

# Living the Story

## A Study through Scripture

### Introduction:

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I love serving people. Especially people similar to me who just need a little help. And when it is convenient for me. And when people notice. And I get to do some work, but not so much that it is, you know, really work.

That's not really service, is it?

And it is not what Jesus is calling us to here in John 13.

What is amazing about the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples is that he did something he was not supposed to do. His actions were completely foreign to his role. If you have ever watched an episode of *Undercover Boss*, you see the CEO in the fry room, cleaning up all of the junk or taking out the trash or ... well, some role that he or she is really not supposed to be doing. We cannot believe the CEO would subject himself or herself to such work. It only works from superior to subordinate, doesn't it? Would you watch a show called *Undercover Janitor*?

The issue is not how much it helps people, but how much does it give your life to them. For instance, it would be easy for someone who is extremely wealthy to stop at the corner of Slide and the Loop on a Sunday morning and drop a couple of hundred for a paper. We might be impressed because of the amount, but how much (remember, I said someone who is extremely wealthy, not necessarily you and me) does that really affect the bottom line of the giver. (Jesus tells a story about this very thing.) What if that rich person stopped and told the guy selling paper: "You take the day off. Here is your pay, I will handle it for the rest of the day." I think this gets closer to the point of Jesus' story. It is not the giving, but the giving of you.

### Summary of the Text:

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A couple of things we find in this passage that help shape our understanding of the whole story.

First, Jesus knew whom he was and that his time had come (v. 1). There is some hint in John's telling of the story of Jesus' baptism that perhaps his true identity was not something he was always aware of. Whether you believe this to be true, there is no doubt here. Jesus knew what his role in salvation history was at this point.

And so he loved his disciples to the end, we are told in that same verse. There was no way his disciples could have understood what Jesus was about to go through on the cross. We see throughout the gospels proof that they did not. I cannot help but think the heaviness of what was about to happen affected Jesus. I do not think I would have been unsympathetic if he had said: "Look guys, the next few hours are going to be rough. You go find some place to hole up, I will take it by myself from here." I think John is trying to let us know that this is exactly what Jesus is NOT doing here.

If you have been around church very long and heard this story taught, you know the custom for the servant to wash the feet of the guests at the dinner. You have probably been told that since the people in that day and age wore sandals, their feet were often dirty and needed to be clean (hence Jesus instruction to Peter that he would only wash his feet). Regardless of culture, you probably thought about washing feet with a certain bit of disgust or disdain. All of these things are supposed to be running through your mind. The thing that is supposed to really shock you, however, is that Jesus is the one doing the washing. The master or teacher does not wash the feet of those who follow him. That is the role of the servant.

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### LESSON #27

**Date:** 03/24/2013

**Text:** John 13.1-17

**The Story:** Chapter 26

**The Big Picture:** Jesus tells us to wash the feet of others. I get that it is sticky, dirty job. Do I also understand it has more to do with the giving up of myself than it does with pedicures?

**Materials Needed:** none

It was thought, in a sense, that you give up your role as “Lord” when you take on the role of “foot washer.” I have been told that people who live in impoverished neighborhoods will not clean up the trash in their neighborhood—even though they know it makes the neighborhood look better—because that places them in the role of “trash man” and no one wants to be known as the guy who picks up trash. So Jesus abdicates his role, at least in the way people of that culture often think of it. He gives up the “ideal” role that people held of him for a greater role, that of savior. His actions here mimic that of going to the cross, which always was considered a defeat. Real kings don’t die. They destroy the enemy. We know, however, that it was only through death that the enemy was in fact destroyed.

There is one other important point Jesus makes in verses 14-17. His action of washing feet was not only to clean the feet of his followers, but also to serve as an example they should imitate. We too, he says, should wash feet.

I have washed the feet of middle school boys late in a week of camp in the summer in Abilene, Texas. I’m not going to lie, it was not a pleasant experience. It made an impact—mostly on those of us who actually did the washing!! Jesus tells us we are to wash the feet of others, but I wonder if washing feet today actually communicates what Jesus intended it to? We could set up a foot-washing station just inside the doors so on Sunday morning, people could come and have their feet taken care of as they enter the church building. However, most of those people have just stepped out of the shower, put on their nice socks/hosiery and nice shoes. There is no need to clean their feet, save to create a moment where people think: Wow, that was unusual.

The other problem with that scenario is: what do we give up when we wash people’s feet? What role have we assumed that is contrary to the one we *should* have? There are certainly times when the literal washing of feet is a role that is outside the norms of our lives. (Our group once saw a family visit Tent Village and one of the things they did was wash the feet of the residents there. I think that probably qualifies—not because they were dirty, but because they were fulfilling a needed role in the lives of those residents.) More times than not, however, I think we may need to be looking for ways to take on roles that are needed by people that may push us to a place where our initial reaction is “I could never do that.”

The challenge for your group this week will be to try to determine ways to “wash people’s feet,” not in a literal sense, but in the sense of placing yourself in a role that fulfills a need people have and does so in a way that is outside the norms you may be used to living within.

#### *Preparing for the Group Time:*

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As you challenge your group to wash the feet of people they come in contact with, I want you to be thinking of ways you do that for your group. With as many groups as we have, I would be willing to bet that some groups have people who are socially awkward, or someone has a member who always wants to interject his ideas. A group will have someone who sees the group time as a therapy group and someone will just not want to be there and will make it known ... every week.

How do you wash the feet of people within your group? Yes, you are the group leader, but in what ways have you taken on the role of group servant? How do you show an example of how to deal with those in group who are outside the “norms” of group life? How do you ensure that you are aware of the needs of members in your group that may not otherwise communicate to anyone?

Think about this—not only how you do it, but who you can do it even better—as you prepare for this week.

## Living the Story

Lesson #27

Text: John 13.1-17

### *Lesson Outline:*

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Ask your group: What is the worst job you have ever done? You may follow up with: Some of you may have seen the television show *Dirty Jobs with Mike Rowe*. If the producers came to us to ask this group to be on that show, what job would cause you to say, "Nope, not going to do it"? Even if they offered you x amount of money?

Read John 13.1-17.

Go through the discussion questions.

Close with a time of prayer asking that God give us eyes to see and ears to hear those who need their feet washed.

### *Discussion Questions:*

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How does the job of washing the feet of Jesus' disciples rank on your "Not going to do it" job list?

Is there anything else Jesus could have done that would have been more shocking at this moment?

How do you think the disciples understanding of what it meant to be the Messiah affected their reaction? How does our perception of what it means to be the Messiah affect how we read this story (perhaps in a completely opposite way of the disciples)?

In Luke 22, we read of Jesus' disciples discussing the greatest in the kingdom at the Last Supper. Although we do not have record of Jesus washing their feet in the gospel of Luke, how would that have affected their argument?

In what ways do you see servants trying to be better than their masters? What are the results of their attempts?

Jesus tells us we are to follow his example. How can we wash people's feet this week? What "job" do you see today as similar to feet washing in Jesus' day?

Why would literal feet washing not be the best way to follow Jesus's example today? What would be better?

### *For the Children:*

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Children are rarely the superior party in a relationship, so the idea of doing something for someone else who is the "subordinate" seems difficult. As I have thought about this, I keep coming back to the idea of a child who has all of the toys. How does he or she share with others? Does he or she even share at all? This gets to the idea I think Jesus is trying to communicate.

I may instruct our children to build an awesome fort out of blocks, then give all of the blocks to just one child and just see what happens. I think there will be opportunity to discuss the lesson's point—just not sure exactly what that point may be! Some of you may have better ideas of how to communicate this with your young people.

### *Living the Story:*

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The challenge to live out the story this week is this: Go and "wash the feet" of people in need that you come in contact with. Now, what we mean by washing feet is not a literal washing, but giving up our role—often times our role as superior—and doing something that is reserved for those who have subordinate status in the relationship. We want to do the unexpected, the thing that causes people to say: "Why are you doing this?" I cannot tell you what that looks like fore your group. It is your job to determine what it is, then to go do it.

*Next Week:*

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Next week's lesson will be from *The Story* chapter 27.