



Discussion Guide

Date: 10/26/2025

Sermon Title: A Robe or a Towel?

Scripture: John 13:1-13

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, You knelt to wash the feet of your friends and taught us that love is known through humble service. Teach us to follow your example—to set aside pride and self-interest, to see others as beloved children of God, and to serve with joyful hearts. Form us as a community of grace, where each person is valued, and where love is made real through action. Amen.

Opening Question:

1. When have you witnessed or experienced an act of humble service that surprised you or made you uncomfortable? How did it impact you?

Scripture Context and Reflection:

- **Setting:** This passage takes place during the Last Supper, just before Jesus' arrest. It marks one of the most intimate and instructive acts of Jesus' earthly ministry.
- **Cultural Context:** Foot washing was the work of the lowest servant in a household—never of a rabbi or master. Jesus' act reverses social and religious expectations.
- **Theological Focus:** Jesus models **kenosis**—self-emptying love (Philippians 2:5–8)—and invites His followers into that same posture. This is not simply an act of humility but a **redefinition of greatness and leadership** in God's kingdom.
- **Wesleyan Lens:** John Wesley saw Christian life as **faith working through love** and believed holiness is formed in **community** through acts of mercy and service. This moment is a lived example of "**practical divinity.**"

Digging into the Word:

Read aloud: John 13:1-11 (NRSV) and a few other versions if you or group have them.

1. What stands out to you most in this passage—the act itself, Peter's reaction, or Jesus' words? Why?
2. Imagine being in the room when Jesus began washing feet. What emotions might you have felt? Surprise? Discomfort? Awe?

Jesus removes his robe—a symbol of position and authority—and takes up a towel, a symbol of servanthood.

3. What might this say about how Jesus understands leadership and power?
4. How does this challenge the world's view of greatness?
5. Peter experienced discomfort or resistance when Jesus wanted to wash his feet, when have you experienced discomfort when God called you to serve in an unexpected ways?
6. Why do you think Peter initially resisted Jesus washing his feet? What was really at stake in this moment?
7. Jesus said, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me" (v. 8). What does this tell us about receiving from Jesus before we can serve like Jesus?
8. Jesus washed the feet of all his disciples, including Judas who would betray him. What does this teach us about serving people who may hurt us or who we know won't appreciate it?
9. How might we, as followers of Christ, be tempted to cling to "robes" instead of taking up "towels" and serving others?

Peter initially refuses to be served by Jesus. Why do you think it's sometimes difficult to **receive** grace or help from others?

10. How does letting others serve us also honor Christ and build community? How can both giving and receiving be acts of humility?

Other scriptures to consider:

Philippians 2:5–8; Mark 10:43–45

Sermon Questions:

1. Jesus did some strange and different things while on earth in his public ministry. Dr. Facen says, "Jesus was strange." What did she mean by this? Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. A quote from the sermon Duane Elmer wrote in *Cross-Cultural Servanthood*, "When God chose to connect with humans he did so as a servant". What are your thoughts and responses to this idea of serving?
3. Dr. Facen asked, "If following Jesus has never pushed you outside of your comfort zone or placed you in a difficult situation, are we truly following Jesus?" How does this question challenge you?
4. How does the metaphor of choosing between a robe and a towel apply to decisions you face in your daily life and relationships?
5. The sermon suggested that if our elected leaders understood that "power is for service," things would be different. How can we, as followers of Jesus, model this principle in our spheres of influence?
6. The robe is comfortable, but choosing the towel will move us beyond ourselves into the lives of others. Where or to whom is God calling you to move towards?

Applying it:

1. What does this passage teach us about the nature of Christian community?
2. In what ways does Jesus' choice to wash his disciples' feet challenge our contemporary understanding of power and leadership?



3. In what areas of your life are you clinging to the robe of comfort, status, or personal prestige rather than choosing the towel of servanthood?
4. What are some practical ways you could "choose the towel" this week in your family relationships, workplace or school, church community, neighborhood or broader community?
5. How might our churches and communities look different if we truly believed and practiced that power is for service? How can your group or class model this kind of servant-hearted love together?

Wesleyan-Theological Reflection:

"One great reason why the rich, in general, have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that, according to the Word of God, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and relieving their needs, is one great means of grace."

— John Wesley, Sermon 98: On Visiting the Sick

Wesley reminds us that grace is not a passive gift—it is **activated through loving service**. Jesus washing the disciples' feet is the living pattern of that grace. In the Methodist tradition, **acts of mercy** (serving, visiting, helping) and **acts of piety** (prayer, study, worship) together shape the full life of holiness. When we serve, we encounter Christ—in others, in ourselves, and in the community being formed between us.

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God, thank you for calling us into the body of Christ; a family bound together in your love. Help us make room for one another with grace and humility. When differences arise, teach us to respond with blessing instead of blame. When challenges come, remind us that we are not alone but joined in the work of your kingdom. Strengthen our teamwork, deepen our compassion, and send us out to overcome evil with good, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND (or challenges for you this week)

1. Identify one "robe" you need to lay down - a position, pride, or privilege that keeps you from serving others freely.
2. Practice one act of hidden service by doing something helpful for someone without them knowing it was you.
3. Cross one boundary that is intentionally to serve or build relationships with someone different from you (different background, generation, political view, etc.).