



an apprenticeship with Jesus in the art of spiritual conversation

HOLY CONVERSATION Session Eight—The Mark of a Christian: John 13:1-17, 34-35

Key verse: *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (13:35 TNIV)*. Spiritual conversation is most effective when reinforced by the witness of a loving Christian community. Jesus provided a radical redefinition of love as he took on the role of a servant at his farewell meal with his disciples and washed their feet.

I. DEBRIEFING

- a. Revisit the Relational Pyramid exercise (SESSION EIGHT APPENDIX 1). **This is the relationship grid we used back in session two to analyze the various relationships we have with people in our church and world. Today we will revisit this grid to assess how our relationships have changed over the past several weeks.**
- b. Session overview:
 - i. **Jesus shocked his disciples by taking the role of a servant among them.**
 - ii. **This act provides both an example for how we are called to love one another and an interpretation of his incarnation.**
 - iii. **To have validity, our spiritual conversations must be backed up by the witness of a loving Christian community.**

II. ENCOUNTERING THE STORY

- a. Engage the senses: DVD clip from *The Gospel of John*
 - i. Pre-viewing-assignment: **Try to put yourself in the place of Peter and the disciples. How might you have felt when Jesus washed your feet?**
 - ii. View DVD
 - iii. Debrief DVD
- b. Read **The Text in Context: *Jesus Washes his Disciples' Feet***.
Again, John's Prologue (1:1-18) provides the best lens for interpreting the conversations of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. In a poetic declaration, the Prologue introduces us to the Word that was "in the beginning." The preexistent Word became the Jesus of history, and made his "tabernacle" among us (*The Message*: "moved into the neighborhood"), full of grace and truth. This "Word become flesh" is powerfully displayed in Jesus' act of washing his disciples' feet. When the Word becomes flesh, it often involves "getting dirty." Jesus prayed to the Father: "as you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them..." (17:18). As Jesus was sent by the Father into the world as a servant, so are all his disciples sent, loving one another as they go.

John 13 marks the beginning of the second section of the Gospel of John, the Book of Glory (John 13-21). The Book of Signs focused on the public ministry of Jesus, unfolding the ways different people came to Jesus through various signs and conversations. The Book of Glory (especially chapters 13-17) focuses on the private ministry of Jesus with his disciples in the Upper Room on the eve of his crucifixion. It includes one discourse (called a “farewell discourse”), followed in John 18-20 by one, ultimate sign (Jesus’ death and resurrection). Jesus’ act of washing his disciples’ feet set the stage for his ultimate sign of sacrificial love.

An understanding of social customs in the ancient Near East is helpful for interpreting this passage. Most ancient Eastern streets were unpaved, narrow, and very crowded. Often they were choked with refuse and frequented by dogs and other sources of excrement.¹ In addition, the most common form of footwear was the sandal. Therefore, foot washing was more than a kind act of hospitality. It was an issue of basic health and sanitation to insure that feet were washed upon entering a home or meeting place. As an expression of hospitality and good sanitation, a host would offer water to his guests for the washing of feet (ex. Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; Luke 7:44), or provide servants (or wives—1 Sam. 25:41) to wash their feet. Rarely, however, did hosts engage in footwashing themselves. Washing feet was a menial task fit only for servants or dependents. To illustrate, a certain mother sought to wash her son’s feet (Rabbi Ishmael) when he returned home from the synagogue. He refused, believing that this act was too demeaning for her. She took the matter to court on the grounds that she viewed the task, in this case, as an act of honor.² In this context, Jesus’ act represented a most demeaning and shameful act, one that was “unrivaled in antiquity.”³ It foreshadowed his death by execution of a Roman cross. As the raising of Lazarus prefigured Jesus’ resurrection, so Jesus’ washing of his disciple’s feet prefigured his sacrificial death on the cross.

Jesus’ intent in washing his disciples’ feet was most probably not to establish a “sacrament” of footwashing. If this was the case, the specific act would be taught or modeled in other parts of the New Testament. Instead, Jesus was providing an “acted parable on the theological significance of the incarnation.”⁴ This act of service illustrated the way in which Jesus was fulfilling the rich Old Testament imagery related to the humility of the Servant of the Lord (see Isaiah 42:1-4; 52:13—53:12). In the context of Jesus’ instruction, however, his primary intent was to provide a model of Christian love and service for his followers throughout the ages. This expression of counter-cultural love within the Christian community would provide a

¹ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary Vol II*, 903-904.

² D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, 462.

³ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary Vol II*, 904.

⁴ Andreas Kostenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 145.

powerful validation of their profession (13:34-35). “The debt we owe him (Jesus) is to be discharged by our subjection to our neighbor (in this case our Christian neighbor) in loving service.”⁵

- c. Interactive Bible Study: John 13:1-17, 34-35 narratively. Identify volunteers for the following parts: (1) narrator, (2) Jesus, and (3) Peter:
- ¹ Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end ² It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. ⁴ So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, ⁵ and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. ⁶ When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” ⁷ Jesus replied, “You don’t understand now what I am doing, but someday you will.” ⁸ “No,” Peter protested, “you will never ever wash my feet!” Jesus replied, “Unless I wash you, you won’t belong to me.” ⁹ Simon Peter exclaimed, “Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!” ¹⁰ Jesus replied, “A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you.” ¹¹ For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, “Not all of you are clean.” ¹² After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing? ¹³ You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. ¹⁴ And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. ¹⁵ I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.... ³⁴ So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

i. See 13:1-5.

- 1. What did Jesus know about himself and his destiny?**
- 2. How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus began to wash their feet?**

⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 171.

- ii. See 13:6-11.
 1. Note Peter's reaction when Jesus approaches him to wash his feet.
 2. How and why does Peter's attitude abruptly change?
 3. What do you think Jesus means when he tells Peter "Later you will understand"?

- iii. See 13:12-17. Why do you think Jesus washed his disciples' feet, rather than giving another sermon or teaching on loving one another?

- iv. See 13:34-35.
 1. There are many commands in the Bible (in both testaments) to love one another. In what sense is this command a "new" command?
 2. Note: "one another" refers to other believers (see "The One Others" in SESSION EIGHT APPENDIX 2). What do you learn about biblical love (vs. cultural definitions of "love") from this list?

III. LIVING INTO THE STORY

- a. Gather in subgroups:
 - i. What is the relationship between acts of love *for* others and the quality of our conversations *with* them?
 - ii. Practically speaking, how might people in your world actually observe Christians loving one another? Brainstorm possibilities.
- b. Call subgroups together and summarize responses.
- c. Discuss the impact of Christians serving one another on the watching world.
 - i. What impact might the witness of a loving Christian community have on our spiritual conversations?
 - ii. How might these acts, like Jesus' act of washing his disciples' feet, help provide "an acted parable" of the life and work of Christ?
 - iii. What can you do this week to serve another Christian in your world?

- d. Leader's input: Session review.
 - i. Jesus shocked his disciples by taking the role of a servant among them
 - ii. This act provides both an example for how we are called to love one another and an interpretation of his incarnation and atonement.
 - iii. To have validity, our spiritual conversations must be backed up by the witness of a loving Christian community.
 - iv. Tertullian, an early Church leader, cited the testimony of pagans of his day about the Christians: "See how they love one another...how they are ready

to even die for one another!”⁶ May this be the same conclusion made by the pagans of our day!

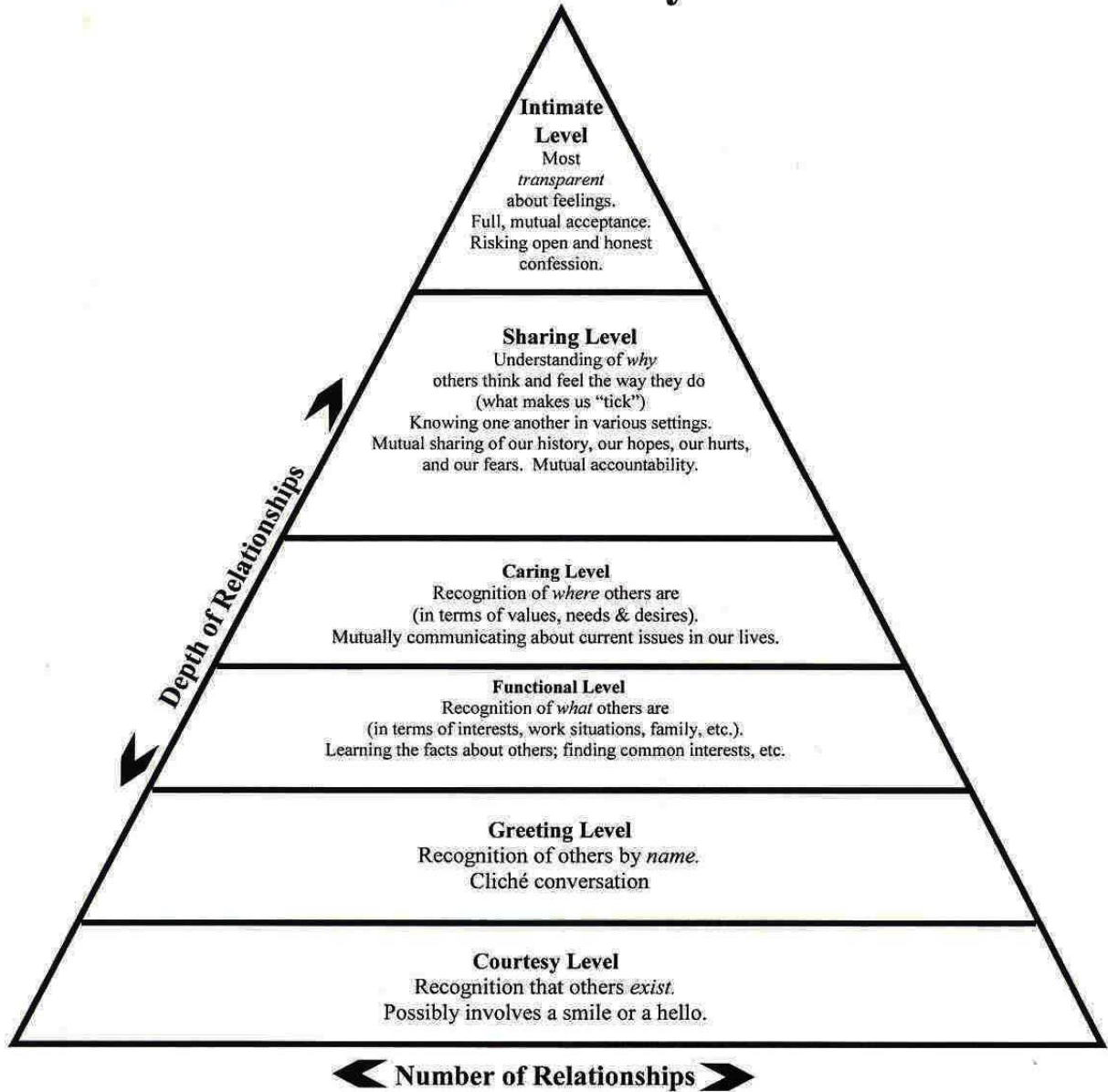
Session Eight Appendix

APPENDIX 1 The Relational Pyramid
APPENDIX 2 The “One-Anothers”

⁶ D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, 485.

SESSION EIGHT APPENDIX 1

The Relational Pyramid



SESSION EIGHT APPENDIX 2

The “One-Anothers”

You are members of one another	Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:25
Be of the same mind toward one another	Romans 15:5; 1 Corinthians 1:10
Do not judge one another	Romans 14:13; James 4:11
Build up one another in love	Ephesians 4:16; Romans 14:19
Welcome and receive one another	Romans 15:7
Admonish one another	Romans 15:14
Wait for one another	1 Corinthians 11:33
Reprove, exhort, rebuke one another	2 Timothy 4:2
Have the same care for one another	1 Corinthians 12:25
Have compassion for one another	1 Peter 3:8
By love serve one another	Galatians 5:13
Bear one another’s burdens	Galatians 6:2
Put up with one another’s faults	Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13
Forgive one another	Colossians 3:13
Submit to one another	Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5
Comfort one another	1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11
Provoke one another to love and good deeds	Hebrews 10:24
Use hospitality toward one another without complaint	1 Peter 4:9
Minister gifts to one another	1 Peter 4:10
Confess your sins to one another	James 5:16
Pray for one another	Ephesians 6:18; James 5:16
Bear with one another	Colossians 3:13
Encourage one another	Hebrews 10:25; 3:13
Be at peace with one another	Mark 9:50
Be gentle, kind toward one another	2 Timothy 2:24; Ephesians 4:32
Live in harmony with one another	Romans 12:16
Owe love to one another	Romans 13:8
Don’t be a stumbling block or offense to one another	Romans 14:13
In humility deem others as surpassing yourself	Philippians 2:3
Greet one another	Romans 16:16
Do not lie to one another	Colossians 3:9
Be good to one another	1 Thessalonians 5:15
Don’t put one another down	James 4:11
Don’t complain about one another	James 5:9
Put on humility towards one another	1 Peter 5:5
Be open and honest towards one another	1 John 1:7
Honor one another	Romans 12:10
Have a sincere and fervent love for one another	1 Peter 1:22; 4:8
Be genuine with one another	Romans 12:9
Be devoted to one another	Romans 12:10
Speak the truth in love to one another	Ephesians 4:15
Be rooted and grounded in love to one another	Ephesians 3:17,18
Have fellowship with one another	1 John 1:7

“A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another even as I have loved” (John 13:34)