

## Reflection on Foot Washing

### Displaying the God-kind of generosity requires stooping—a dethroning of self.

(From article “Generous People” by David D. Ireland, Ph.D.)

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#### **SCRIPTURE: Read John 13:1-17**

*“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.” John 13:14*

#### **NOTE:**

One of the heart-shaping lessons Jesus used with His disciples was foot washing (John 13:4-17). Just before the Passover Festival, and before Judas fled to carry out his betrayal of Jesus, Jesus offered this truly profound lesson. Foot washing was customarily a servant’s job. That evening there were no servants present. The dusty, dirty, travel-worn feet of the sandaled men needed washing. Jesus didn’t wait for someone else to address the need. With love, and the desire to teach by example, He washed the disciples’ feet.

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#### **Jesus, Our Role Model**

Picture this. All of the disciples were piled into the upper room for the Passover meal. They sat comfortably around the table and started to chow down. Imagine the looks on their faces as Jesus pushed Himself from the evening Passover table, poured water into a basin and began washing and drying their feet. Without completing His meal, He performed this selfless act of generosity.

Although the disciples would have all recognized the need to abide by this custom, no one was willing to stoop to do it. The sight of Jesus lowering Himself to do this humble act must have been shocking. I’m sure it was awkward for them all, though He was quite comfortable. When Peter verbally protested, declaring to Jesus, “You shall never wash my feet,” he surely spoke for the others. Jesus told him: “Unless I wash you, you have no part of Me.” (John 13:8)

I can understand Peter’s reluctance to allow Jesus to wash his feet. After all, foot washing was beneath Him. Right?

Ironically, when we piece together the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), we learn that before they entered the upper room, the disciples had been arguing about which one of them was the greatest (Matt. 18:1-9). They were so preoccupied with self that it hindered them from being big-hearted. Little did they know that their thoughts and behavior placed them in the same category as the unconverted, self-centered people they were called to help lead.

Jesus ended this life lesson by saying, *“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you”* (John 13:14-15). Jesus provided the disciples with a priceless display of generosity! It’s easy to judge and condemn the disciples when we see their hearts so far away from the place of generosity. But, if truth be told, like these men, we all typically fall into the same self-absorbed trappings. Few of us set out to live selfishly but like them we get pre-occupied with our own self-importance and service to others falls by the wayside. We all need God to transform our selfish hearts.

Imagine what the feet of those first-century working men must have looked like. They weren’t soft and cute after pedicures from the local downtown Jerusalem salon. Some of them were fishermen. All of them wore sandals and walked the dusty roads. This foot washing lesson raised the level of Jesus’ example of humility and generosity of service. His behavior was not forced, scripted, or isolated. Generosity was part of His character and person just like His well-known traits like faithfulness, mercy, and kindness.

Lest we forget, Jesus performed this extravagant display of unconditional love and humility toward His apostles on a very fraught occasion, at a time He knew He would soon leave the earth to be with His Father. Already, the devil had prompted Judas to betray Jesus. Christ was aware that one of His 12 disciples would soon renounce Him. Still He washed the feet of each.

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### **DELIBERATE with God**

When you deliberate with God, carefully weigh each reflection in your heart, not just your head. Peter stood off to the side deliberating whether or not he was going to let Jesus wash his feet. When his turn came, it was with renewed fervor to dedicate his allegiance to Jesus.

- What, if anything, do you think His decision to wash His disciples' feet says about Jesus' self image?
  - How can you use Jesus' actions to help you define generosity in your own life?
  - Does John 13:14 challenge your thinking in any way? How?
  - Can the people closest to you expect to see a change in you? If so, how?
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### **SHARE with others**

Good conversations flow from meaningful experiences and rich times of reflection. After mulling over the foot washing lesson for a day or two, what would you like to share with others? What did you take away from the foot washing story? Did it shift your thinking? Invite your friends to help you on your journey of self-discovery.

- What does servanthood mean to you?
- Can the people closest to you expect to see a change in you? If so, how?
- We all want Jesus to sit on the throne of our lives, but—if we are honest—most of us have some areas where SELF sits on the throne. What are some of those areas for you?
- If SELF is dethroned from your life, what changes would your family and friends notice?
- Think about whether your level of service to others reflects your understanding of the example of the servant life Jesus wants us to imitate.