

Men, Towel Up and Bless Others

In the three years that they had been together, the disciples had watched Jesus feed thousands with a few loaves and fishes. They were in the boat when he walked on the water and when he calmed the storm. They had seen him heal the sick and raise the dead, even cast out demons.

On the night of his arrest, they shared a last meal together. In the next 24 hours, their lives would be turned upside down in the shadows of his crucifixion. But, in the days ahead, God would begin to use them to turn the world upside down as they would stand in the power of his resurrection.

Jesus Showed What Love Does

Jesus was about to do something very personal, something they would never forget. Around the intimacy of this table he showed his disciples not just what love is, but what love does. He used one of their customs, something they could relate to.

In the First century, the servant of the house would wash the feet of a guest. Everyone in the room knew that.

“ ... so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” (John 13:4-5, NIV)

This was so unexpected, so provocative. It seemed ridiculous and inappropriate. Peter openly objected.

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

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

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"(John 13:6-8, NIV)

Peter was all over the map! He really didn't get it, not until later. I think it caught them all off guard, but it took them to a place they had not yet been to help them experience the depth of God's love.

God wants us to do that—to take people to a place where they can experience the depth of his love. To go beyond what is expected and show others what the redeeming love of God looks like. Jesus did that with a towel and a basin of water. It was disarming and powerful. It left a mark.

The men in the room didn't deserve it. They would all scatter when Jesus was arrested. When he had Peter's feet in his hands, Jesus knew that he would deny him three times. He knew that Judas had already made up his mind to betray him.

What About You?

What about you? Who in your life has denied you, or deserted you, or betrayed you? If you were in the same room with them with a basin of water, would you throw it in their face? Are they less deserving than the disciples who deserted Jesus? Are they less deserving than Peter who denied Jesus? Are they less deserving than Judas who betrayed Jesus?

What about you? Do *you* deserve to have *your* feet washed by Jesus? If he was kneeling at your bare stinky feet right now with a towel wrapped around his waste and a basin of water in his hands, would you be thinking: "Well, it's about time. I deserve this."

The truth is, by God's standard, none of us deserve it.

"... There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." (Rom. 3:10-12, NIV)

If you compare yourself to someone else, you can always find someone who is worse than you! But, compared to God, none of us measure up. We are his church not because we deserve it, but because he went beyond what was expected and sacrificed his Son Jesus for us.

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8, NIV)

While We Were Still Sinners

It's really important that we get that *"while we were still sinners"* part. God didn't wait for us to clean up our act. He showed us what his redeeming love looks like *"while we were still sinners."* **We stand on *his grace*, not on how good we are. We stand on *his promises*, not on our performance.** Someone said, "That oughta humble the hell out of all of us!"

As Jesus washed their feet he knew they would all initially flake out, but he also knew that eleven of the 12 would circle back and do great things in the power of the Holy Spirit. Most of them would die a martyr's death. Washing their feet had a pretty good return on his investment. For all, but one—Judas. So, why did Jesus wash his feet? He could have skipped over him and called him out. But, he didn't. He still demonstrated his love for Judas.

God offers his grace to everyone. Many will receive it. Many won't. Our mission is to extend it to everyone with no strings attached.

"... love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them

without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:35, NIV)

Don't expect to get anything back, but your reward will be great? That's not a contradiction. Jesus is saying don't expect a reward from those you are serving. Go into it with no strings attached. Hold out for a greater reward—God's reward.

After Jesus washed his disciple's feet he said this:

“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you ... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13: 15-17, NIV)

A Tremendous Blessing

He promised that if we take what we know and do it, then we'll be blessed. That's a promise; just don't turn it into a formula. The promise is “knowing + doing = blessing.” Formula-based faith is “A + B = C” and “C” is a constant, a specific blessing that we have in mind. Formula-based faith reduces God to a personal need-meter or concierge.

If we practice what God tells us we can always count on his blessing. The blessing just may not come in the package we prefer.

If you've ever prayed for patience, you know what I mean! God doesn't hand it to you in a nice gift-wrapped package. The Scriptures teach us that our faith is strengthened through struggles. That's where some of God's greatest blessings are found.

Before you pick up a towel and start washing feet you should check your motive. It's quite possible that your circumstances may not change. But, one thing is for sure. *You* will change. That's a blessing you can count on.

Towel up and look for ways to go beyond what is expected to those who don't deserve it, and expect nothing in return. It's provocative. It's unusual. But, when we do it right, it's disarming, and sometimes it's irresistible.

Adapted from *STAND*, a 4-Session Small Group Series by Tierce Green.

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