

# Real Greatness



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 28

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** John 13–17.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “I [Jesus] have set you [the disciples] an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15, NIV).

**IMPORTANT THOUGHT:** Jesus was not concerned (worried) about what might happen to Him on the cross. Instead, John 13–17 finds Him showing His love and concern for His disciples.

**REAL GREATNESS IS TO FOLLOW JESUS IN THE PATH OF HUMBLE SERVICE.**

For many people, greatness comes with wealth, fame, and power. Not many famous, wealthy, powerful people will wash another person's feet. But Jesus does the opposite of what seems natural to human experience.

With John 13, the book of John starts to change. Instead of public ministry (work), Jesus goes to a quiet, unknown place to teach His disciples.

This lesson and lesson 11 cover John 13–17. John 13–17 deals with the “upper-room<sup>1</sup> experience.” In this lesson, we will discuss the parts of John 13 and 17 where Jesus showed His concern for His disciples in the foot-washing ceremony (John 13) and in a marvelous prayer (John 17). In lesson 11, we will cover John 14–16, where Jesus tells His disciples about the work of the Holy Spirit after Jesus goes back to heaven.

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 6.

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<sup>1</sup>“upper room”—the place where Jesus spent a quiet time with His disciples before the Crucifixion. This is also where the disciples met in secret after Jesus' crucifixion.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 29

### THE FOOT WASHING (John 13:1-11).

**Read John 13:1-11. Then in your own words write down what you think this story means. Tell why the Holy Spirit directed John to write about this story. Focus on what you believe is the key (important) message of these verses.**

In New Testament times, people had a custom of bathing themselves before attending a feast. Upon arrival, they would not need to bathe again. They needed only to have their feet washed because they wore sandals and walked on dusty, dirty roads. The washing of the feet was the same as a “welcome” before people entered the house where they were to be guests. But in John 13:1-11, the foot-washing ceremony had greater meaning.

**Read John 13:10-12. Why did Jesus wash Judas’s feet? How does Jesus washing Judas’s feet show what foot washing is all about?**

The full-body bath shows the complete cleansing a person receives at the beginning of the Christian life (baptism). But foot washing shows the Christian’s continuing need to deal with sin in a sinful world. In Bible times, the foot was the part of the body that was always touching dusty roads. So the foot always needed to be cleaned.

From Jesus’ action of washing the disciples’ feet, we learn a beautiful lesson. Our daily failings as Christians do not require our original cleansing (baptism). It is not necessary to be baptized again every time we sin. A person who has bathed needs only to wash the feet again! We are secure (safe) as long as we do not choose to turn away from God (also read John 10:27-29).

Jesus washing His disciples feet shows that He forgives sins we have done after we were baptized. The disciples washing one another’s feet shows our willingness to forgive other people who have sinned against us and hurt us. Foot washing solves the threat against the unity Jesus planned for His disciples to have (read John 13:34, 35).



**How willing are you to forgive other people?**

**What does it mean to “wash feet” in everyday life? How can we be willing to “wash” one another’s feet? What preparation do we need to be able to “wash” another person’s feet?**

## MONDAY—MARCH 1

**REAL GREATNESS (John 13:12-17).**

**What was Jesus' further purpose in washing the disciples' feet? John 13:12-17.**

Real greatness is the King of the universe (Jesus) picking up a towel and a bowl of water, then stooping down to wash the feet of weak disciples such as Peter and a traitor such as Judas. A person who is really great does not need to show off or advertise himself or herself. Real greatness knows how to use self-control or act as a slave. Real greatness means doing the right thing when everyone laughs at you or hates you in their hearts.

Real greatness is to have the same attitude<sup>2</sup> as Jesus' attitude (Philippians 2:5), who was "in very nature God [God Himself]" (Philippians 2:6, NIV). But He took "the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2:7) and "humbled himself" (Philippians 2:8). Real greatness is to "consider (think of) others [people] better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). Real greatness is to follow Jesus in the path of service and humility.<sup>3</sup>

Our first thought in any situation is to look out for ourselves first. But looking out for ourselves first is a false greatness. Our first reaction to any situation is to nag (pick on), belittle,<sup>4</sup> criticize,

and complain. But then we are showing the opposite of humbleness and real greatness. Putting other people down says, "I am better than you." Thinking that other people are better than yourself helps you to encourage them.

**How can we develop real greatness? How can we learn to live a life of service? John 13:12-17; John 15:4-8; 2 Corinthians 3:18.**

**Does the way your local church practices foot washing capture the heart of Jesus' command to wash one another's feet? If not, how can you change what your church does? Does your local church follow Jesus' example in its relationships with people inside and outside the church? How can the foot-washing service become a more meaningful part of our Christian experience?**

## TUESDAY—MARCH 2

**JUDAS: THE OTHER PATH TO "GREATNESS" (John 13:18-30).**

**Why did Jesus quote a prophecy about His betrayal (Psalm 41:9)? How does the fact that " 'scripture [the prophecy in Psalm 41:9] must come true' " work through all prophecy? John 13:18, 19.**

<sup>2</sup>attitude—how you feel and think about something or someone.

<sup>3</sup>humility—no pride.

<sup>4</sup>belittle—to make a person feel that she or he is not important.

**How did the knowledge of His coming betrayal influence Jesus? John 13:21-26. Why should His betrayal have hurt Him so much? What does John 13:21-26 tell us about God's feeling toward even the worst sinners?**

"The disciples knew nothing of Judas's purpose. Jesus alone could read his secret. But He did not expose Judas. Jesus hungered for his soul. He felt for Judas the same burden He felt for Jerusalem when He wept over the doomed city (Matthew 23:37-39). Jesus' heart was crying, How can I give you up?"—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 645.

But Judas chose to follow a different path to "greatness." It was the opposite path from what Jesus had shown in the foot-washing service. At this time, Judas thought he was wiser



Judas did not choose a life of forgiveness and service.

than Jesus. Surely anyone should know that greatness comes from power, wealth, and the praise of other people! But Judas's action led only to his own destruction.

"The thought of having a high place in the new kingdom had led Judas to work for Jesus. . . .

"It was Judas who started the idea of forcing Jesus to become king. . . .

"Judas hoped to get the position next to Jesus in the new kingdom."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 718–721.

Judas failed to understand that anybody can act great or demand to be treated as great. Anybody can spend money or command other people if he or she has the opportunity. It takes real greatness to act the part of a servant and do jobs that other people should have done. It takes real greatness to put other people first or to treat other people as better than yourself.

**Is the opinion of greatness in today's world more like the opinion of Jesus or Judas? How can a person best present the message of Jesus to people who know only Judas's kind of greatness?**

**WEDNESDAY—MARCH 3**

**JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES  
(John 17:1-19).**

**For whom does Jesus pray, and why? John 17:1-19.**

The farewell meeting of Jesus and His disciples (John 13–17) comes to a close with Jesus' intercessory prayer.<sup>5</sup> Jesus' prayer has three parts: 1. In John 17:1-5, Jesus prays for Himself. 2. In John 17:6-19, He prays for His disciples and their need for support during His absence. 3. The third part we will look at tomorrow.

The first goal of Jesus' prayer is for help in finishing His work of giving glory to the Father while Jesus is still on earth (John 17:1-5). This work will be done on the Cross. There has never been a clearer picture of God's character than what Jesus showed in His humble death. But Jesus prays for strength to complete this work for all the people who will believe in Him. When Jesus and His Father are glorified on the Cross, eternal<sup>6</sup> life becomes available to all people who have a relationship with Jesus (John 17:2, 3). So even in His prayers for Himself, Jesus' greatest goal is that His Father receive glory and that other people profit from His death.

Jesus then prays for His disciples, who soon will have to learn how to live without Him. He does not pray for the world but only for people who are "not of the world"<sup>7</sup> (John 17:9). Jesus prays for His disciples, because they will have to remain in the world when He goes away. But they will become the target of the world's evil ways. As in John 13, Jesus is not concerned

about His death on the cross. He is more concerned about what may happen to His disciples after He goes back to heaven.

**Read John 17:14. What does it mean to be "not of this world"? In what ways should Christians be "not of this world"? How could we know if we are or are not of this world?**

#### THURSDAY—MARCH 4

**"BUT ALSO FOR THOSE [PEOPLE] WHO BELIEVE IN ME [JESUS] BECAUSE OF THEIR [THE DISCIPLES'] MESSAGE'" (John 17:20-26).**

**Who else does Jesus pray for? John 17:20.**

**What does He pray will be the common experience of both the disciples and the second generation of Christians?<sup>8</sup> John 17:21-24.**

In the last part of Jesus' prayer, He turns to the second generation of Christians. This second generation includes all Christians who have never seen Jesus face to face.

Jesus prays for love within the church. Love will unite the church. Then

<sup>5</sup>intercessory prayer—prayer for other people.

<sup>6</sup>eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

<sup>7</sup>"not of the world"—people who refuse to follow the evil ways of the world and who choose to follow Jesus.

<sup>8</sup>second generation of Christians—Christians who were not living before Jesus was crucified.



**Jesus prayed that we would be united in love for Him and one another.**

the world will come to know that Jesus is truly the One who showed the character of the Father on earth (read John 13:34, 35). But the world will never be attracted to Jesus if the church quarrels all the time.

In Jesus' prayer, we see one reason why prayers do not get answered. Jesus has given everything for the church's unity. But the nonunity of the church shows that even Jesus' prayers can be blocked by stubborn, selfish people. There are many things God would want to do for the church if His people would let Him.

Another wonderful thing about Jesus' prayer is that He is praying for His disciples and *for us*. Jesus showed great power in His ministry (work) on earth. But He still saw great value in praying for other people. Prayer for other people

does things in this world that would never happen any other way.

For most Christians, prayer for other people can be an up-and-down experience. So they might find it helpful to set up a regular time to pray. They can make a prayer list if the list does not become too long. But most important of all, Christians need to have someone who will remind them to pray, such as a prayer partner or a prayer group. Having someone to remind you to pray is especially important during difficult times.

**Look carefully at John 17:26. Jesus prayed that the love the Father had for Him would be in us, His followers. What is that love? 1 Corinthians 13. Would this be the**



**Without love our words are like a noisy gong.**

most perfect love possible? If so, how can we show that love in our lives? Is nonunity among Christians one example that we do not have God's love?

### FRIDAY—MARCH 5

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read some of the other farewell speeches of the Bible: Genesis 47:29–49:33 the whole book of Deuteronomy; Joshua 23; 24; 1 Chronicles 28; 1 Chronicles 29; Acts 20:17–38; 2 Timothy 3:1–4:8. How are these farewell speeches the same? How is Jesus' farewell speech (John 13–17) the same as these speeches? How is His speech different? Suppose you were to give a farewell speech to your family and friends. Following the Bible model (example), what would you say?

In John 17, Jesus talks about “glorifying” His Father and being glorified Himself (John 17:1, 4, 5). This idea of glory is an important theme in the book of John (John 1:14; John 2:11; John 7:18; John 8:50; John 12:23, 24; John 14:13; John 15:8; John 17:10; John 21:19). Some Bible translations use words such as *honor* instead of *glorify*.

Glorifying, or honoring, God is also an important part of the first angel's message in Revelation 14:6, 7. What does Revelation 14:6, 7 suggest about the word *glory*? How does the reading

of these verses influence your life? How can we “glorify God” in our lives today?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of unity was Jesus praying for? Is it possible to have unity of faith without unity of doctrine?<sup>9</sup> How much difference in doctrine can there be before we lose unity?
2. Why is knowing Jesus the key to eternal life? When Jesus talks about eternal life in John 17:3, is He thinking about how we live now? Or is He thinking only of heaven? Explain your answer.
3. What is Jesus saying in John 17:17 that shows how important the Bible is to our spiritual life?

**SUMMARY:** Real greatness is not found in power, wealth, or fame. Real greatness is found in following Jesus along the path of humble service. Jesus showed this path when He knew He would face the Cross. But He was more concerned about how His crucifixion would make His disciples feel than He was about Himself. In washing the feet of His disciples and in praying for them and for us, Jesus did the opposite of what humans normally do. So He set for us an example of real greatness.

<sup>9</sup>doctrine—church belief.