

The Character of Jesus 77
Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet
(John 13:1 – 17)

- Characteristic: Leadership through Service
 - Jesus had addressed the subject of leadership previously (Matthew 20:25 – 28, John 10:10 – 18). Apparently, the disciples had not retained it.
 - (1 – 3) Jesus knew that His death would come very soon, who would betray Him, and that He would be awarded the eternal kingdom shortly.
 - (4 – 5) Jesus addressed His disciples with final instructions in chapters 14 through 17. This is the beginning of the final instructions. The illustration Jesus performed needed to happen before going to the Garden, since foot-washing would not be physically practical there.
 - I suppose that no one had thought to provide foot-washing services upon their arrival as would have been customary. (See Luke 7:44)
 - (6) Peter was surprised by Jesus' actions and thought the situation inappropriate. The culture of the time would not permit this. This was work for a servant, and a leader would never take the role of a servant.
 - (7) Jesus acknowledged that the meaning was unclear at the moment, but that they needed to bear with Him so they could learn something important.
 - (8) Peter missed the part about understanding later, so he would not let it go. So, Jesus had to get forceful about it, almost contrary to the point He wanted to make.
 - (9) Peter goes from one extreme to the other.
 - (10) Just the small washing would serve to make the point of the illustration. A complete washing would not illustrate it as well. The side-reference to Judas was revisited in verse 18 and following. Jesus explained a few minutes later.
 - (12 – 17) The meaning of the illustration was explained:
 - You rightly see Me as a leader. Why do you suppose I took on the role of a servant? If I can serve you, there is no excuse for not serving each other.
 - Note: despite verse 15, this practice is not described in early church literature.
 - Further, do not think that playing the servant makes you great. A servant does not become more important than the one he serves. Rather, serve as a servant does, not with ulterior motives.
 - Now, go and be real servants.
- Application: Leadership through Service
 - In the modern church (in general), are church leaders expected to assume menial roles?
 - Do we tend to react to counter-cultural behaviors to an extreme like Peter?
 - Some church leaders have taken the title of servant because they “serve God.” Is that what Jesus had in mind?
 - Is this servant mentality a part of any relationships in the world?
 - How do we teach this servant mentality?
 - Should we be repeating a foot-washing ritual as we do baptism and communion?