

CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY TWELVE

When Adversity Leads to Humility

John 13:1–17

The disciples were ready to occupy a throne to rule, but nobody wrestled over the towel to serve.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN our first *Searching the Scriptures* study, James urged us to see trials as “an opportunity for great joy” (James 1:3). How can one find joy in troubles? The answer lies in our perspective. Through the lens of fear, trouble looks terrifying . . . but through the lens of faith, we see that same trouble as an opportunity for God to act and for us to completely depend on Him.

Abraham, for example, viewed sacrificing Isaac as an opportunity for God to provide. David saw Goliath as an easy target for God to take down. For Joseph, imprisonment meant God would rescue him. Closed doors for Paul simply pointed him toward the one door God would open.

In every case we studied, after God acted, irrepressible joy followed. We can still hear Abraham and Isaac’s laughter as they descended the mountain together, David’s whoop of victory over Goliath’s hulking carcass, Joseph’s cries of happiness as he hugged his brothers, and Paul’s excitement as he weighed anchor for Macedonia.

James was right. Trials are fertile fields for great joy when, through our troubles, our great God produces something good in our world and in us.

This final study is set against the backdrop of the most severe adversity—Christ’s betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. The disciples were oblivious to the coming storm as they ate the Passover in the upper room. So, Jesus took the opportunity of the upcoming trial to teach the men a vital lesson in storm survival—how to stick together by humbly serving one another.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus came into the world “not to be served but to serve others” (Mark 10:45), and He calls us to do the same. As you open the Word, pray for Jesus’ humility to take root in your spirit.

Father, You know my struggles with serving others. Through my study of Your Word, melt my pride and mold my spirit into the shape of Christ’s heart of love and humility. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

To fill in some details about the setting, read [Luke 22:1–14](#), reviewing how the disciples secured a room to celebrate the Passover. Particularly, notice the diabolical forces at work behind the scenes. Also, don’t miss the undercurrent of conflict churning in the group. What were the disciples fighting over, according to [22:24](#)?

The Greek word for *argue* in verse 24 means “a verbal fight.” The disciples were sailing into the teeth of a monster storm, and what were they doing? Fussing over who got to wear the captain’s hat! How would Jesus teach them the humility needed to get along and be unified after He was gone? The future of the church depended on it. Let’s turn to John 13:1–17 to find out.



Observation: Humility Demonstrated and Explained

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method, a crucial first step to examining a passage of Scripture is to observe the text through a literary magnifying glass. Read [John 13:1–17](#), observing the three main parts: the setting (13:1–3), the demonstration of humility (13:4–11), and the explanation of humility (13:12–17).



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John 13:1–17

The Setting—John 13:1–3

The Passover feast celebrated the night of the Jews' deliverance from Egypt when the plague of death passed over the Jews' homes covered with the blood of a lamb (Exodus 12). As the Lamb of God, Jesus would soon spill His blood to save the world from sin as the utmost expression of His love (*John 13:1*).

What evil cast its ominous shadow over the celebration, according to *John 13:2*?

With betrayal in the air, Jesus responded with love by humbly washing the disciples' feet . . . including Judas'.

There was no condition in Christ's love. He loved each one of them equally. He loved them deeply, consistently, sacrificially. He loved them all. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus' Demonstration of Humility—John 13:4–11

Why did Jesus wash the disciples' feet? First, because of something He *heard*—the disciples arguing about who was greatest (Luke 22:24–27). Second, Jesus washed their feet because of something He *saw*—their 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.



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Put yourself in the place of the disciples as Jesus slowly made His way around the room. What would you have thought and felt as Jesus washed your filthy feet (*John 13:3–5*)?

How did Peter's pride show through his objections, according to *13:6–11*?

Jesus' Explanation of 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.

How did Jesus explain the foot-washing object lesson, according to *John 13:12–17*? Put His teaching in your own words.



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We might expect Jesus to say, “I’ve washed your feet, now you wash Mine.” But He didn’t say that. Who wouldn’t wash Jesus’ feet? The disciples would do anything for Jesus. Instead, He said, “Do this for one another.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Principles on Humility

Now let’s glean some principles about humility demonstrated by the supreme Servant when, without saying a word, He “got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin” (John 13:4–5). Jesus’ wordless actions teach what *first principle* about humility?

The *second principle* emerges as a contrast to Peter’s unwillingness to receive Jesus’ service. Review 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 tell Jesus what He could and couldn’t do! Turn Peter’s wrong response into a positive principle about humility. What should humble people do when being served?



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Peter responded with embarrassed pride. He wanted to come across as humble, but his resistance to Jesus kept him from being humble. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus' direct responses to Peter model the *third principle* in John 13:7–10:

- “You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will.”
- “Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me.”
- “A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean.”

What principle about humility does Jesus' confident strength model?



Searching the Scriptures Digging Deeper

To understand Jesus' distinction between “bathed” and “wash” (John 13:10), read Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on John*, page 247. For a free, online alternative, read the section on John 13:10–11 in *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org. Do a little digging on your own and write down what you discover.



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The *fourth principle* shines through Jesus' unconditional love. He washed the feet of each disciple, even the feet of His betrayer. What was Jesus teaching His disciples (*John 13:1*; see also, *Matthew 5:43–48*)?

There are people who are tough to enjoy being with and to serve. But we serve them all.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Paul's Teaching on Humility

In the years that followed, Christ's humility became the standard for His church. What did Paul teach about humility based on Christ's example in the following passages?

Philippians 2:3–8

Romans 12:7–14



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Why should we bless those who persecute us? Because that's what Jesus did. That's the Jesus way. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Putting on the Towel

Application allows the Bible's lessons to take hold in our lives. Review the four principles we learned in the text. Pastor Chuck Swindoll states them:

1. *Humility is unannounced.* We don't draw attention to our acts of service.
2. *Humility is willing to receive—without embarrassment.* Truly humble people admit their need, release control, and slip their dirty feet into the bowl to be washed.
3. *Humility is not a sign of weakness.* Strength is best demonstrated when we stoop to serve.
4. *Humility does not play favorites.* Doing the Lord's work His way means we serve everyone, even our enemies.

Which of these principles hits closest to home for you right now?



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We best serve the Lord by serving others. Remember, it's not enough to know about serving others. The blessing 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?

The moving image of Jesus washing His disciples' feet forms a fitting conclusion to our studies on hope during trials. Like the disciples, we enter Jesus' banquet room with our feet caked in the filth of the world and unfit to dine at His table. He sees us as we are and moves toward us with a towel around His waist and a bowl of pure water. With His strong but gentle hands, He places our feet in the bowl and washes them clean. What affection He expresses in His tender touch!

Jesus expressed this same, servant-hearted love on the cross when He spilled His blood to cleanse our souls. Our greatest hope rests on Christ's sacrificial love, and it is to this hope we will forever cling.



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.

