

Di122 Essentials of Christianity

Lesson Di121-19 Christian Character: Humility

You have just considered four lessons on living the Christian life: witnessing, overcoming temptation, putting on the armor of God, and being victorious in spiritual warfare. This lesson is the first of three you will hear on the subject of ‘Christian Character’: humility, service, and loving God and neighbor.

The twelve disciples—Jesus’ closest friends—were somewhat confused in the last few weeks of his life here on earth. The Jewish opponents of Christ had tried to stone him, but he had escaped from their grasp. Then he had astonished them by raising their friend Lazarus from the dead. The disciples all had to withdraw from the public view after that, because the chief priests and Pharisees were plotting to kill Jesus. But six days before the Passover, they had all gone to Bethany for a dinner. And the next day Jesus had paraded into Jerusalem as a king. Jesus had told them, “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My father will honor the one who serves me” (John 12:26). What would happen next?

Peter thought he understood, but he wasn’t sure what was happening. He sat near Jesus at the evening Passover meal with the other disciples. Peter didn’t want to miss a single word Jesus spoke. He wondered what Jesus had meant when he said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” How was he going to be lifted up? Peter, James, and John knew they were the inner circle of the Twelve. Impulsive Peter was perhaps the most outspoken of the group, but he dared not ask what Jesus referred to when he said, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer...” (John 12:32, 35).

At the evening meal, Jesus knew that his time on earth was coming to an end. He knew that he would soon die and return to the Father. Jesus discerned that the traitor Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, was already plotting to turn him over to the angry religious leaders. Even though Jesus knew about the plot, it did not stop him from showing all his disciples the extent of his love, even Judas.

They had gathered, reclining at the table, enjoying a meal with one another. Together now for three years, they knew Jesus had taught them everything the Father had told him. In those years they had seen miracles the world had never before seen. They had experienced the great power of God working through Jesus. But they had one more lesson to learn before Jesus left them.

Even though the Father had put all things under Jesus’ power, he needed to teach this remaining lesson. This was more than a lesson. It was a lifestyle that Jesus knew would be needed for those who followed him. The lifestyle was humility. Jesus decided to give a living example of the power of humility. He took on the role of a servant. He humbled himself and took off his outer clothing. He wrapped a towel around his waist and showed them how they must live in his kingdom.

Jesus, the Lord of all creation, poured water into a basin, and washed the dust and dirt off each disciple's feet. He then took the towel that was wrapped around his waist and dried their feet just as a slave would do for his master. Spiritually he was getting them ready for their ministry in his kingdom. The disciples were surprised and questioned what Jesus was doing. How could someone with so much power bow down and become a servant?

Peter was upset and did not want Jesus to do this. Peter wished Jesus would stop this nonsense. Didn't Jesus know that he needed to act like a king instead of a slave? Peter may have thought, "Look at Jesus, he is all bent over, getting dirty. Worse yet, he's acting like a household servant. I want nothing to do with this." He said the first thing that came into his head, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" He was agitated.

Jesus set Peter straight, for the lesson was almost complete. He said to Peter, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Peter was stunned. Here was the Messiah, God's anointed one, a basin and towel in his hands. All pride was gone and yet all love was being shown with those gentle hands. Peter saw Jesus, the Son of God, who had humbled himself to the level of mankind, so that that man could see God's heart.

Jesus looked Peter in the eye. Peter understood Jesus was inviting him to serve others, so that they might see God and believe. A light went on in Peter's mind. He suddenly understood what Jesus was teaching. "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well."

Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:1-17).

This lesson is **important** because it helps us understand that Jesus set the great example of servanthood for us all. We are to imitate this behavior in our lives and be servants to all.

The **main point** of this lesson is our Father in heaven knows that the best life for us is one of humility and servanthood.

Your **review** questions are:

1. What was Peter's attitude at the evening meal with Jesus? [Pause]
A. If you answered that Peter's attitude was one of confusion, even though he knew Jesus loved him, you have answered correctly.

2. Why did Jesus wrap a towel around his waist and wash the disciple's feet? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "Jesus washed their feet to teach them an important lesson about humility," you are correct.
3. What was Peter's reaction to Jesus stooping down to become his servant? [Pause]
A. If you answered that Peter's first reaction was refusal, but when Jesus explained the reason, Peter humbled himself and let Jesus wash his feet, you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it several times, allowing it to become part of your life. Confess any pride in your life and ask God to forgive you. Share this lesson with two or three friends. You might even want to re-enact the washing of one another's feet, like Jesus did. Then pray that God will help you to be a true servant leader like Jesus.

Memorize these Bible verses on the subject of humility:

1. "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:10).
2. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (Philippians 2:3-4)

God bless you as you learn about him and live for him with your whole heart. Amen!