

# true leadership

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*John 13:1-17*

**A Disciple 13 Resource**  
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## *how to use this lesson*

### The Purpose

This lesson was written as a training tool. It can be used as a part of a leadership retreat or as a single leadership training session.

### The Study

Participants should do the individual study on their own in preparation for the small group discussion. The discussion is then used to process the passage as a group.

### The Discussion Guide

Use this to guide your discussion times as a group. There are far more questions included in the guide than you could possibly get through in an hour, so follow this formula when planning your small group time:

pick one warm-up question  
+  
pick three to four discussion questions  
(be sure you read the passage as a group!)  
+  
pick one-two application questions

That should be more than enough to get you through an hour, but it's not a bad idea to have one or two extra questions picked as back-up. Additionally, it's a good idea to begin and end each study with a brief prayer. (*And do make it brief.* Prayer is good, but this hour is for a group study.)

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## *Individual Study*

What does it mean to be a leader? What is leadership? When a person leads like Jesus lead, *what will that look like?*

In your opinion, what's the most important characteristic of Jesus' leadership style?

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Jesus leadership style proves to be a very different model of leadership. There are plenty of slick leadership models out there in the corporate world and even a few that claim to be modeled after Jesus, but the truth is there are very few people who really do lead like Jesus led. You know why? *Because it's hard.*

It's not hard because his leadership techniques are highly technical and difficult to master. It's not hard because it's complex. It's hard because it requires *sacrifice* and we don't tend to be too fond of that.

In this Bible study, we're going to examine what it means to be a leader like Jesus was a leader.

**read:** John 13:1-17 (reproduced below in the NLT)

### *Jesus Washes His Disciples Feet*

<sup>1</sup>Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He now showed the disciples the full extent of his love. <sup>2</sup>It was time for supper, and the Devil had already enticed Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to carry out his plan to betray Jesus. <sup>3</sup>Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. <sup>4</sup>So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, <sup>5</sup>and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he had around him.

<sup>6</sup>When he came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, why are you going to wash my feet?"

<sup>7</sup>Jesus replied, "You don't understand now why I am doing it; someday you will."

<sup>8</sup>"No," Peter protested, "you will never wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "But if I don't wash you, you won't belong to me."

<sup>9</sup>Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"

<sup>10</sup>Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you are clean, but that isn't true of everyone here." <sup>11</sup>For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."

<sup>12</sup>After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? <sup>13</sup>You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because it is true. <sup>14</sup>And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. <sup>15</sup>I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup>How true it is that a servant is not greater than the master. Nor are messengers more important than the one who sends them. <sup>17</sup>You know these things—now do them! That is the path of blessing."

This is a powerful story of Jesus' approach to leadership. John says in vs. 1, "Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He now showed the disciples the..." what?

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For Jesus, a key component of leadership is love. Christian leadership must be rooted in love. Leading because you enjoy leading or even because you have a gift for leading is not leading for the right reason. No, the first requirement for leading like Jesus is that you genuinely love those you intend to lead.

What are some things you love about those you lead?

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What are some ways you hope to express love for others as a leader?

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I hope you thought of several things you love about the people you intend to lead. Sure, they are sometimes demanding, high-maintenance, stressful, slow, stubborn and even rebellious, but relationships are a real blessing in life. And while leadership can be hard, it can also be tremendously rewarding.

Next, fill in the blanks from verse 3-5 below:

Jesus knew that the Father had given him \_\_\_\_\_ over \_\_\_\_\_ and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to \_\_\_\_\_ the disciples' \_\_\_\_\_ and to wipe them with the towel he had around him.

Did you catch that? “Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything...so he got up from the table and...began to wash the disciples' feet!” Authority (which so often goes right to our heads) actually *inclined* Jesus to serve. Because Jesus understood who He was and what God had called Him to, He didn't hesitate to serve. In other words, understanding His own identity led Jesus to lead *by serving*.

Think about all God has done for you. Think about the salvation you are secure in—the hope you have in Jesus. A clear understanding of who God has called you to be should motivate you to serve just like it motivated Jesus.

What does it mean to serve others in your role as a leader?

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Certainly, you have authority over those you lead—this is true by virtue of the fact that you are leading. How did Jesus treat those He had authority over?

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What's truly amazing about this passage is that John clearly says in vs. 2 that Judas already had in mind to betray Jesus, but Jesus went right ahead and washed Judas' feet!

Why do you think Jesus washed Judas' feet?

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*Christian leaders must be willing to serve even those who backstab them. I don't know why Jesus was willing to wash Judas' feet, but I do know that it's a powerful lesson for me. Jesus' willingness to serve even Judas teaches me that I have to be willing to serve every single person entrusted to me, even the ones I can't stand!*

Finally, at the end of the passage, Jesus simply says, "Do what I've done." He tells His disciples that they know how to lead, how to love—now it's time to get on with it. We know how to lead, too. You lead by serving in love.

What's the hardest thing about servant leadership for you?

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What aspect of Christian leadership are you really good at?

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In what ways do you hope to experience “the path of blessing” as you lead others? How will leading help you to grow in Christ?

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## Discussion Guide

### Warm-up

- a. Who are some of the people you looked to as leaders? Why?
- b. Give the worst example of leadership you can think of—who's the worst leader you've ever seen? What made that person a poor leader? If they had wanted to become a better leader what would they have needed to change?

### Discussion

- c. read: John 13:1-17
- d. What do you know about foot washing? Why did people wash feet in Jesus' day? What kind of job was it? Why was it an unpleasant job? Who usually washed feet?
- e. John begins this passage by saying that this is how Jesus "showed the disciples the full extent of his love," (vs. 1). How were Jesus' actions loving? What kind of leader would Jesus have been if He hadn't been loving? How did His love for those He led show through?
- f. Think of other Bible stories you know, Old and New Testament—how has God demonstrated His love for His people while leading them?
- g. Vs. 2 clearly states that Judas was already planning to betray Jesus—why do you think Jesus washed Judas' feet? What does that tell you about Jesus as a leader?
- h. Jesus was given authority over *everything* (vs. 3), and He responded by serving. What does this tell you about Jesus? What role does *submitting* play in leading?
- i. Based on this passage, how does God view authority? Strength? Humility? Pride?
- j. In what ways does Jesus model true "servant leadership" in this story? At other times in His life? Today?

### Application

- k. Jesus tells His disciples to do what He's done (vs. 15)—what does Jesus mean by that? What will it look like when we "wash each others' feet"? What are some intimate ways we can serve each other like Jesus served His disciples?
- l. Look again at vs. 3—Jesus knew the Father had given Him authority...*so He chose to serve*. How is Jesus' response to being given authority different from ours? How do we usually handle being given authority? How should we respond to being given authority?
- m. What does it mean for you to be a "servant leader"? How can you engage in "servant leadership"?