

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet



Scripture Reference: [John 13:1-20; 31-35](#)

Suggested Theme: Jesus came to serve and love people. Following Jesus means serving and loving others.

Memory Verse: “I give you a new command: Love each other. You must love each other as I have loved you. All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other.” [John 13:34-35, ICB](#)

Story Overview:

When Jesus and His closest disciples gathered for the Passover meal, Jesus performed a task usually done by servants. He was their teacher but modelled true service and love by washing His disciples' feet. He then goes on to teach them that they should show this kind of love and service to others.

Background Study:

This event takes place during the last days of Jesus' earthly ministry. In a very short time, He will be arrested and then crucified. Jesus knows He is about to leave these men and suffer greatly through his trial and crucifixion. This is an intimate gathering of close friends, and the actions He takes are filled with love.

Matthew, Mark and Luke write about the Passover Meal and the [Last Supper](#). But, of the four gospel writers, John is the only one to write about the washing of the disciples' feet. Both events seemed to have happened on the same evening. In his writing style, John sometimes combines events or groups them in different ways, so it is unclear. In any case, both happened just before Jesus was to “leave this world”.

Normally, a servant would wash the feet of people as they entered a house. This was very important when eating a meal. Instead of sitting in chairs at tables, diners of the time reclined on low couches. They would have been reclined close to the feet of the person beside them.

In addition to dirt and mud, feet would have collected the smells and grime associated with animals and people. The streets of this time would have been very dirty. There was no running water or sanitation to take care of waste.

For whatever reason, there was no servant to wash the feet of Jesus or the disciples before this meal. Instead, Jesus took on the role of the servant and washed feet. This was a humble act, not one that a rabbi or teacher would normally do.

Peter was mortified that his teacher would serve him in this way, but Jesus wanted His followers to know that humility, love and service were acts of a true leader. Jesus was going away soon. He was setting His followers up to be genuine and effective leaders. If Jesus could humble Himself in this way, they could also go on to serve others after His death.

In John's version, after washing their feet, Jesus continues the meal and mentions the upcoming betrayal and denial by Judas and Peter. This is followed up by many of Jesus' teachings. In [chapters 14-17](#), John

covers vast subjects such as Jesus preparing a place, the comfort of the Holy Spirit, Jesus as the true vine, rejection by the world, sorrow turning to joy, overcoming the world and finally, Jesus' prayer.

In [John 13:31-35](#) Jesus makes it clear that love will be the key to helping people understand God. If people see love expressed between disciples, then they will recognise that they are God's people.

"I give you a new command: 'Love each other. You must love each other as I have loved you. All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other.'" John 13:34-35, ICB

Way to Introduce the Story:

Have the children remove their shoes and compare feet. The children will enjoy comparing sizes and unique characteristics. Today we will learn about a time when Jesus talked about feet.

The Story:

Jesus had been teaching people but knew it was almost time to leave the earth. He gathered His closest followers to share a meal together.

Like we do today, the food was gathered, and the dishes were laid out. It was time to eat, but there was a problem.

The dishes were clean, and the cups were clean. The problem was that there was still something that was not clean. In those times, there was something else that should be cleaned before anyone else began to eat. Can you guess what else needed to be cleaned? What do you think it was?

If you guessed "feet", then you are correct. In those days, washing your feet before the meal began was very important.

People wore sandals and walked in the very dirty streets at that time. Sometimes, animals used the street as a toilet, and sometimes, people threw their rubbish out into the street.

Jesus and His disciples would have been very close to each other during the meal, so this was a problem.

The disciples must have thought, "It is a servant's job to wash our feet. We need our feet washed. Where is the servant?"

But then something happened that they never expected. Jesus stood up and took off His outside clothes. He got a towel and a bowl of water and then bent down in front of each of the disciples to wash their feet.

Everyone was in shock! Jesus was their teacher! He was too important to do this job. This was a job for servants and not teachers!

When Jesus came to Peter, Peter was shocked. "Stop, I will never allow you to wash my feet!"

But Jesus told Peter that it was all right. Jesus wanted Peter to know that good teachers and leaders love their friends and take care of them. They don't have to act better than everyone else. Jesus was the teacher, but He was willing to be like a servant and show love to others.

Jesus told Peter that He wanted to show love to His people in this way. "Peter," Jesus said, "if you do not let me wash your feet then you are not one of my people".

Of course, Peter wanted to be one of Jesus' people. He wanted this so much that he said, "If you want to, then you can wash my feet and my hands and even my head!"

Jesus taught His disciples many other things after this. He knew He would die on the cross, so He told them that He would have to go away. Jesus wanted His disciples always to remember that they should love one another. They should not act proud and try to be bossy. They should be like servants and help one another.

If Jesus could do this, then so could they.

We can read Jesus' words in our Bibles. Jesus said, "I give you a new command: Love each other. You must love each other as I have loved you. All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other."

Jesus showed love to His disciples and helped them. How can you show love to other people?

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download the slideshow](#), or [click here to download the pictures to print](#).

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story, while reflection questions encourage them to internalise its meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

Review:

1. Who washed the disciples' feet when Jesus and the disciples were at a meal together? (Jesus)
2. Which disciple said Jesus could wash not only his feet, but his hands and head as well? (Peter)
3. Why did Jesus wash the disciples' feet?
4. After Jesus washed the disciples' feet, what does He say the disciples should do? (serve each other, just like how Jesus served them)
5. Jesus said that people will recognise His disciples if they have something for each other. What is it? (love)
6. What did the disciples learn about love from Jesus washing their feet?
7. What did you learn about Jesus in this story?
8. What did you learn about people in this story?

Reflection:

1. What do you think the disciples' feet looked or smelled like before Jesus washed them?
2. Why do you think Jesus decided to spend time serving his disciples on his last night with them?
3. Why did Peter not want Jesus to wash his feet?
4. How do you think Jesus washing the disciples' feet is similar to what He did for them on the cross?
5. If you were one of the disciples, would you have wanted Jesus to wash your feet? Would you have done something else?

6. Who do you think it was hard for the disciples to want to serve?
7. What does it mean to serve someone?
8. What did Jesus show you about serving and love in this story?
9. What are ways you could serve someone in your family or school? Who could you show love to today?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- [L-O-V-E Song](#)
- [Love is Something If You Give it Away](#)
- [Jesus' Love is Bubbling Over](#)
- [Hello, Hello Song](#)
- You can search YouTube for a number of songs about serving. Such as:
 - Lord, Make Me a Servant
 - Will You Let Me Be Your Servant?
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- Wash the feet of the children. Use a bowl of warm water, a towel or cloth for washing and another for drying. Adding fragrance to the water or using lotion is also good. While you are washing their feet, speak words of encouragement to them and tell them what an honour it is to serve them. Verbally affirm your love for them. If appropriate, then offer children the opportunity to wash the feet of the other children.
- Draw smiley faces on toenails. Or, if appropriate, paint toenails.
- Play a simple word game. [Bible Wordz Game](#) is an adaptable game where children form words from letter tiles. The words relate to words found in the Bible lesson.



Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

- Use washable paint to make footprints on a large piece of paper. On the paper, write “Jesus Washed the Disciples’ Feet” and “John 13: 1-20”
- Make a craft using hearts or write out the memory verse.
- Make footprint moulds using salt dough.

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Print bookmarks, trading cards or timelines ([printable pages](#)).

- Visit the [Teaching Ideas](#) page for additional activities and crafts.

Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring Pages: A selection at coloringhome](#)
- [Slideshow for younger children by Free Bible Images](#)
- [Activities to print \(Sunday school zone\)](#)
- [Craft: Make footprint ornaments from salt dough. Recipe at Yummy Toddler Food.](#)

<https://www.pinterest.nz/marynnz/jesus-ministry-last-week-death-resurrection/>

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