

Serving Love

Cleavon sat as in a trance beside the hospital bed of his unconscious wife, hooked to tubes and beeping machines. Shianne, their 14-year-old daughter, and six-year-old son Jimar were in the Intensive Care Unit waiting room.

“Mr. Jamison, you have visitors,” said a nurse, who startled Cleavon from his thoughts.

When Cleavon went to the waiting room, he could have burst into tears. His pastor and seven other church members had come to see Renita.

Hugs were exchanged and a group prayer offered. The group had also brought takeout from one of the family’s favorite restaurants. His children devoured the food.

The group sat with Cleavon for more than three hours, taking turns going in to visit, pray, and sing over Renita. At about 8:30 P.M., Sister Carol announced that Cleavon should go home and get some rest or take a break from the hospital. Four of the sisters were prepared to stay the night.

One of the younger couples offered to take Shianne and Jimar home with them for the weekend.

“Can we go, Daddy?” asked Jimar hopefully, who loved going to the Simpson’s technology-filled home. Shianne also pepped up at the invitation.

“I don’t want to be any bother,” Cleavon said.

“We’d love to have them stay the weekend,” said Brother Simpson.

“I don’t know what I would have done without you all,” Cleavon said, his voice cracking.

“And you won’t have to find out,” said Sister Carol.

1. *What are some ways the world sometimes perceives Christians?*

2. *What are some consequences of this?*

3. *What should we be known for? Why?*

LESSON FOCUS: You are called to serve—go and love!

An Unexpected Act

John 13:1-5, KJV

1 Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.

2 And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;

3 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;

4 He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.

5 After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

John 13:1-5, NIV

¹It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

²The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

On the night before He was crucified, Jesus spent time with His disciples explaining what was going to happen and providing some words of encouragement that would be of help in the difficult days that lay ahead.

When they arrived at the place where they were to share a Passover meal, no servant was waiting to wash their feet. That was a custom in those days when visitors arrived at a home with their feet covered from the dust of the roads they had traveled on. It seems that no one was willing to step forward to assume this role—except for Jesus. Sometime during the meal, Jesus removed His robe, wrapped a towel around

his waist, and began washing the feet of those reclining at the table with Him.

By all rights, Jesus could have demanded more honor, respect, and support from His disciples during what was to become a time of great personal need. He would soon face the most painful event someone in that day could experience—He would be betrayed by one reclining at the table and would be handed over to those who wanted Him killed; He would be tortured and would then die in agony, abandoned by those who hours earlier claimed to be among His followers. At a time when Jesus' need for encouragement was the greatest, He showed the extent of His love by taking on the role of a servant and performing a task that only the lowliest of that time would typically do.

4. *What was unusual about what did not happen when Jesus and His disciples arrived at the place where they were going to share a Passover meal?*

5. *Why was Jesus' response unexpected?*

6. *What did this reveal about Him?*

A Spiritual Implication

John 13:6-10, KJV

6 Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?

7 Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

8 Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.

9 Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also

John 13:6-10, NIV

⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

KJV

my hands and my head.

10 Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.

11 For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

NIV

¹⁰Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.”

¹¹For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

Peter initially refused to let Jesus wash his feet. He may have been embarrassed that one he’d followed and respected was taking on such a menial task, or he may have been too proud to believe he was unclean in some way—so dirty that someone of such a high position had to clean him up a bit.

Those who came to an event such as this would often bathe themselves before traveling. If they’d done so, the only part of their body that would need additional cleaning when they arrived would be their feet. Even if they’d bathed beforehand, this final bit of cleansing was sometimes required before they could enter the place where the event was taking place.

Jesus’ actions had a spiritual implication. Although those who followed Him could do some things on their own to contribute to their spiritual cleanliness, before they could enter His house—the kingdom of God—they had to be washed of those things that only He could cleanse them of.

7. *Why may Peter have initially been reluctant to let Jesus wash his feet?*

8. *Why was what Jesus did important from a social standpoint?*

9. *What did it symbolize spiritually?*

A New Command

John 13:12-15, 34-35, KJV

12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments,

John 13:12-15, 34-35, NIV

¹²When he had finished washing their feet, he put on

KJV

and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

NIV

his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

³⁴"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

After hinting that there was spiritual significance to what He had just done, Jesus noted a more practical implication of His actions. Jesus wanted His disciples to love one another; and one way they could do so was by serving others.

Earlier that evening, Jesus' disciples were arguing about who among them was the greatest (Luke 22:24-30). Jesus told them that it is not those who lord it over others who are the greatest, but rather it is those who serve others. By washing their feet, Jesus was providing His disciples with an example of how this type of service is demonstrated. Jesus then told His disciples to do likewise, not perhaps by literally washing the feet of others, but by demonstrating God's love through practical acts of service.

10. *What incident may have prompted Jesus to perform this act of service?*

11. *How did Jesus want His disciples to respond to His example? Why?*

A Servant-Leader

I once had a boss who understood the concept of what it meant to lead by serving. Although he could have come around the office telling us what we needed to do, his approach was to ask us what he could do to make our jobs easier and to then do whatever he could to make that happen. The result of this leadership was a happier and more productive work place. Ironically, his commitment to serve us resulted in our company becoming more profitable.

The day before he left for greener fields, I asked him about his philosophy of leadership. He said that he considered himself to be a servant-leader. Rather than driving us to succeed, he felt that we and the company's interests were best accomplished when he served those put in his charge.

I have thought about his example often in the years since I left the company. How might my own positions of leadership have been more effective if I had taken my responsibility to lead as an opportunity to serve rather than to lord it over others? How might my relationship with my wife and children have been different if I had chosen to lead by serving them rather than being domineering toward them? Would more people in my neighborhood have been attracted to me and perhaps to Jesus if I had learned how to be a servant-leader?

I suspect that over the years more have seen the "I want to be in charge" attitude in me than the "I want to serve" one. Thankfully, I can now be more committed to serving others so that they can see Jesus more clearly through me.

12. *What does it mean to be a servant-leader? Share examples of someone you've observed being one.*

13. *Do you consider yourself to be more a servant-leader or one who wants to be served or in charge? What are some consequences of this?*

14. *What are some ways you can demonstrate what it means to love by serving?*

Demonstrate Love through Service

It's easy to fall into the trap of wanting to be served rather than being the first to step up to serve; and sometimes when an opportunity to serve presents itself, we wait, hoping perhaps that someone else will step forward so that we don't have to. But as Jesus noted, others will know we are Christians by the love we have for one another, and one of the ways we can demonstrate His love is by serving others.

Jesus has called us to serve. And so let's go and do it—let's go and love.

► *What can you do this week to demonstrate Jesus' love by serving others?*

KEY VERSE

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. —John 13:15, KJV

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. —John 13:15, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

November 2 through November 8

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 5:1-7—God Is Disappointed with Israel.
- Tues.** Isaiah 27:2-6—God Will Redeem Israel.
- Wed.** John 14:8-14—Believers Continue God's Work.
- Thurs.** John 10:11-18—Jesus Freely Lays Down His Life.
- Fri.** John 15:18-25—Facing the World as Jesus Did.
- Sat.** John 15:1-3—Jesus Tends to His Vineyard.
- Sun.** John 15:4-17—Always Love One Another.