

COMPELLED BY THE CROSS

STUDY FOUR

Christlikeness in One Word

John 13:3–15

Many expected the Messiah to arrive on a white horse, flashing a sword. Jesus, however, demonstrated authentic humility right up to the end.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WITH the clarity of cathedral bells, Jesus' "I am" statements in John's gospel ring out Jesus' identity. He declared, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35); "I am the light of the world" (8:12); "I am the gate" (10:9); "I am the good shepherd" (10:11); "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25); "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6); and "I am the true grapevine" (15:1).

But these weren't the only "I am" statements Jesus made. 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)

"I am humble," Jesus said. This beautiful quality characterizes our Savior, the true Servant. In Jesus' final hours, it should not surprise us that His humility took center stage as He served His disciples by washing their feet.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Christlikeness in One Word

John 13:3–15



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Join the disciples as they entered the upper room for their final meal with Jesus before He went to the cross. Pause to ask the Lord to reveal to you His truth found only in the Scriptures. Write down a prayer for open eyes, a receptive mind, and a responsive heart.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The occasion was Passover. To fill in some details about the meal, read [Luke 22:1–14](#), and write down how the disciples secured the room to celebrate Passover. Particularly, note the diabolical forces at work behind the scenes.



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

The hour for Jesus “to leave this world and return to his Father” was fast approaching (John 13:1). In the closing darkness, the religious leaders conspired, the Devil schemed, and the disciples bickered. And yet, shining through in bright contrast was the humility of Jesus as displayed in an unforgettable act of service.



Observation: The Context, the Act, the Lesson

The first crucial step in studying Scripture is observing the text through the magnifying glass of questions. Read the passage carefully and ask, “What is the setting?” “Who is present?” “What did the characters do?”

The Context for Humility—John 13:1–3

John set the context for the scene with a glimpse into the mind of Jesus. According to *John 13:1–3*, what did John say Jesus *already* knew and intended to do?



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While Jesus entered the upper room with His heart full of selfless love, the disciples clomped into the room with soiled feet and self-serving attitudes. Customarily, the first guests to arrive washed the others' feet if no servant was present. Each man, however, considered himself too important for this lowly task.

An Unforgettable Act of Humility—John 13:4–10

Jesus observed the disciples' big heads and dirty feet. What did Jesus do in response, according to [John 13:4–5](#)? Why do you think John recorded each move Jesus made? What would have been the atmosphere in the room as it dawned on the disciples what Jesus was doing?

Jesus said not a word. He simply slipped away from the table and began to wash the disciples' feet. To display humility, no words are needed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What happened when Jesus came to Peter in [13:6–10](#)? Observe each phase of the back-and-forth dialogue. What emotions do you think Peter was awkwardly trying to communicate?

It was hard for Peter to let Jesus wash his feet. You see, it takes humility to receive. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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The Lesson about Humility—John 13:11–15

Summarize the point Jesus made in *John 13:11–15* by washing the disciples' feet.

Humble people offer what they have without calling attention to themselves. They want to serve because of love. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Principles We Glean

From your observations, you can glean key principles—truths about God and humanity that transcend culture and time. For example, Jesus' quiet service teaches the principle that *true humility is unannounced*. It's the same principle that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount: "When you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Matthew 6:3). Why is unannounced serving an essential characteristic of humility?

Now you try. Read again 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!"



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What principle do you glean from Peter's show of false humility? Finish the statement: *True humility . . .*

In the first century, foot washing was a demeaning task. Powerful leaders never stooped to wash a person's filthy feet. And yet, the Son of God stooped to wash the feet of the disciples to show them what leadership looks like in the kingdom of God. What principle do you glean? *True humility . . .*

Finally, Jesus knew Judas would betray Him; even so, He washed Judas' feet along with the others. What principle was Jesus teaching about dealing with enemies? *True humility . . .*



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Correlation: Humility and Servant Leadership

On a previous occasion, James and John tried to elbow past the other disciples by having their mother ask Jesus for places of honor for them (Matthew 20:20–23). Their brazenness angered the other disciples, prompting Jesus to teach a lesson about humility that was similar to His foot-washing lesson.

What point did Jesus make about humble leaders in *Matthew 20:24–28*?

What similarities from this teaching of Jesus do you see with Jesus' lesson of the foot-washing in *John 13:11–15*?

Jesus came to give and to serve. You can say to anyone you meet, “Christ died for you. He can be your Savior because, in absolute humility, He served you by dying in your place.”

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Putting on the Towel

The disciples had a lot to learn about humility. They were more interested in sitting on seats of honor than kneeling to serve others. They were ready to fight for a throne but not for a towel. How do we shake off a self-serving attitude like they had and replace it with a Christlike mindset?



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Pastor Chuck Swindoll gleaned the following principles from our passage:

1. *True humility is unannounced.* You don't need to talk about what you're doing. Just do it.
2. *True humility is willing to receive—without embarrassment.* Humble people are vulnerable. They admit their need and gratefully slip their dirty feet in the bowl.
3. *True humility is not a sign of weakness.* Be confident in your abilities. Know your strengths and share with others what God has given you.
4. *True humility does not play favorites.* You're most Christlike when you wash others' feet—especially the feet of a “Judas” in your life.

Which of these principles hits closest to home for you? Which do you most struggle with implementing?

The blessing of serving won't be yours until you put on the towel, kneel with a bowl of water, and start washing. What can you do to serve with humility this week? Whom will you serve?

The Master became the Servant not merely to clean dirty feet but to purify sinful hearts and to send us into a sinful world with basins in hand, ready to serve in His name. *Humility*. It's Christlikeness in one word. Put on Christ's towel and follow in His humble footsteps today.



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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 receive His love, give His love, and even be humble enough to accept love from others. Amen.

