

**8/30/20 Why Community Groups? Servants
John 13:1-17**

Today we are concluding our 4-part sermon series on Community Groups. If you are new here, a community group is a weekly meeting of 12 to 18 people in the home of a church member where we get to live out our identity in Christ as family, missionaries and servants. Each leader and the group decides how they want to handle the meeting time, place, child care, and when to take breaks for holidays and other things.

I do not know what you consider to be the number-one desire of most people today, but I suspect that if we were to conduct a poll, in one form or another the answer that would come highest on the list would be “happiness.” While some may say that their highest desire is for justice or some may peace. Above all else most people want to be happy. It is true that they do not always see this clearly; they even express it in different terms. Some might say that most of all they would like to be rich. Others might wish to be famous. Some might want to be loved. But basic to all these replies would be the desire to find happiness.

The difficulty, however, is that happiness is not easily attainable. We seek for it. Indeed, in this country the privilege of seeking for happiness is even declared to be one of our inalienable rights. But no one can guarantee happiness itself.

So, our founding fathers wrote wisely when they defined those rights as “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Liberty can be guaranteed. So, can life, up to a point. But not happiness. Only the right to pursue happiness can be guaranteed to any individual.

But how do we pursue happiness, and in what direction? One man thinks that he will be happy if he can save ten thousand dollars. So, he saves all he can; he gets his ten thousand. But he still is not happy. He thinks in terms of fifty thousand, then a hundred thousand. If he is able, he earns a million dollars, but still happiness eludes him. Why? Because happiness does not come through amassing a fortune.

Some try to find happiness through fame, but fame does not guarantee happiness either. If it did, we would not hear of so many of the world’s famous people committing suicide. Still other people think that they will be happy with power. They run for a local political office and win. Next they aspire to the mayor’s chair. If they become mayor, they want to be state senator. After this they think in terms of national politics. But still they are not happy.

John Calvin said, “While all men seek after happiness, scarcely one in a hundred looks for it from God.”

Why is that? Our first problem is that we’re sinners, so our hearts are bent toward rebellion. But our second problem is that, based on what we’ve heard our whole lives, whether outside or inside the church, we have a hard time believing we will find happiness in a relationship of God.

G. K. Chesterton wrote, “Jesus promised His disciples three things—that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy, and in constant trouble.” It might be argued that most American Christians aren’t any of these three—least of all “absurdly happy.”

Why is that? Perhaps you believe that God wants you to be holy, but not happy. That somehow holiness and happiness are mutually exclusive. Maybe you even have the impression that God Himself isn’t happy.

But joy, gladness, delight, celebration, and happiness in Christ are based on solid redemptive facts, including God’s love and sovereignty. And in our text today, Jesus teaches and demonstrates a formula to be absurdly happy.

Let’s read John 13:1-17....

That last verse, John 13:17 is the key. Jesus says, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.” The Greek word for “blessed” is makarios and it means happiness. In the present passage, as in most other New Testament passages where this Greek word makarios occurs, the focus is upon the subjective state of happiness shared by people who have received God’s blessing.

So, in our text this morning Jesus tells us the way to be happy. Jesus teaches and demonstrates three main points. And the sequence of the three points is important: humbleness, holiness, then happiness. Happiness is the by-product of a life that is lived in the will of God. When we humbly serve others, walk in God’s paths of holiness, and do what He tells us, then we will be blessed and enjoy happiness. Real joy and delight comes when we serve others in the name of Christ.

Let’s look at the three main characteristics of being a servant.

I. Humbleness: Jesus and the Father

Verse 1...

Jesus knew that “His hour had come.” What was this divinely appointed “hour”? It was the time when He would be glorified through His death, resurrection, and ascension. From the human point of view, it meant suffering; but from the divine point of view, it meant glory. He would soon leave this world and return to the Father who sent Him, Jesus having finished His work on earth.

Verse 1 says, “Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father.” Jesus knew that Jewish religious leaders and the Roman authorities could not even arrest Jesus, let alone kill Him, until the right hour had arrived. The fact is, when the servant of God is in the will of God, He is immortal until his work is done.

Notice again in verse 1: “He loved them to the end.” This statement, “He loved them to the end,” is about degree of Christ’s love for His own.

Ultimately, Jesus did what He did in humble obedience to the Father’s will and for the Father’s glory. But Jesus also did what he did out of His perfect, sacrificial, and eternal love for His own disciples.

Christian service begins with love in your heart, not a towel in your hand. The first thing we need to do is ask the Father to fill our hearts with the love of Christ that will move us to serve others.

We love one another and it becomes a testimony to the world. Look at John 13:34-35...

Now let me ask you a question, if you only had 24 hours to live what would you do? Jesus’ hour had come, in less than 24 hours from this Passover dinner he will die on the cross. So, what did He do? Verses 3-5...

In Bible times foot washing was necessary because folks wore sandals and they did not have paved roads. The sand from the road would make for some pretty filthy feet. In fact, the feet were considered to be the dirtiest part of the body. For this reason it was customary for a host to offer water for visitors to wash their feet when they entered the home. In some cases a host’s servant would even wash the feet of the guests as they entered the home. And if there were multiple servants, foot-washing was assigned to the lowliest servant in a household. It is unheard of for one in authority to wash the feet of those under him.

But this is exactly what Jesus did. It was a snapshot of what Jesus did in His incarnation. Philippians 2:6-7 says “though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

The Father had put all things into the Son’s hands, yet Jesus picked up a towel and a basin! His humility was not born of poverty, but of riches. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says Jesus was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor.

A Malaysian proverb says, “The fuller the ear is of rice-grain, the lower it bends.”

That’s the thing we remember from meeting a truly humble Christian, we remember how giving they are and how much they seemed to be totally interested in us.

When you leave a humble Christian you realize, “I never even got to ask them a question! They were so interested in knowing about me, learning about me, and serving me.”

How is it someone can always putting others ahead of themselves? Here is the essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less."

A truly humble person is not a self-hating person or a self-loving person. But a person who has forgotten about self to be used of God in the life of someone else.

Would you like to be the kind of person who does not sit around dreaming about all your abilities, strengths and successes and how it will give you the edge over someone else? Or perhaps you tend to beat yourself up and to be tormented by regrets and mistakes you made.

Imagine three female Olympic sprinters on the podium to receive their medals. The third place bronze medal winner is in tears because she lost the race and thinks the other two must have cheated and had a false start or else how could she lose?! But the silver medalist is thrilled because the gold medalist has just broken the world record for the fastest time - a record that has stood since 1988! The silver medalist is so happy for the winner that you would think she had won the race herself. But her identity is not in her success but in the success of another. That is true humility. Not thinking more of myself and not thinking less of myself. Simply thinking of myself less.

As commendable as such humility is, we can never achieve it simply on our own. Otherwise, we’ll become proud thinking about ourselves and our valiant attempts to be humble. What we need is to be so gripped by Jesus and His grace, so lost in His love, that we truly forget about ourselves.

Why would we want to think about ourselves, the lesser, when we can think about Jesus, the infinitely greater? This happens directly, when we worship and serve Him, and also indirectly, when we love and serve others for His glory.

Jesus was the Sovereign King, yet He took the place of a servant. He had all things in His hands, yet He picked up a towel. He was Lord and Master, yet He served His followers.

True humility grows out of our relationship with the Father. If our desire is to know and do the Father’s will so that we might glorify His name, then we will experience the joy of following Christ’s example and serving others.

We today, just like the disciples that night, desperately need this lesson on humility. The disciples did not even think to wash Jesus’s feet, let alone wash each other’s feet. In fact, Luke 22:24 tells us they were busy having a dispute over which one of them was the greatest! Talk about pride!

Andrew Murray wrote, “Humility is the only soil in which the grace of God grows. The lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure.”

Jesus obeyed His Father and served His disciples because of His humility and because of His love. Contrast John 1:11 with 13:1: Jesus came “unto His own, and His own received Him not.” But now in 13:1 we are told He loved His disciples to the end. He loved them from eternity into eternity. He loved them with an everlasting love. The word for “end” is *telos* in the Greek and means “without end, forever, perfection.” Jesus, having loved His own, He loved them perfectly.

For a fisherman to wash another fisherman’s feet is a small act of humility, but for the Creator to wash the feet of men who are sinful in their pride is indeed an amazing example of humbleness. We move from humbleness to holiness in verses 6-11.

II. Holiness: Jesus and Peter

Verse 6 says, “He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, do you wash my feet?’” The pronouns in that statement are emphatic: “Lord, do YOU wash MY feet?” Peter couldn’t believe what he was seeing. It cut right through his notions of leadership and greatness and authority. In his mind, being in charge meant others serve you. Great people did not serve, and definitely not such degrading service as washing feet. This didn’t make sense to Peter. So he asked Jesus, “What do you think you’re doing?”

Verse 7...

Jesus is talking now about something much greater than foot washing. He’s saying, “Peter, you still don’t get My incarnation, My condescension, My mission.” As Jesus says in Mark 10:45...

Verse 7....

If you read 1 Peter, then we clearly see that Peter eventually understood because he writes in 1 Peter 1:18, “You are redeemed not with corruptible things like silver and gold, but the precious blood of Jesus Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.”

But in John 13 Peter questioned Jesus. Jesus answered Peter. But if you thought that would be the end of the conversation, you don’t know Peter. Verse 8 says, “Peter said to Him, ‘You shall never wash my feet.’”

In the original Greek, Peter uses a double negative. And the word “never” means “not for eternity.” Peter was defiant. On one hand, Peter’s refusal was an expression of humility. He did not want Jesus to perform such a lowly service for him. On the other hand, Peter’s refusal was an expression of pride. Peter was too humble to have Jesus wash his feet but not too humble to dictate to Jesus what he would and would not do.

In verse 8, Jesus responds, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.” This is a metaphorical reference to the forgiveness of sins. 1 John 1:7 says, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

If Jesus does not wash you, you have no part with Him. Unwashed people do not belong to Jesus. This is a powerful reminder that salvation is based upon what Christ does for you, not what you do for Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

True disciples not only have a strong desire to serve Christ, they also have humble submission that permits Christ to serve them.

This exchange between Peter and Jesus reveals various ways people may respond to your service. Some may question your service. Some may refuse your service. Some may take advantage of your service. Peter did all three in this encounter with Jesus. He questioned Jesus. He refused Jesus' service. Then he tried to take advantage of Jesus' service.

In verse 8, Jesus told Peter if He did not wash him he had no part with Christ. In verse 9, Peter said, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head." This is a wonderful expression of devotion to Jesus. Peter did not understand or agree with what Jesus was doing. But Peter wanted to be with Jesus. And if being with Jesus required washing, Peter wanted the full-service cleaning.

Verses 10-11...

A person invited by a friend to dinner would take a bath, get dressed, and walk to his friend's house. Because he traveled in open-toe sandals on unpaved dirt roads, when he arrived at his friend's house, his feet would be dusty and dirty. But he would NOT take another bath at his friend's house. He just needed his feet washed.

This is a practical illustration of Christian salvation. When Jesus washes you in regeneration, you are clean. But as you travel this sin-tainted and self-centered world, your feet get dirty because you sin. But you do not lose your salvation. You just need your feet washed. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

We have seen humbleness and holiness, which lead to happiness.

III. Happiness: Jesus and the Disciples

Verse 12 says...

This is a rhetorical question. The disciples did not understand. So, Jesus explains.

In verse 13, Jesus says, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am." Jesus affirms the disciples are right to call him Teacher and Lord. But to call Jesus Teacher and Lord is to accept divine obligation. And here is the obligation in verse 14...

The word "ought" means to owe or to be in debt. It is used to speak of a necessary duty. Jesus is not recommending we wash one another's feet. As Lord and Teacher, Jesus commands us to wash one another's feet. If you are not willing to serve others, you really do not have the right to call Jesus your Teacher and Lord. In Luke 6:46, Jesus asks, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"

Now some read this command to wash one another's feet in a wooden-literal sense and view it as a Christian ordinance, like baptism and the Lord's Supper. But the New Testament gives no indication the early church understood it that way. Foot-washing is only mentioned again in 1 Timothy 5:10 to illustrate the hospitality of godly widows.

Theologian and Bible scholar, D.A. Carson writes, "Wise theologians and expositors have always been reluctant to raise to the level of universal rite or to the level of an ordinance something that appears only once in Scripture. More importantly, the heart of Jesus' command is a humility and helpfulness toward brothers and sisters in Christ

that may be cruelly parodied by a mere act and rite of foot washing that easily hides a critical spirit and proud heart.”

Throughout church history, this command to wash one another’s feet has been understood to mean we should do whatever it takes to serve one another, no matter how menial the task. The question that should be on our hearts and lips is this: “Is there anything I can do for you?”

In verse 15, Jesus explains the driving force of this call to serve: “For I gave you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”

Last night as I was going over my sermon, Paula was sewing in the kitchen. She would lay a pattern out and then cut the material to fit the pattern. Then she would sew the garment on the basis of the pattern.

In washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus laid down a pattern of what it means to be like Him. To be like Jesus is to be a servant. You are not growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ if you are not serving others.

Verse 16 says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.”

The servant is not greater than his master; so, if the master becomes a servant, where does that put the servant? On the same level as the master! By becoming a servant, our Lord did not push us down: He lifted us up! He dignified sacrifice and service. You must keep in mind that the Romans had no use for humility, and the Greeks despised manual labor. Jesus combined these two when He washed the disciples’ feet.

Jesus says in verse 17, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

Once again we are reminded that the Scriptures were not given for our information, but for our transformation. Jesus tells us the truth of God’s Word needs to move from the head, to the heart, to the hands. It is not enough to know the Lord’s commands, we must obey them.

Jesus wanted His listeners to realize—He was offering them something counterintuitive. He is teaching that the path to happiness is not in what you keep to yourself but in what you give in service to others. Jesus is telling us that God wants to work in us and through us to be loving channels of His grace for the glory of God.

You are blessed, meaning you find true happiness in God, when the Lord uses you to serve and meet the needs of someone else. Some of the poorest Christians I have met in other parts of the world are some of the happiest. They find their happiness in God and in putting others ahead of themselves.

Fernando and Silvia in Mexico do not have very much. Their small, one bedroom home does not even have hot water. But when a family of six was down there they insisted we stay in their house while they slept in the church. When I went to teach in Russia, I stayed in Victor and Katya’s apartment – and they insisted that I sleep in their bedroom while they slept on the couch. Both of these couples were so happy to share what little they had.

When it comes to loving and happy hospitality, Kevin and Felicia Covington come to mind. They have had over 400 guests in their home in the past ten years! They have lived out John 13.

Friends, the truth is human needs in our world today are indescribable, innumerable, and (if you have a tender heart) the needs are almost unbearable. You and I can’t do everything, but we can do something; and that something is the ministry God has called us to fulfill.

In your community group you will see and hear of needs in the group and you will hear of needs outside of the group (a non-Christian coworker, a classmate, a friend). Then must pray, “Lord, what do you want me to do to help meet that need?”

It may be taking a meal.

It may be writing a card and letting them know you are praying for them.

It may be babysitting.

It may be the community group pitching in to help a new believer financially. I read about a Community Group near where our son lives in the state of Washington where a young married couple had their first child. The wife wanted to stay home with her new child and the husband was in full agreement. However, he did not make enough money for them to pay rent, food and utilities and other needs. So, the Community Group asked this couple to write out a budget and let know them how much money they needed each month so this young mother and wife could stay home. The number was \$500 and the Community Group said, “I think we can cover that.” One member said I can give \$100 a month, another said \$50 and within minutes \$500 a month was committed and this young couple were overwhelmed by the love and service of their community group.”

Why community groups? Because our mission is to know Christ and make Him known. We do this by living out our identity in Christ as family, missionaries and servants.

There’s always going to be fear and trembling in Jesus’ invitation to join Him in the lowest place in being a servant to others. Will I or won’t I work out of the saving knowledge of my identity as God’s beloved child and as His servant?

When God invites you to join Him in His work, you will quickly realize you cannot do what He is asking on your own. If God doesn’t help you, you will fail. And that is exactly where God wants you to be. Instead of rolling up your sleeves, you must first get on your knees and pray, “Lord, I know apart from You I can do nothing.”

You need to be in a community group, and you need to invite others to join your community group.

Here is what the elders envision at Cornerstone. That you attend a worship service on Sunday and you participate in a Community Group.

We envision community groups as communities of Jesus-centered happiness, overflowing with the joy of embracing and living out the gospel as family, missionaries and servants.

Psalm 16:11 says, “You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.”

The Hebrew words in Psalm 16:11 for joy and pleasures mean ultimate happiness. And God is a fundamentally Happy Father. May it be said of us that because of the happy God we know, the Jesus we love, the gospel we embrace, and the treasure we gladly share, we are truly the happiest people in the world.

And may we see our present happiness as a down payment on the eternal happiness that awaits us, bought and paid for by the blood of Christ, who is eager to welcome us into His eternal happiness—a happiness that had no beginning and will have no end. A happiness that is perfect.

Let’s pray...