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# Foreword

Welcome to *inLight Bible Studies*.

Barbara Fuller's life was changed by the Gospel of John. As Barbara encountered Jesus through John's first-hand accounts in his Gospel writings, her faith grew strong. She would need that strength as she navigated the fatal shooting of her husband and the raising of their three young children on her own. Armed with faith, Barbara found her way through seminary, served in Christian ministry domestically and internationally, and now brings her experience and wisdom to guide you and me through the Gospel she knows and loves. Barbara believes that the study of John will change us.

This is the second part of the first study in a series of Bible studies. *inLight Bible Studies* will walk you through individual books of the Bible, following the chronology chosen by the authors to lay out their messages. You'll pull out powerful truths and insights from each book and be amazed at the conversations they generate. Be prepared for *inLight Bible Studies* to transform you and all who seek God through them.

May the study of the Gospel of John be a light on the path to the life you long for.

Donna Lamothe  
RSVP Executive Director

# How to Use This Study

This study is intended to be used in the context of a small group, so opportunities have been provided for interesting discussions as you seek to understand the message of the Gospel of John. Although you can do the study on your own, I would encourage you to find at least one friend, or a group of friends, with whom to go through the study.

This study is the second of a two-part series and covers the last nine chapters of the Gospel of John. In the first part of the Gospel, John writes about Jesus' public ministry of teaching as he presented himself to the world. This second part of the study covers John 13–21. In these chapters, we read about Jesus' private ministry to the disciples as he teaches them vital truths during the final, intimate hours of fellowship prior to his arrest. Then we will follow John's eyewitness account of Christ's crucifixion, death, and resurrection.

If you're leading a small group through this study, you'll find encouragement and guidance from the RSVP leadership training that is available, or by ordering *Leading Small Groups* on our website. See the back of this book for more information about RSVP resources.

The lessons in this book include some helpful features to guide you in your study and challenge you in your faith journey. For

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example, at the beginning of each lesson, a theme phrase encapsulates the main message. Also, an icebreaker question is included in each lesson to help launch the group into discussion.

Each lesson is comprised of seven sections.

## Setting the Stage

The lesson begins with either a reflection to engage you or some historical, geographic, cultural, religious, or theological insight to help you understand the Bible passage under consideration. The idea is to set the stage for a better understanding of the portion of ancient text you will be reading.

## Today's Scripture

In each lesson, the related scripture passage is indicated here. At the back of the book, chapters 13 to 21 of the Gospel of John are printed out in their entirety. Any reference to those chapters will be indicated in bold print: for example, **John 14:1–3**, reminding you to look for it in the back. Additional Bible verses are printed out within the body of the lesson itself, except for those referenced in the “Digging Deeper” section. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the New Living Translation.

## Our Questions to Discuss

Although you can do the study on your own, it's ideally used in the context of a small group. It's helpful to read through the lesson and scripture prior to meeting. Even if you don't, the comments

and questions will guide your group through the passage in an engaging manner.

## **My Question for God**

We all have questions, but some questions are personal and difficult to share in a group. Space is provided here to write down that question that you aren't ready to share with others. Bring that question to God, who knows your heart and invites you to share whatever you are grappling with. It's also sometimes helpful to share your question with a trustworthy friend who can help you think it through, or help you bring it to God. Asking the question is a step in the right direction, a step of faith.

## **Worth Contemplating**

Here you'll find a Bible verse related to the lesson to mull over in your mind. Memorize it and ask God to help you understand what it means and how he wants you to apply it. Ask him to instill the meaning in your heart today. And tomorrow. And the next day.

## **Sharing My Heart with God**

I've written a brief, simple prayer you can use if prayer is new to you or you just don't know what words to use. You can let it be a starting place for your own words. The important thing is to communicate with God and know that he's listening to your heart's cry, no matter whose words you use.

## Digging Deeper

There's always more to learn, more to understand, more to knowing God than we can ever comprehend. If you have the time and inclination, you can delve into the resources, passages, and activities suggested in this section. They will help you in your quest for the life God promises to those who seek.

*Listen to wisdom.*

*Try with all your heart to gain understanding ...*

*Search for it as you would for silver.*

*Hunt for it like hidden treasure ...*

*Then you will begin to know God.*

Proverbs 2:2,4,5 (ICB)

You may want to have a Bible on hand for extra readings. There are many contemporary translations of the Bible, but for the person new to the Bible, I'd recommend the New Living Translation, the New International Version, or, if English is your second language, the Good News translation. You can also find verses easily online, or you can download a Bible app to your mobile device.

LESSON 1

# Serving



# Serving

## John 13

To love is to serve sacrificially.

### Setting the Stage — Learning Love

Have you ever found it difficult to love somebody? You know, that one whose personality is the complete opposite of yours, or who doesn't seem to understand your perspective at all, or the person whose values are totally different from yours, or that one who just annoys and frustrates you for reasons you don't even understand? Maybe you're an extrovert and that person is an introvert. Perhaps you're laid back and they're highly motivated and driven to constant action and accomplishment. Maybe you're detail-oriented and plan things months ahead and they just slide along by the seat of their pants, never knowing until they get somewhere what their next step will be. Perhaps it isn't a personality difference but just something in their mannerism that irks you for no apparent reason, or something about them that reminds you of someone who hurt you.

I think we all have people at various places on our life path whom we find difficult to love. As I was writing this study, I came into a situation of relational conflict that became stressful and incapacitating. While I thought I was doing my best to be kind and polite, I felt challenged and criticized. This was a Christian person that I was supposed to love, so I tried. But the struggle continued, even though I felt I was "being nice." I cried out to God for help, and a verse in Romans came to my attention: "*Love must be sincere*" (Romans 12:9a, NIV). A sincere effort to act in a kind way wasn't

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enough. But how do you force yourself to love someone sincerely who just annoys you?

“I can’t do this, Lord,” I said. “How is this possible?”

At that point God reminded me of the subtitle I’d chosen for this study: *Learning Love in the Gospel of John*. Right. So here I am writing a “manual” of sorts on learning love, and I’m asking God how I can learn to love. The irony wasn’t lost on me.

I looked over the chapter titles and saw that my first lesson—our first lesson—in learning love is “Serving.” Jesus set an example for the disciples, and I understand how they must have seen this. To serve as Jesus did—washing their feet as if he were a lowly household servant—involves swallowing one’s pride and acting in the humblest fashion. Personally, swallowing my pride gives me indigestion. But if I truly want to learn love, this is lesson one—doing the lowly task that I might hope somebody else would do.

In biblical times, “somebody else” was often the household slave. Depending upon the economic status of a family, tasks would be assigned according to one’s position. The lowest and most menial tasks were not done by those in positions of authority or privilege.

Foot-washing was a menial task in Israel. Those travelling the dusty roads of Palestine needed to wash their feet upon arrival in a home. If there were no servant available, the host would at least provide water and a basin for guests to wash their own feet.

In later tradition in Jewish households, a Jewish slave would not be asked to wash feet. Rather, the task would be assigned to a Gentile (non-Jewish) slave. Out of devotion a wife might wash her husband’s feet, or children might wash their father’s feet, or a slave his master’s feet. But for a teacher to wash his disciples’

feet? Unthinkable! And for friends to wash each other's feet? Highly improbable!

In today's story, Jesus characteristically turns things around to teach an important lesson. Let's watch and listen as he surprises his friends with radically unorthodox behaviour. Why would he do this? Why should we do this?

*Icebreaker:* What distasteful or menial task do you try to avoid, hoping or expecting that someone else will do it?

## Today's Scripture – John 13

### Our Questions to Discuss

#### The Hour Has Come

In the final lesson of Part 1 of this study, we saw Jesus proclaiming that the time had come:

*Jesus replied, "Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives" (John 12:23–24).*

*"The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." He said this to indicate how he was going to die (John 12:31–33).*

This was the fulfillment of his mission, the accomplishment of his purpose on earth. As Part 1 answers the question "Who is Jesus?", Part 2 answers "Why did he come?" In these last hours

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with the disciples, we'll learn more of Jesus' heart's desire for those he loves.

Have you ever parted from a loved one for an extended period of time, or even permanently? What kind of things seemed important to say to each other in those last days or hours?

As we begin this study, we enter into some of the most intimate moments Jesus shared with his disciples prior to his death. Chapters 13 to 17 recount the words that Jesus most wanted to communicate to his closest friends. You'll want to take note of the themes Jesus emphasizes by bringing them up more than once.

Read **John 13:1-3**, which you'll find printed out in the back of this book.

What things does Jesus know?

What do these verses tell us about the situation or setting for this conversation?

What do you understand to be the motivation for Jesus' subsequent action?

What motivates Judas to do what he does?

### **An Example to Follow**

Read **John 13:4-17**.

Why do you think Jesus' knowledge motivated him to wash the disciples' feet?

As you read in "Setting the Stage," it was totally inappropriate for Jesus to wash the feet of his guests. It was something a servant should do. Notice that it didn't even occur to the disciples to wash each other's feet, and it was unthinkable for Jesus to do so.

According to Luke, the disciples had been having a heated discussion. Perhaps that was what caused Jesus to take such dramatic action. Jesus often teaches with illustrations.

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*Then they began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest among them. Jesus told them, "In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called 'friends of the people.' But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:24-27).*

While Luke records Jesus' words, John tells of the dramatic action that precedes Jesus' teaching. Just imagine the scene: Jesus stooped low before each of his followers, one after another, with nothing but the sound of the water sloshing and being poured over their dusty feet as the disciples, including Judas, sit in shocked silence. Contrast the image of Jesus on his knees before the disciples with the image of Mary at Jesus' feet, as she had been a few days earlier: "*Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance*" (John 12:3).

How would you have felt if you were one of the disciples having your feet washed by Jesus?

How does Peter react (**John 13:6-9**)?

Jesus responds to Peter by discussing cleanliness. Cleansing was a familiar concept in the Old Testament Scriptures. Read Ezekiel 36:25-27:

*“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.”*

Scholars suggest that washing the disciples’ feet was symbolic of Jesus’ impending death. The humiliation of foot-washing pointed to the humiliation Jesus was about to suffer on the cross. That suffering would lead to spiritual cleansing and forgiveness for all who believe and accept it. Read what Jesus says to Peter in **John 13:8**.

In verses 12-17, Jesus explains the lesson. What was the example he said they must follow?

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Is there anything you can think of in our culture that would be similar or equivalent to foot-washing?

Have you ever been given something or been served in a way that was symbolic and meaningful?

The word Jesus uses for “example” was sometimes used to mean “exemplary death.” The kind of serving Jesus speaks of requires a death to self, a relinquishment of any claim to entitlement. Read Philippians 2:5–8 for Paul’s description of what that looked like in Jesus’ life:

*“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.  
Though he was God,  
he did not think of equality with God as something to cling  
to.  
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;  
he took the humble position of a slave  
and was born as a human being.  
When he appeared in human form,  
he humbled himself in obedience to God  
and died a criminal’s death on a cross.”*

## Betrayal

Read **John 13:18–30**.

Jesus tells his disciples that he is to be betrayed by referring to a prophecy in Scripture. According to verse 19, why does Jesus tell them about the betrayal before it happens?

At the beginning of his Gospel, John writes: *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”* (John 1:14, NIV). Throughout the Gospel, we see the humanity of Christ made clear in various ways. Jesus was thirsty, he was tired, he wept at the grave of a friend. Read the following verses to see that Jesus experienced very real emotional responses, as any of us do:

*“When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled”* (John 11:33).

*“Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But this is the very reason I came!”* (John 12:27).

Aware that the hour of his betrayal is near, what does Jesus feel, according to verse 21?

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Does an awareness that Jesus felt the things that you and I might feel surprise or challenge you?

What details in this passage make you realize that this is an eye-witness account?

As they were at the table, according to custom, the disciples would have been reclining with their legs extended. Normally they would lean on the left elbow and eat with the right hand. In this scenario, it would seem that John (the disciple Jesus loved<sup>1</sup>) would have been at Jesus' right and so easily able to lean back against him. For Jesus to dip and give the bread to Judas, he would most likely have been on Jesus' left side. It was in this close seating arrangement that Jesus identified his betrayer, Judas.

1 The author, John, refers to himself five times as "the disciple Jesus loved." In Part 1 of *The Life We Long For*, Lesson One explores who John is and why he referred to himself in this way. John passionately wanted people to know about the love of God, and his intention was that each one of us would see themselves as the disciple Jesus loves.

If John knew that Judas would betray Jesus, why do you think he didn't stop him?

As he writes, John often uses the imagery of light and darkness. Previously in the Gospel, Jesus claimed to be the light of the world. Symbolically, John uses darkness to refer to unbelief and opposition.

What is John saying about Judas in verse 30?

One writer describes Judas' betrayal in this way:

*Judas betrays Jesus on freshly washed feet and with the taste of sacrament still on his tongue. Precisely at the moment of greatest grace from Jesus he wrenches himself from intimacy with the Light and plunges into outer darkness.<sup>2</sup>*

### **A New Commandment**

Read **John 13:31–38**.

In this passage, Jesus begins his farewell discourse to the disciples. Such speeches would have been familiar to those who knew the Hebrew scriptures and had read the farewells of some

2 Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1985), 99.

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of the great heroes of faith, such as Jacob (Genesis 49) and Moses (Deuteronomy 31–33).

In verse 31, Jesus speaks of the time or the hour of his glorification. Essentially the glory of Jesus comes when God's glory radiates through him. God has been honoured through Jesus' life of perfect obedience, and ultimately God will be glorified by Jesus' death on the cross. John doesn't portray Jesus' death as a low point in his story but rather as the ultimate sign of Jesus' obedience and solidarity with the Father.

In verse 34, Jesus gives the disciples a new commandment. How are they to love each other?

Read 1 John 3:1:

*"We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters."*

Go back and read verses 13–14 again. What is the connection between washing feet, loving one another, and giving up our lives?

What did Jesus sacrifice to love and serve his followers?

What would the disciples need to sacrifice to serve one another?

In verse 37, Peter appears to be more than willing to sacrifice his life for Jesus. He expresses that willing eagerness to follow Jesus anywhere, but Jesus poses a difficult question: “Will you really lay down your life for me?” While Peter’s intentions are good, his strength of character and readiness to actually follow Jesus will fail him.

***What about you?***

Have your good intentions to love someone been contradicted by your actions?

What have you learned about love in this lesson?

## **THE LIFE WE LONG FOR**

What might you have to sacrifice in order to serve Jesus and to love and serve others?

As we continue our journey through the Gospel of John, may your love for Jesus steadily grow and may you learn love by watching Jesus in his final days on earth.

## **My Question for God**

From the Scripture you have read and the questions you have discussed, is there a question in your mind that you would like to ask God? Write out your question here.

## **Worth Contemplating**

*“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other”  
(John 13:34).*

## **Sharing my Heart with God**

Dear Lord Jesus,

I want to learn love from you. I watch you washing the feet of even your betrayer, and I'm amazed at your love and your grace. Will you cleanse my heart, Lord, so that I can be forgiven and follow you? In those places where I feel a sense of entitlement, help me to let go and remember your humility in serving others. Where I need to swallow my pride, help me to do so. May I learn to love others as you have loved me. Amen.

## Digging Deeper

**Activity:** On an unlined piece of paper, draw a line in the middle. On one side make a sketch of Mary anointing Jesus' feet. On the other side, draw Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Consider who Jesus is as you reflect on these drawings. (This is not about your drawing skills; use stick figures if desired.)

**Study:** As a leader in the church in later years, like John, Peter also wrote letters to young believers. Read these passages to see what Peter shared about loving and serving sacrificially:

1 Peter 2:21-25; 4:7-11; 5:1-11.