

REFLECTION GUIDE

JOHN 13:1-17 | WALKING THE WAY OF THE CROSS

KEY TERMS

His hour - Jesus and John use this term to refer the time for Jesus to go to the cross. Everything in John's Gospel from chapter 13 onward is written with the coming cross in mind.

Supper - The meal in John 13 is very likely Jesus' Last Supper recorded in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22. What John includes from that final meal is different from the others, though. He does not include Jesus explaining the meaning of the bread and cup, and he is the only writer to include Jesus washing the disciples feet.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the first century, footwashing was considered one of the lowliest household tasks, usually performed by servants. Because people wore sandals and walked on dusty roads, feet would get dirty quickly. It was common for Jews to wash their feet, or have a servant wash their feet, before meals.

Lord/Teacher - These two terms are titles of authority, and—in John's Gospel—even divine identity. Jesus' use of these titles after washing his disciples feet highlights the completely upside down nature of his actions.

SYNOPSIS

Beginning with chapter 13, John's Gospel shifts away from Jesus' public ministry and highlights his final words to his disciples beginning with the Last Supper (v. 1). John frames this section of his Gospel writing, "having loved his own who were in the world, [Jesus] loved them to the end." What comes next demonstrates this love as Jesus gets up from dinner, takes off his outer garments, puts on a towel, gets down on the floor, and washes his disciples feet (vv. 2-5). In response to this culturally absurd act, Peter says, *Lord, do you wash my feet?* (v. 6). After some back and forth, Peter then asks Jesus to wash his hands and head as well to which Jesus responds saying, *The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you* (vv. 7-11). Jesus' actions in this scene are a symbolic parable for the gospel: Jesus left the privileges of heaven to come to earth to cleanse us from our sin; his grace makes us clean, not our effort. After doing this, Jesus resumes his place as *Lord and Teacher* and leaves his disciples with an invitation: *If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet* (vv. 13-14). Jesus then closes these verses with a potentially surprising statement: *If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them* (v. 17).

GOING DEEPER

Read Philippians 2:5-11 and Mark 10:42-45. Jesus shows his disciples that leadership in his kingdom is marked by humility and service, not power or prestige. How do these passages deepen your understanding of what it means to follow the example of Jesus? Where might God be calling you to serve others in your life?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read John 13:1-17. What is surprising about what takes place? What stands out to you?
2. In verse 1, John writes, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." How does this verse serve as a banner over the story? What does it reveal about the heart and motivation behind everything Jesus does both in this story and as he prepares to go to the cross?
3. What would it have felt like to have your feet washed by Jesus? Do you think you would responded with resistance like Peter? Or in some other way?
4. Read John 13:12-17. After washing the disciples' feet, Jesus tells them to "do just as I have done to you." What is Jesus inviting his followers into? How does his example shape our understanding of what it means to follow him?

LIVING THE WORD

5. How does receiving Jesus' cleansing and love (rather than trying to earn it) change the way you approach God and others?
6. How does Jesus' actions confront pride or entitlement in your own heart, and call you toward a posture of humility like his?
7. As you look around your life—your family, workplace, school, neighborhood, and/or church—where do you see opportunities to "wash feet"?
8. Jesus promises, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (v. 17). Where have you experienced joy or fullness through humble service? How might you practice this more intentionally in the days ahead?