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2026 ANNUAL THEME: “*Hope in Motion*”

## BIBLE STUDY

April 15, 2026

“Empowerment Communities: The Pathway of Servant Leadership”  
(John 13:5-20)

### Topics

- Scripture Reference
- Reflection Questions
- Important Emphasis
- Key Terms and Definitions
- Outline
- Introduction
- Background and Context
- Explore The Text
- Check For Understanding
- Life Application

### Scripture Reference (John 13:5-20):

<sup>5</sup> Then He \*poured water into the basin, and began washing the disciples’ feet and wiping them with the towel which He had tied around Himself.

<sup>6</sup> So He \*came to Simon Peter. He \*said to Him, “Lord, You are washing my feet?”

<sup>7</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing, you do not realize right now, but you will understand later.”

<sup>8</sup> Peter \*said to Him, “Never shall You wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no place with Me.” <sup>9</sup> Simon Peter \*said to Him, “Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!” <sup>10</sup> Jesus \*said to him, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet; otherwise he is completely clean. And you are clean—but not all of you.”

<sup>11</sup> For He knew the one who was betraying Him; it was for this reason that He said, “Not all of you are clean.”

<sup>12</sup> Then, when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done for you?”

<sup>13</sup> You call Me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’; and you are correct, for so I am.

<sup>14</sup> So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.

*15 For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you.*

*16 Truly, truly I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.*

*17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*

*18 I am not speaking about all of you. I know the ones whom I have chosen; but this is happening so that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against Me.'*

*19 From now on I am telling you before it happens, so that when it does happen, you may believe that I am He.*

*20 Truly, truly I say to you, the one who receives anyone I send, receives Me; and the one who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."*

### **Reflection Questions**

A. When have you experienced someone serving you in a humble and unexpected way? How did it impact you?

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B. What does servant leadership mean to you, and how do you see it modeled in your home, community, and church?

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### **Important Emphasis Empowerment Community**

John's focus in this Johannine gospel is on the Deity of Christ. The community is encouraged to make the profound connection between the deity of Christ and how he ministers to those who are his disciples and the wider audience throughout this discourse. **John 1:1**

Disciple in Greek Etymology is *Mathetes*. This is interpreted learner, student and pupil. The action of one who learns. (Disciple is mentioned more than 260 times in scripture) **John 13:35**

***Koinonia*** means the bond of common purpose and devotion that binds Christians to one another and to Christ. Jesus does not use the term *koin* in the Gospels but the type of gathering that takes place is implied. *Koinonia* was Paul's favorite word to describe a believer's relationship with the risen Lord benefits of salvation that come through Him! **Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32-35**

God has created us to have a desire for Spiritual, healthy and nourishing community. Just as the Trinity is in Community that is the desire that Jesus has for us and not only a desire, but it is His prayer for us! **John 17:21-23.**

### **What is our godly role in Community?**

Don't sow Discord- **Proverbs 6:19, Romans 16:17, James 4:1, Acts 5:1-11**

**Serve with Sincerity** - Servant is the word *doulos* which is interpreted servant or slave. A person that owed a debt that they could not repay. Service is a Work done for other people or for God and the worship of God.

In the Gospel of John Chapter 13, Jesus seamlessly executes the example of an exemplary servant. "Jesus in John 13:1-17 lifts the act of foot washing to religious significance." Here is the Master in Reversal of Roles (**1 Tim 5:10**). The practice of foot washing as an ordinance has been justified from the details of John 13, specifically on the basis of **Jesus' personal example, his specific command "I have set you an example", blessing he pronounces "if you know these things you are blessed"**.

- **Dealing with the Devil-** The Devil shows up during Sacred supper and tries to crash it.
- **(Jesus) Does not Dismiss the Infected Disciple-** Jesus does not tell Judas to leave the fellowship even though he has betrayal on his mind.
- **Demonstration of Divine Duty-** Jesus willingly postures himself as a servant. **Phil. 2:1-8**

There is a vital transition in this 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of John and that is the Supper which is the symbol of sacrifice and the Service which is the Spirit of Sacrifice.

### **Witnessing a Rich Ritual that comes with the Community**

Washing - Pedilavium (Lat., washing of the feet Maundy Thursday) Washing in water for ritual purposes is widely attested. In many context it is linked to purification.

*Tertullian* indicates a knowledge of foot washing noting that it was a part of Christian worship. *Chrysostom* encourages Christians to imitate the action of Jesus in John 13. The *Greek church* recognized foot washing as a sacrament but seldom practiced it.

**Foot washing ritual** - The conditions. The wearing of open sandals, the dry climate, and the dusty paths make it so. The instrument that was used was a shallow earthen ware bowl with a ridge in the middle for the feet and a outside drain.

- 1) **As Ritual**
- 2) **Domestically, personal comfort and hygiene**
- 3) **Expression of hospitality, a gesture of greeting or in preparation for a banquet**
- 4) **As a service by servants or slaves**

**Servants Role in the washing-** The washing of the feet of guests before a meal seems to have been a sign of welcome in Ancient Near East in the Yahwist Account **Gen.18:4**

**Exodus 30:19** the washing of the feet is required of those who are to come before the presence of God at the sanctuary.

Jesus took on this role of a servant some have articulated it as a Role Reversal. Here is the Master in Reversal of Roles. It is an encapsulation of the entire servant ministry of Jesus. In this act he performed the work of a servant called his disciples to continue this servant ministry.

**“The son of man came not to be served but to serve.” Mark 10:45 and Luke 22:27**

It would seem, then that the disciple’s identification with their lord and master, actualized by the foot washing ceremony had within the Johannine community a persecution context, since the humility with which the disciples identify themselves is humility unto death. In their synoptic settings these sayings also require of the disciple’s willingness to face up to death.

## Key Words and Terms

Basin  
Bathed  
Believe  
Betraying  
Blessed  
Bread  
Clean  
Communities  
Disciples  
Empowerment  
Example  
Feet  
Fulfilled  
Garments  
Grace

Hospitality  
Humility  
Jesus  
Lifted Up His  
Heel  
Lord  
Love  
Master  
Place  
Poured  
Realize  
Receives  
Reclined  
Respect  
Scripture

Selflessness  
Sent  
Servant Leader  
Servant  
Leadership  
Simon Peter  
Slave  
Teacher  
Tied  
Towel  
Understand  
Washing  
Wiping

### **Outline**

- I. Humility in Service
- II. Hospitality in Community
- III. Honor in Leadership

### **Introduction**

The main theme of John 13:5-20 is Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, demonstrating humility, servant leadership, and love. In this passage, Jesus sets an example for his followers by performing a humble act of service, teaching that true leadership is found in serving others rather than seeking status or power.

This theme directly relates to Empowerment Communities, as such communities thrive when members serve and uplift one another. By following Jesus' example of humility and service, Empowerment Communities foster an environment where everyone is valued, supported, and encouraged to grow. The passage inspires members to lead by example, empower others, and build a culture of mutual respect and care.

In a world that often equates leadership with authority and power, the example of Jesus in John 13:5-20 stands in stark contrast. Here, Jesus, the Master and Teacher, stoops to wash the feet of His disciples—a task reserved for the lowest servant. This act is not just a lesson in humility, but a radical redefinition of what it means to lead and empower others.

As we explore this passage, we will discover how Jesus’ actions lay the foundation for building Empowerment Communities—groups where every member is valued, uplifted, and encouraged to serve. We will unpack three key principles from this passage, each with practical subpoints and supporting scriptures, to help us embody servant leadership in our daily lives.

## **Background and Context**

The setting of John 13:5-20 is the Upper Room, during the Last Supper. Jesus, fully aware of His impending crucifixion, chooses this intimate moment to teach His disciples a profound lesson. By washing their feet, He demonstrates the heart of His mission: to serve, not to be served (**Mark 10:45**). This act is especially significant given the cultural context, where foot washing was a menial task, never performed by someone of Jesus’ status.

## **Significance of foot washing in the first century**

In the first century, foot washing was an important custom because people wore sandals and walked on dusty roads, making their feet dirty. Hosts would offer water or have a servant wash guests' feet as a sign of hospitality and respect. In Jewish tradition, it symbolized ritual purity, while in Christianity, Jesus washing his disciples' feet showed humility and servant leadership. This act taught the value of serving others selflessly.

Jesus’ actions challenge the disciples’ understanding of greatness and leadership. He calls them to follow His example, not just in word but also in deed. This passage set the tone for the 1<sup>st</sup> century church and remains a blueprint for the 21<sup>st</sup> Christian community and leadership today.

## **EXPLORE THE TEXT**

### **I. Humility in Service (John 13:5-10)**

*<sup>5</sup> Then He \*poured water into the basin, and began washing the disciples’ feet and wiping them with the towel which He had tied around Himself.*

*<sup>6</sup> So He \*came to Simon Peter. He \*said to Him, “Lord, You are washing my feet?” <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing, you do not realize right now, but you will understand later.” <sup>8</sup> Peter \*said to Him, “Never shall You wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no place with Me.” <sup>9</sup> Simon Peter \*said to Him, “Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!” <sup>10</sup> Jesus \*said to him, “He who has bathed needs*

*only to wash his feet; otherwise he is completely clean. And you are clean—but not all of you.*”

This passage highlights two important points: humility and spiritual cleansing.

**A. Acknowledging Need** – Recognizing our own need for cleansing and growth (**Psalm 51:2**).

First, Jesus' act of washing His disciples' feet demonstrates humility and servant leadership, challenging Peter's initial refusal and teaching that accepting service from others is essential.

**B. Adopting Lowliness** – Embracing a posture of humility, regardless of position (**Philippians 2:3-8**).

Second, Jesus' response to Peter emphasizes the necessity of spiritual cleansing—symbolized by washing—indicating that while believers are fundamentally clean through faith, ongoing confession and repentance are needed to maintain fellowship with Him. Thus, the passage illustrates both the importance of humble service and the continual need for spiritual renewal (**Romans 12:1-3; and Ephesians 4:22-24**).

Dr. Myles Munroe, in his books “The Spirit of Leadership,” “Understanding the Purpose and Power of Authority,” and “Becoming a Leader,” teaches that true leadership is about service, humility, and empowering others, using Jesus’ example of washing the disciples’ feet to illustrate that real authority is shown through serving others rather than seeking status. He summarized these ideas in what he called the “Towel Principle.”

<b>CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING</b>
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1. Why did Peter initially resist Jesus washing his feet, and what does this reveal about our own struggles with humility?

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2. How can we cultivate a spirit of Christ-like humility in our daily interactions?

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## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### II. Hospitality in Community (John 13:11-13)

*<sup>11</sup> For He knew the one who was betraying Him; it was for this reason that He said, “Not all of you are clean.” <sup>12</sup> Then, when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done for you? <sup>13</sup> You call Me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’; and you are correct, for so I am.*

**A. Welcoming Others** – Creating an environment where everyone feels valued.

Jesus demonstrates hospitality in the community by humbling Himself to serve others, as seen when He washes His disciples’ feet. Despite knowing that one among them would betray Him, Jesus does not withhold His kindness or service. Instead, He creates an environment where each person feels valued and cared for, modeling the kind of welcoming spirit that should characterize Christian community. His actions teach that true hospitality involves not only meeting physical needs but also honoring the dignity of every individual, regardless of their status or actions. Jesus’ example shows that hospitality extends beyond welcoming those who are easy to love (**Romans 12:10-13**).

**B. Withholding Judgment** – Extending grace and acceptance, even to those who may betray or disappoint us.

By washing the feet of all His disciples, including the one who would betray Him, Jesus withholds judgment and extends grace. He calls His followers to do the same—to accept one another and show love even to those who may disappoint or hurt us. This radical hospitality builds a community marked by acceptance, forgiveness, and mutual service, reflecting the heart of Christ’s teachings in passages like **Matthew 7:1-5; Luke 6:36-37; and James 2:12-13**.

## CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

3. How does Jesus' willingness to wash Judas' feet challenge our approach to hospitality and forgiveness?

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4. In what ways can our communities become more welcoming and less judgmental?

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## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### III. Honor in Leadership (John 13:14-17)

*<sup>14</sup> So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you. <sup>16</sup> Truly, truly I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*

#### A. **Modeling Service** – Leading by example, not by command (1 Peter 5:2-3).

Jesus shows honor in leadership by humbling Himself to serve others, specifically by washing His disciples' feet, even though He is their Lord and Teacher. This act demonstrates that true leadership is rooted in serving others rather than commanding them. By setting this example, Jesus calls His followers to do likewise, modeling service and humility in their own leadership roles.

**B. Multiplying Impact** – Empowering others to serve and lead (2 Timothy 2:2; Ephesians 4:11-13).

The subsequent impact of Jesus’ modeling service is twofold: it encourages leaders to lead by example (Modeling Service), and it empowers others to serve and lead as well (Multiplying Impact), thereby expanding the reach and effectiveness of servant leadership within the community.

**Biblical Role Model of True Servant Leadership**

Moses is a biblical character who embodies the concept of honor in leadership. He **modeled service** by humbly leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness, often putting their needs before his own (**Numbers 12:3**). Moses also **multiplied his impact by empowering others**, such as when he appointed capable leaders over groups of people at Jethro’s advice (**Exodus 18:17-26**) and when he commissioned Joshua to succeed him (**Deuteronomy 31:7-8**).

**The [Ultimate] Role Model for Christian/Servant Leadership**

Jesus Christ the greatest role model for Christian leadership. If you consider His actions in **John 13**, you'll find **a model for servant leadership**. Read **Colossians 1** and **Philippians 2** in tandem as well, and you'll see His greatness cloaked in humility. While none of us have the power and majesty of Jesus, we can follow His example by yielding all we are and all we have to serve the least of these. ~ John Maxwell

**CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING**

5. What does it mean to “do as I have done to you” in the context of leadership?

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6. How can we intentionally empower others to lead and serve in our communities?

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**LIFE APPLICATION**

**Think About It!**

- What specific steps can you take this week to serve someone in your community with humility?

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- How can you help create a culture of empowerment and mutual respect in your family, workplace, or church?

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**Resources:**

Adult Questions for LESSONMaker, LOGOS Bible Software

Enns, Paul P. *Moody Handbook of Theology*. Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J., et al., eds., in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (London; Grand Rapids, MI: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005).