



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Jesus declared His identity through seven “I am” statements in John’s gospel. With the clarity of cathedral bells, Jesus’ words rang out:

- I am “the bread of life” who nourishes the soul (John 6:35).
- I am “the light of the world” who chases away sin’s darkness (8:12).
- I am “the gate” who invites all lost sheep to come into the fold (10:7).
- I am “the good shepherd” who knows His own and leads them (10:11).
- I am “the resurrection and the life” who gives hope beyond the grave (11:25).
- I am “the way, the truth, and the life” who leads us to God (14:6).
- I am “the true grapevine” who gives life and fruitfulness (15:1).

But these weren’t the only “I am” statements made by Jesus. In a rare moment of self-disclosure, Jesus gave us an inside look into His personality with this “I am” statement in Matthew’s gospel:

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28–29, emphasis added)

Humility and gentleness. These two beautiful qualities characterize our Savior, a true servant. It should not surprise us that in His final hours, Jesus’ humility took centerstage as He served His disciples by washing their feet.

Quotable

*The disciples
were ready
to fight for
a throne but not
for a towel.*

— Charles R. Swindoll





YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

John 13 launches the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus' longest discourse (John 13–17). As we cross this literary threshold with Jesus into the upper room, pause to ask the Lord to reveal Himself to you. Write down a prayer for open eyes, a receptive mind, and a responsive heart.



Observation: Background, Setting, and Illustration

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method, a crucial first step in examining a passage of Scripture is observing the text through the magnifying glass of questions. Take a few moments to review John 13:1–17, asking, “What is the setting?” “Who is present?” “What does Jesus do?”

Background and Setting—John 13:1–3

The occasion is the Passover; the location is an upper room of a house in Jerusalem, the setting for the Last Supper. To fill in some details about the meal, read Luke 22:1–14, and write down how the disciples secured a room to celebrate the Passover. Particularly, note the diabolical forces at work behind the scenes.



In addition, note the undercurrent of conflict that churned in the group. What were the disciples fighting over (Luke 22:24–27)? The Greek word for *argue* in verse 24 means “a verbal fight.”

For Jesus, the hour “to leave this world and return to his Father” was fast approaching (John 13:1). Although a fleeting 15-hour timespan remained, Jesus did not knit His brow or pace nervously. Completely at peace, Jesus accepted His role as the Paschal Lamb who would be the sacrifice for sin, just as the Scriptures prophesied (Isaiah 53:10) and the Father willed.

Unlike the lamb, though, Jesus was not an unfortunate victim. A powerful inner drive compelled Jesus to *willingly* choose His destiny. What do the insights in John 1:14; 3:16; and 13:1 say about His motivation for sacrificing Himself?

In the murky shadows, the religious leaders conspired, the Devil schemed, and the disciples bickered. And yet, shining through in bright contrast was the love of Jesus as displayed in an unforgettable act of service.

Illustrating Humility—John 13:4–11

Why did Jesus wash the disciples’ feet? And what principles did Jesus illustrate? Let’s observe the text to find out.



Two Reasons Jesus Washed the Disciples’ Feet

As we’ve already noted, the disciples had been arguing about who was greatest (Luke 22:24–27). So, the **first** reason that prompted the foot-washing was *the disciples’ proud hearts*. Jesus couldn’t teach about intimacy with God, the Holy Spirit’s power, unity, or love until He addressed their pride. Why was Jesus’ lesson about humility foundational to everything that followed?

The **second** reason was *the disciples’ dirty feet*. It was customary for the first guests who arrived to wash the others’ feet if no servant was present. However, each man considered himself too important to do the menial task. The disciples were ready to fight for a *throne* but not for a *towel*.

But Jesus, who loved His disciples “to the very end” (John 13:1), did what a person who loves always does: He saw a need and gladly served.¹ What lesson was Jesus teaching about true greatness when He stooped to wash the disciples’ feet (Mark 9:35; 10:31)?

Now let’s observe Jesus’ actions and glean four principles about humility that the supreme Servant illustrated.

Four Principles Jesus Taught about Humility

Without speaking, Jesus’ actions declared His **first** principle: *humility is unannounced*. What did Jesus do (John 13:4–5)? And what did His silence imply about humility and leadership?



Second, *humility is willing to receive—without embarrassment*. This principle emerges as a contrast to Peter’s *unwillingness* to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Observe Peter’s responses to Jesus in John 13:6–9:

- “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”
- “No . . . you will never ever wash my feet!”
- “Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!”

Peter put on a show of false humility, and then he tried to take charge by telling Jesus what to do! What do you think may have motivated him to resist love and control the situation?

Just as it takes humility to serve, it also takes humility to receive grace—which Peter struggled to do. Truly humble people are vulnerable. They admit their need, release control, and humbly slip their dirty feet into the bowl to be washed.

Jesus’ response to Peter modeled the **third** principle: *humility is not a sign of weakness*. Jesus, although humble, was no pushover. Peter’s resistance and controlling personality didn’t deter Jesus from doing the job the Father gave Him to do—purify His people.

To understand Jesus’ responses to Peter and the distinction between “bathed” and “wash” (John 13:10), read Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on John*, page 247. For an online alternative, read the section on John 13:10–11 in Constable’s notes in lumina.bible.org. Do a little digging on your own, and write down what you discover.



The **fourth** principle is *humility does not play favorites*. Jesus washed the feet of each disciple, even the feet of His betrayer, Judas. What was Jesus teaching His disciples about dealing with enemies (Matthew 5:43–48)?



Interpretation: The Meaning of the Illustration

Jesus interpreted His own actions when He explained the object lesson.

Discussing Humility—John 13:12–17

When Jesus finished, He put away the bowl and towel and reclined at the table. A hush settled over the room as all the men listened to Jesus explain His actions. Cleansed from pride as thoroughly as their feet were cleansed from dirt, their hearts were opened wide to receive a lesson about humility they would never forget.

What did Jesus teach about *serving one another*, not just serving the Lord (John 13:12–15)?

What did Jesus teach about *doing what He taught*, not just knowing what He taught (13:16–17)?





Correlation: Washing Feet and Cleansing Souls

We correlate the Bible when we compare the meaning of one biblical passage to another. Do you see a connection between Jesus' washing dirty feet and His atoning for sin on the cross—Jesus' ultimate act of service to humanity? Read Titus 3:4–7, and write down the parallels you discover.



Application: Putting On the Towel

Application allows the Bible's lessons to take hold of our lives, causing us to examine ourselves and act on what we have learned. Review the principles we learned in the text:

- Humility is unannounced.
- Humility is willing to receive—without embarrassment.
- Humility is not a sign of weakness.
- Humility does not play favorites.

Which of these principles hits closest to home for you right now? And what can you do to put the principle into action?



Remember, it's not enough to know about serving others. The blessing of serving won't be ours until we put on the towel, kneel with a bowl of water, and start washing. What specifically do you plan to do this week and for whom?

Let's pray, thanking the Father who sent His Son to become the Servant as a model for us.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You sent Your Son, Jesus, as my Master but also my Servant. Thank You for His ultimate act of love when He died on the cross to cleanse me. Just as He washed the soles of the disciples' feet, He purged my soul from the filth of my sin. Help me to receive His love, give His love, and even be humble enough to accept love from others. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. The phrase, "to the very end," in Greek is *eis telos*, which means, "literally, 'to the final goal.' He had loved them to completion, to the fullest, all the way to the end." Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on John*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 245.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Humility Personified

John 13:1–17

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



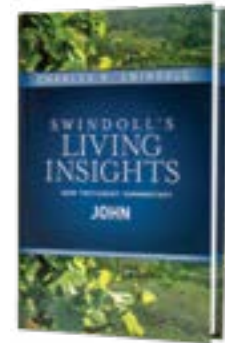
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For the 2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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