jewish (instead of a foreigner) they were exempt from this humiliating job.

Yet, as the meal gets underway, an astonishing scene is enacted. Jesus gets up from dinner, takes off his outer clothing, puts a towel around his waist and with water and a basin, begins to wash the feet of his disciples. His disciples are shocked and horrified, but Jesus, by his living example, demonstrates to them that he came to serve, not to be served. He taught them and teaches us that serving is the way to greatness. Through Christ's example, we learn that we achieve our full potential by giving, not grasping and by loving, just as Christ loved us.

PREPARATION

1. Before you read **John 13**, ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and guide you into all truth (**John 16:13**). You may want to make the following prayer your own:

Spirit of the Living God, the One who comforts, strengthens and encourages me.

I admit that I cannot understand the truth found in God's Word with only my mind.

I agree that spiritual truth has to be understood with my heart as well as my head.

So I ask You to give me spiritual understanding as I do this lesson.

*I pray that You would enable me to see, hear and understand,
with my spirit, all that You want to teach me.*

I ask this in the powerful Name of Jesus (as if Jesus were asking it).

Amen

2. Read **John 13** slowly and thoughtfully in your own Bible. As you read and reread, **underline or highlight** any verses, phrases or words that are meaningful to you. Put a **question mark** beside anything you don't understand. Put a ✓ beside anything you would like more information about.

You may also want to read this chapter in another translation. The Scripture handouts for these lessons contain the *Amplified Version* of the Bible. It is important, however, that you don't try to answer the questions in the lesson from just the *Amplified Version*. The questions are phrased to be answered from the *New International Version (NIV)*, the *New Living Translation (NLT)*, or something similar. Using **only** the *Amplified Version* may be confusing. It is given only as a supplementary text.

3. Write one question that you have about this chapter that you would like answered as you do this lesson.

QUESTIONS

Read **John 13:1-11**.

1. In this setting of a shared meal between Jesus and his disciples, what does Jesus know about the future that the disciples don't know (**13:1, 3, 11**)?

2. Considering that Jesus knows these things, what is remarkable about his *emotions* and *actions* on this night (**13:1-4**)?

 - ♥ Imagine Jesus recalling the story of this night as a guest on *Oprah* or *Larry King Live*. What would our culture find unbelievable about Jesus' definition of **love** and **authority** (**13:1, 3**)?
 - ♥ When have you seen love demonstrated in a remarkable way?
 - ♥ *Who* or *what* would be on your mind if you knew for sure that you would leave this world in a week's time? What is one thing you would definitely have to do before you left? Should you do it now? Why or why not?

3. The borrowed room where this meal takes place obviously had water, a basin and a towel, but no slave or servant to do the customary foot washing. What do we learn about the disciples and their thinking by the fact that the meal had begun without anyone getting the expected and necessary foot washing?

 - ♥ Can you think of a humble or lowly task that no one wants to do that could be a contemporary example of "foot washing"?
 - ♥ What lowly, unpleasant task is especially difficult for you to do? Why?

4. From Peter's reaction in **13:6-8**, what do you think Peter was thinking as he watched Jesus wash the feet of all the disciples and why did he say to Jesus, "No, you will never wash my feet" (**13:8**)?

5. Peter took Jesus' reply to his protest literally (**13:8-10**), but what did Jesus really mean when he used the words *wash* and *clean*? What spiritual truth was Jesus teaching his disciples? (**1 John 1:7-9** may help you in your answer.)

- ♥ Are you *washed* and *clean* in the sense that Jesus was using these words? How so?
- ♥ Why does a person who has had a bath, need only wash their feet (13:10)?

Read John 13:12-17

6. Sum up in your own words the spiritual truth or principle that Jesus wanted his disciples to understand (13:13-14).

- ♥ How did Jesus challenge the disciples idea of what it means to be a leader? Why the role reversal?
- ♥ How do you feel about serving someone whom you admire and like as a person? How do you feel about serving someone who you don't particularly like or value?
- ♥ **Luke 22:24-27** tells us what the disciples were talking about over dinner. How does Jesus define greatness? How is this counter-cultural? How important is it to live this way? Why?

7. For what reasons did Jesus expect his disciples to obey his command (13:14-17)?

- ♥ What are some ways a person might be blessed if they choose to follow Jesus' example (13:17)?
 - ♥ Do you feel awkward and uncomfortable when others serve you? Why or why not? What should be your attitude when others serve you?
 - ♥ What do you learn about servanthood from the fact that Jesus washed Judas' feet even though he knew that Judas would betray him? What "Judas" in your life could you serve? What would be your motive?
8. Read **Philippians 2:3-8**. This is not the way the world and our culture thinks. This Christ-like attitude has sometimes been called "the upside-down kingdom." Why do you think that Jesus puts such emphasis on our having this kind of attitude and who benefits when we live this way?

- ♥ Jesus knew who he was, where he was from, where he was going and what authority he had (13:3). How well do you know these things about yourself? How would knowing these things make it possible for you to humbly serve another without pride or resentment?
- ♥ Are motives important when we serve another? Why or why not? What are your motives when you serve another: Because you should? Love for others? Love for Jesus? To impress others? Other motives?

Read John 13:18-30.

9. What is usually Satan's first move when he tempts us to sin (13:2)?

How can you fight this strategy?

10. The giving of a piece of bread, dipped in the common dish, was a mark of friendship and honor (13:26). Why do you think Jesus did this for Judas?

- ♥ If you knew ahead of time that someone would betray you, how would you treat that person? How does Jesus' example speak to you? What happens to us when we hold grudges, harbor resentment and seek revenge?
11. What connection do you see between Judas accepting the bread from Jesus and Satan entering him (13:27)? What does this teach you about temptation and sin?
- ♥ Have you ever been *stabbed in the back* by a friend? How did it feel? What difference does it make to know that Jesus was troubled by Judas' betrayal (13:21)? What should you do when you are betrayed?
 - ♥ Have you ever betrayed or denied Jesus by your **words** or **actions**? How did you feel and what did you do about it?

Read **John 13:31-38**.

12. What, if any, difference do you see between Jesus' new command to love (13:34) and the old command to love (Leviticus 19:18)?

What are the defining characteristics of Jesus' love for us (13:1, 4,5; 15:13)?

- ♥ Can you love another as Christ loves you and still disagree, confront or correct? Why or why not?
 - ♥ What do you think it means to love another as Christ loves you?
13. What is one of the tangible results of Christ-followers loving each other as Christ loves them (13:35)?

Why is this important and what would be the result?

Response

Jesus calls us to a life of service, for our sakes as well as for the ones we serve. Below are examples of different types of service you can give others. Choose an act of service that is new for you and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you whom you can serve this week. (Taken from Richard Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline*.)

The Service of:

- ❖ *Hiddenness*; secret, anonymous acts of service; a great pride-buster!
- ❖ *Small things*; simple assistance in trifling, petty things that take up your time
- ❖ *Guarding the reputation of another*; refusing to talk behind another's back
- ❖ *Being served*; submitting humbly to someone serving you
- ❖ *Common courtesy*; simple things that acknowledge others and affirm their worth
- ❖ *Hospitality*; opening your home to another
- ❖ *Listening*; patiently giving someone your full attention, especially someone "lesser"
- ❖ *Bearing the burden of another*; comforting another; weeping with those who weep
- ❖ *Sharing the Word of Life*; sharing a word you have received from God to encourage another

Encounter with Jesus

For **10 days in a row**, begin the day by praying this prayer: *Lord Jesus, as it would please you, bring me someone today whom I can serve.* Share with someone what your expectations were before you began this exercise and then what actually happened. How did Jesus answer your prayer?