

John 13:12-17, 15:9-17, and 17:20-26: The Love of Jesus' Disciples

Leader Guide



Small Group Study – Each week our small groups team works alongside Pastor J.D. to create a small group study which corresponds to his sermon that week. The study examines a related passage of scripture to the text he preaches through with the goal of challenging small groups to grow both in their confidence in studying the bible and in their application of the truths brought out in the sermon.

Context: John 13-17 is often called the “farewell discourse” because this is Jesus’ last teaching with His disciples (before the Resurrection). As you can imagine, Jesus saves some of His most important words for this significant time. Here is an outline for these chapters:

John 13:1 -17 Jesus washes the disciples’ feet

John 13:18-30 Jesus predicts Judas’ betrayal

John 13:31-38 Jesus predicts Peter’s denial John 16:5-16

John 14:1-14 Jesus is the way to the Father

John 14:15-31 Jesus promises the Holy Spirit

John 15:1 -17 Jesus is the our Vine

John 15:18-16:4 Jesus warns about opposition

John 16:5-16 The Holy Spirit will guide the disciples into all truth

John 16:17-33 Jesus will return to the Father

John 17:1 -26 Jesus prays for His followers

Take note of the passages that fall between the ones that we are studying this week, as context will play a key role in the study questions. For example, Jesus washes the disciples’ feet and thus shows an unprecedented act of love and service for a rabbi. From the following passages, we see that Jesus does this for Judas and Peter with full understanding that both will walk away from Him soon. Another example is Jesus’ words about unity and friendship in chapters 15-17. In the middle of those chapters, there is a long warning about the opposition that Jesus’ disciples will face. The reader gets the impression that unity and friendship will be necessary among believers in the face of this opposition.

Much of what Jesus teaches in this section of John flows out of the Trinity. Jesus abides in the Father, and both seek to glorify each other. Jesus and the Holy Spirit follow the decrees of the Father and make Him known to the world. The Holy Spirit and the Father will aid Jesus’ disciples after Jesus departs. Most astounding of all, Jesus invites believers to share in the same unity with Him and with each other that He has with the Father. The Trinity is working to share its unity, love, and joy with us!!

Theme: Amidst this lofty theology, Jesus offers three very practical teachings about love among His disciples. The first, John 13:12-17, shows Jesus providing an example of service. The narrative in verse 12 echoes the dramatic effect of verses 4-5 that describe Jesus taking the place of a slave to wash His disciples’ feet. When He’s finished, Jesus returns to his place as their rabbi and begins to teach them. He has set the example that will become a key ethic in the Kingdom of God – leaders should serve. Disciples of Jesus will do such acts of (seemingly) menial service for each other.

Another famous passage in this section of John is “the Vine and the branches.” Here, Jesus says that He calls His disciples “friends.” He says this on the heels of His definitive statement on friendship that “greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Who is the friend of Jesus: the one who does the commands of Jesus. What is Jesus’ command: to love each other. To those who fit this description, Jesus will give His joy and love.

Jesus ends the Last Supper narrative with a prayer in John 17, which many call the “High Priestly Prayer.” In this chapter, Jesus prays for the disciples and then for all believers. Thankfully, the prayers of a righteous man are powerful (James 5:16), so we know that Jesus prayers will come true. The main point of Jesus’ prayers to the Father, on behalf of all believers, is that believers would have the same unity among them that Jesus has with the Father! The rest of John 13-17 tell us that the entire Trinity is working in the world towards that end. This will become a reality for the church, partially now and fully in the future.

Aim: The love that Jesus wants among his disciples includes service (13:12-17), self-sacrifice (15:9-17), and unity (17:20-26). Summit Church wants these to be key elements in everything that we do. If we can practice these, we will have a great witness to the watching world and we will be true friends of Christ and each other.

Study Questions:

Opener: What were some principles of friendship/love that stuck with you from JD's sermon?

Opener: Who are some people in your life that shocked or impacted you by acts of friendship?

[13:12-17] How do you think the disciples felt about Jesus washing their feet? Does Jesus' example remind you of other parts of Scripture?

It is striking that Jesus didn't just teach that leaders should serve, but that he actually took the place of a slave for this act. Philippians 2: 6-11 and Matthew 20:26 come to mind. I wonder if Peter (see verse 6), Judas, and the other disciples had different reactions.

[13:12-17] What does it say about Jesus character that He washed Judas feet knowing fully that Judas was going to betray Him?

Jesus truly loved His enemies and gave Judas every opportunity to choose rightly.

[13:12-17] What are some modern day examples of foot washing?

This will be crucial application question. Remember that foot washing was something that only slaves did in that time period, but it was necessary for all people at that time to do. Perhaps things like house-work, cooking meals, giving money and resources to those less fortunate, and spending time with those whom culture would view as our "subordinates," would be comparable to foot-washing.

[15:9-17] What does it mean to "abide" in Jesus? Who have been the best models of this in your life?

JD's sermon on this text included three statements about what it means to abide in Jesus:

- 1) What you abide in is what you draw acceptance from.
- 2) What you abide in is where you draw satisfaction.
- 3) What you abide in is where you draw power.

Some markers in your life that you are abiding in Jesus are that you will follow Jesus' commands, that you pray, that you seek to gain a better understanding of who He is, and that you try to imitate Him.

[15:9-17] How does Jesus provide an example of His teaching in this passage, as He did in chapter 13?

Jesus will eventually lay down His life for those that He has just called His friends. That sacrifice will bring joy and salvation to millions throughout history.

[15:9-17] Who are the people in your life that you'd most readily jump in front of a car to save? How does that willingness to die for those people affect the way you treat them on a daily basis?

Hopefully, self-sacrifice does not occur only in one final act, but daily we can die to ourselves to serve those around us. I personally need to bring less work home and turn off sports so that I can love, serve, and bring joy to my wife.

[17:20-26] Why is it important that Jesus prayed this prayer for all believers? What are some ways that this prayer can be answered in the church? What about at the Summit?

Because Jesus prayed it, we are 100% certain that it is going to become a reality. It has happened at times in the past among the early church whose service to each other often puzzled their neighbors. Hopefully, whenever we walk into any church, we are aware of the spiritual unity that the Holy Spirit is already working in the people that we worship among.