

21. The Footwashing



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Leader Notes:

- View [this session's focus](#), faith nurture goals, leader devotional, and story symbol (click on the story symbol to download or print).
- For the full set of DWELL Flex story symbols use the link in the sidebar.
- Need this as a PDF? Just [print this page](#) and choose to save/print as a PDF.

Take a few moments to greet the children and let them know how glad you are to see them.

I love exploring God's story with you. Let's get ready to do that together.

Breathe

Use this time to focus your attention on God.

Do this with me: calm your head, heart, and hands as you slowly breathe in . . . and out. (*Demonstrate a few deep "in and out breaths" with eyes closed.*)

Tell and Wonder

Let's enter God's story together. Here's the story symbol for the part of God's story that we'll be spending time in today. I wonder what clues it gives us about the story we're about to hear? (*Show the story symbol. Accept any answers without giving away whether or not the kids have guessed correctly.*)

Listen closely as we read the story together to see which story our symbol represents.

Read "The Footwashing" aloud (below), pausing throughout to allow children to answer the wondering questions. NOTE: It's always a good idea to read through the story beforehand so you'll be able to tell it well.

You can also read the story from a children's Bible or a simplified translation of Scripture like the New International Reader's Version (NIRV). Remember to pause throughout to allow time to wonder.

Pray

Close with a circle prayer. Have each person thank Jesus for the person sitting to the right. Begin the prayer, saying, "Thank you, Jesus, for Maggie; she is my friend." Continue around the circle. Have everyone say Amen

together at the end.

Consider saying each child's name before you start, to make sure the kids know the names of the person they are praying for. If you are meeting virtually, assign each child someone to pray for before you begin. Assure the group that if they forget who they are supposed to pray for, they can pause the prayer to ask—God won't mind!

See [5 Ways to Pray with Kids](#) for other ways to pray.

Respond

Select and do one or more of the response activities from God's Big Story card #130* or check out [5 Ways to Retell a Bible Story with Kids](#) for some fun ways to retell this story. Include older kids in the retelling by having them read the story aloud while the younger children act it out.

*God's Big Story cards can be ordered from FaithAliveResources.org.

Easy Extra

Spend some time with your group reflecting on the ways Jesus serves us today. Encourage kids to think about how we experience Jesus' love for us in very real ways. Move on to exploring ways we can serve others. How does Jesus want us to follow his example today, when footwashing is no longer a custom? How can we serve our families, friends, and neighbors? What kinds of things can we do to show the love of Jesus and our love to others? (Be ready to suggest a few ideas if the kids have difficulty coming up with ideas.)

Hand out index cards or slips of paper and encourage kids to think of specific things they can do for their family, friends, the church, the environment, their school, missionaries, and even for people they have a hard time liking. Have them write or draw a picture of the things they plan to do. Be sure you complete a card too. If you're meeting virtually, encourage kids to complete this activity at home. Encourage them to bring their page to your next meeting so they can share their ideas with one another.

Story: The Footwashing [John 13:1-17](#)

It was a special time of year for Jewish people everywhere—time for the Feast of the Passover. I'm sure you can tell by the word "feast" that this was a very special celebration. **Can you think of a special celebration where your family might travel to visit relatives or friends and have a special meal?** (Pause for responses.)

The Jewish people celebrated Passover by leaving their homes and traveling to Jerusalem. Together they would celebrate and remember all the good things God had done for them. **If you could name just one good thing God has done for you, what would you choose?** (Pause for responses.)

Everyone looked forward to the Passover celebration because it was a whole week long! Imagine—special foods! Special treats! Time with friends and relatives! Playing with friends you didn't see every day!

Jesus and his disciples looked forward to this time too. They gathered for supper one evening after a busy day in the hot and dusty streets of Jerusalem. But when they entered the room where supper was prepared, something was missing. Let's see—the table was ready; the dishes were all in place. The food smelled

delicious. The cushions to sit on were arranged around the table. Hmm. **What do you think was missing?** *(Pause for responses.)*

You might not have thought of what was missing because it's a custom that we don't have today. But the disciples knew. They were all thinking: Where's the servant? When Jesus lived on earth, it was the job of a servant to wash the hot and dirty—and sometimes smelly—feet of the guests who came for dinner. **I wonder how you would feel about having a job like that.** *(Pause for responses.)* **What would be so bad about it?** *(Pause for responses.)*

You can be sure the disciples weren't about to do it! After all, they were guests, not servants. No one moved a muscle. No one volunteered.

Finally, they sat down on the cushions that were placed around the table—dirty feet and all. But as they were about to begin their meal, Jesus got up, took off his outer robe, and wrapped a towel around his waist. The disciples watched in silence. What was Jesus doing?

Jesus filled a bowl with water. Then Jesus knelt down in front of the disciple who was sitting next to him and began to wash his feet. **I wonder what the disciples were thinking.** *(Pause for responses.)* **What do you think their faces looked like when Jesus got up and started washing feet?** *(Pause for responses.)*

"Why is Jesus acting like a servant?" one of them wondered.

Another thought, "Where is the real servant?"

Another was thinking, "I wish Jesus wouldn't wash our feet! It makes me feel guilty—like I should be doing it instead."

But Jesus kept going around the table. One at a time, he washed the disciples' feet and dried them with his towel. Everyone watched Jesus move from one person to the next. The room was very quiet. No one was eating. No one was talking. No one was whispering. **How would you feel if Jesus washed your feet?** *(Pause for responses.)*

And then Jesus came to Peter. He jumped right up and said, "Jesus! You are not going to wash my feet—that's a job for a servant! It is not a job for you. You will never wash my feet."

Jesus answered kindly, "Peter, you don't understand what I'm doing now—but later you will. If I don't wash your feet, you won't be able to follow me."

"Well," said Peter, "then don't stop with my feet. Wash my hands and my head too!"

Jesus smiled and shook his head. "No, Peter. Just your dusty feet need to be washed now." Then Jesus poured water over Peter's feet and began to wash them. The other disciples watched.

Jesus continued around the circle, bending on his knees to wash and dry the feet of each disciple. When Jesus finished, he put his outer robe back on and sat down again at the table. The disciples waited for Jesus to say something.

Soon Jesus spoke. "Do you understand what I have done here tonight?" Jesus asked. **How would you have answered that question if you were there?** *(Pause for responses.)*

The disciples weren't sure what to say, so Jesus explained it to them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you're right," said Jesus. "I am your Teacher and Lord. And I am willing to do anything for you—even wash your feet like a servant. I do that because I love you. Now that I have done that for you, I want you to do that for each other and for other people too. Love and serve others in the same way I loved and served you here tonight."

And then they began to eat.

Looking for More Activities for This Story?

Click below to access the full age-specific *Dwell* session for this story:

- [2nd-3rd Grade: The Footwashing](#)
 - [6th-8th Grade: Our New Life](#)
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