

Demonstrating Your Faith A Study of John 13:34-35

Big Idea: Serving takes the creepy out of seeking.

Related Scriptures: Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 5:44; 22:39; Luke 22:24; John 13:1-17; 15:13;
1 Peter 1:22; 4:8; 1 John 3:16

Introduction:

1. Many of you—maybe most—know that I’ve been asking God to use me to move seven people a little further down the road to a relationship with Christ this year. And I’ve asked you to join me. The challenge is very simple: ► Seek seven.

Some have asked me and maybe you’ve wondered: “Bob, when are you going to stop talking about seeking seven so that I can invite some of my seven to church?” I know. There *is* something awkward about the idea of your seven coming to hear me talk about you seeking them. I get it.

Others of you, I suspect, are feeling a little conflicted about the whole idea of seeking seven. Oh, intellectually and biblically, maybe you get it. But your gut tells you there’s still something awkward about it.

Let me give voice to the awkwardness. Let’s just call a spade and spade.

Seeking seven is creepy.

That’s right. It’s creepy. To those of us who have been on the inside of Christianity for some time, seeking seven may not seem creepy at all. But to those on the outside, it’s creepy. And this makes it awkward.

In our culture today, the idea of a religious group seeking people for some kind of conversion is not welcome. In our society, the term, “proselytizing” is a bad word.

It’s largely because many in our postmodern culture and probably many of your seven believe there is no real meta-narrative, no “big story” that gives explanation and meaning to life. There is no “big story,” no universal truth that ties everything together. There are only individual “little stories.” So what’s true for you may not be true for me. I alone determine what is true for me.

And so, anybody who claims that there is indeed a “big story” that applies to everyone—a “big story” like Christianity—well, that is an arrogant person—a person who is just trying to sell some bogus “big story” to control and oppress and moralize people. As such, evangelism has become almost a hate crime in the eyes of some.

2. So here we are. Stuck. Stuck between Jesus who says we are to seek and save the lost.

And the lost, who generally think our seeking is creepy.

This comes as no surprise to the Lord. He saw this coming from the very beginning. So, a couple of thousand years ago, He gave some instructions on how to take the creepy out of seeking. It's in the Bible. We're going to learn how to take the creepy out of seeking seven today.

3. But before we get to that, I want to take a moment to address those of you who are not yet believers—those who might be a little creeped out—or those who are wondering, what exactly are you people seeking from me? I want to be perfectly authentic and open about what we're trying to accomplish here. Here's what we're up to at Moon Valley. Let me take you right back for a tour of our boiler room. This is what we want for you. It's pretty simple. We want ► three things.

First, we want you to ► belong. We want to create an extraordinary environment of grace, humility, warmth, attentiveness, and personal acceptance in which you feel that you are welcome among us, that you are treated as equals, that you matter to us, and that you can safely consider the next step toward Christ with us, regardless of your background.

Second, we want you to ► believe. To believe in Jesus for eternal life. We want to respectfully, patiently, and gently help you process the good news of Jesus Christ—presenting the good news many times in many ways, providing easy access to more information, and equipping believers to dialogue with you—all in ways that are extraordinarily clear, thoroughly biblical, humbly respectful, and culturally relevant.

And third, we want you to ► become. Once you have believed in Jesus, we want to create opportunities for you to become more and more like Christ in your motivations, values, beliefs, and conduct, so that, together, we may increasingly manifest the extraordinary love of Christ—applying the Bible to our lives, discovering who God made each of us to be, enjoying and sharpening one another, serving one another and our community, and reaching out to those who need Christ, that we may invite them to belong and believe, too.

So that's our deal. Belong, believe, become. That's what I've been talking about lately. Not because we need to pay the bills. Not because we're trying to gain political advantage. Not because we're trying to oppress or control or moralize anybody.

But because this happens to be the greatest thing that has ever happened to us. And we want it for you.

I know. This still may sound a little creepy, so let's ► get to what Jesus has to say. This is not only going to be helpful for believers, but I think this is going to be just as helpful for those not yet convinced, because I think you're going to learn more about who Jesus is and what He's up to. And you'll be in a little better position to determine

whether Jesus is the kind of guy you'd like to follow.

4. The biblical story begins a couple thousand years ago. It was Thursday, the night before Jesus was to be crucified. He was with His disciples, sharing His last supper in the upper room of a home in Jerusalem. He knew what was about to happen to Him, but His disciples didn't.

So Jesus told them. Sort of.

He said He wasn't going to be around much longer—that He had to go away to a place where they couldn't come. Then He said something that, I suspect, took a while to sink in. It's recorded for us in John 13:34-35. It's the main biblical text we're studying the morning. Jesus ► said:

^{NKJ} John 13:34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

You may be sensing the relevance of this already. Jesus is giving this new command to love each other. And He says if we obey it, then all people—including our seven—will know that we are His disciples. If we do this loving thing, people will know that something's up with us. They'll know something is different about us. They'll know we've got something. They'll know this Jesus thing is real. They'll know we are authentic and not just pretenders with an agenda to manipulate people. This will work. That's what Jesus was saying.

5. Only one problem. Been there, done that. It wasn't new. At least it didn't seem like it. After all, over a thousand years earlier, the command to love others was given by God to the Jewish people back in the Old Testament. Way back in Leviticus ► 19:18, it says,

^{NKJ} Leviticus 19:18 “. . . you shall love your neighbor as yourself . . .”

And the love-one-another command was certainly not new to His disciples on that Thursday night. They were all Jewish. They knew the old love command.

And Jesus was certainly aware of this old command. In fact, He had just quoted it on Tuesday of that week leading up to His crucifixion.¹ Matthew ► 22:39 records Jesus saying,

^{NKJ} Matthew 22:39 “. . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

So how could Jesus' command to love back in ► John 13:34 be a *new* commandment?

The answer lies in a little phrase that's easy to overlook: ► “as I have loved you.”

¹ Oberholtzer, “Chronological Life of Christ.”

That's the new part. Jesus was not just saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself." He was saying "Love one another *as I have loved you*." That was the new part.

6. But it does raise yet another question. How had Jesus loved His disciples?

From our vantage point, we may be quick to think that Jesus loved His disciples by dying for them. True enough. Good thinking. But that's not what Jesus was talking about. Jesus spoke these words *prior* to His death, and He used the past tense to point back to something He had already done for His disciples. What was it?

Well, if we work our way backwards in John 13, we find that, just moments earlier, Jesus said in ► John 13:15,

^{NKJ} John 13:15 "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."

We're getting warmer. But what's the example? Well, in the verses immediately preceding, we see that Jesus had just washed the disciples' feet. That's the example. That's what Jesus had in mind when He said, ". . . love one another, as I have loved you." Washing each other's feet.

Only one problem. This is gross. This is super creepy. Imagine the looks you would get from one of your seven when you say, "Hey, wanna come to a foot-washing we're havin' down at the church." Wouldn't be "seek seven." It'd be "stink seven."

Fortunately, ► Jesus washing His disciples' feet was merely an object lesson—an object lesson intended to convey a certain principle. Jesus is not calling us to duplicate the object lesson, but to adopt the principle behind it.

We're going to work our way to the underlying principle by first uncovering three remarkable ways that Jesus loved His disciples. These three ways of loving are going to point us to a principle that will help take the creepy out of seeking our seven. So we're going to briefly cover the three ways Jesus loved His disciples and then we're going to look back to see what they have in common.

- I. Here's the first remarkable way in which Jesus loved His disciples. ► In His position of greatest authority, Jesus became the lowliest servant. His greatest rank and His lowliest service are contrasted in John 13:3-5.
- A. Christ's position of greatest authority and His knowledge of it is revealed in the first phrase of ► Verse 3. It says,

^{NKJ} John 13:3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands

For the Father to give all things into the hands of Jesus means that Jesus has divine authority over all things. Jesus knew that. Jesus knew that He is the Lord of lords and King of kings. Jesus knew that He has the power and the prerogative to do whatever He wants. Jesus is the founder, the proprietor, the president, the general, the CEO, the COO, and the CIO of the universe. No one is higher. No one is even close. He lacks nothing. He holds all the cards. He holds the universe in the palm of His hand. Jesus could have called down 10,000 angels by His whisper. He could have vaporized the earth with a glance. He had the authority because, “the Father had given all things into His hands.” And Jesus knew it.

B. It is this greatest King who became the lowliest servant.

1. It is this Jesus the Christ who, according to ► Verse 4:

^{NKJ} John 13:4 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.

- a. To rise from supper to perform this foot-washing was most unusual. In that day, feet were to be washed *before* a meal, not during. The disciples would have been stunned by this timing. I think that’s exactly the effect Jesus intended. They would never forget this moment.²
- b. To lay aside His garments probably means that Jesus stripped down to His loin cloth. This would have been even more stunning to the disciples because Jesus was assuming the garb of a lowly slave.³

2. And what Jesus did next would have been the most stunning thing of all. Verse ► 5 says,

^{NKJ} John 13:5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded.

- a. It was against the Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures for a superior to wash the feet of subordinates.⁴
- b. Foot-washing was considered the task of the lowliest servant.⁵ And it’s no wonder. In that day, people wore simple sandals.

² Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John*, Vol. 3, 467.

³ Morris, 468.

⁴ Gangel, *Holman NT Commentary, John*, 249.

⁵ John the Baptizer acknowledges foot-washing as the lowest service required of any man. That’s why he says in John 1:27 that he’s not worthy to even untie the sandals of Jesus. The untying of sandals is an allusion to foot-washing as the responsibility of a slave (Tenney, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 136).

Walking through Jerusalem or any village left a person's feet smelling like the animal manure that littered the streets after herdsman and merchants led their flocks through town to the markets. So, a person's feet were rightly viewed as filthy.⁶

In His position of greatest authority, Jesus became the lowliest servant.⁷

- II. There is a second remarkable way in which Jesus loved His disciples. ► In His hour of greatest need, Jesus focused on serving others. John ► 13:1 says,

^{NRJ} John 13:1 Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

- A. Jesus ► knew. Jesus knew this was His hour of greatest need; He knew that He was on the brink of public ridicule, brutal flogging, and a suffocating crucifixion. He knew that He would bear the punishment for the sins of the whole world in a matter of hours. His hour had finally come.

If I were Jesus, I think I'd be holed up somewhere, in the fetal position, feeling sorry for myself. I don't think I'd even want to be around people who wouldn't minister to me in my hour of anguish. I'd want people to love *me* and encourage *me*.

- B. In the months leading up to the upper room, Jesus had told His disciples in no uncertain terms on at least three different occasions that He was going to suffer and He was going to be killed.⁸ Then, on that Thursday evening before Jesus was crucified, at supper, Jesus said that this would be His last Passover meal and His last cup of wine.⁹

⁶ Derickson & Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker*, 41.

⁷ Contrast this loving act of self-sacrifice by Jesus with the concurrent attitude of self-absorption evidenced by His disciples.

In that day, it was customary for a household servant to wash the feet of guests. Apparently, there was no such servant in the house the disciples were using. And apparently, none of the disciples was willing to stoop to perform this task for the others. When they entered the room, they all would have known what needed to be done. Any one of them could have done it. No one did.

In fact, instead of serving one another, it appears that the disciples were jockeying for position. You see, the disciples were expecting Jesus to soon establish His kingdom on earth, to set up His government, and they wanted a piece of the action. My seminary mentor, Earl Radmacher, explains, *They were all jockeying for position in the up-coming government of Messiah. And, thinking like the world thinks, their pride and ambition craved prestige, not humiliation. To wash others' feet that evening might be seen as an admission that the other deserved a better position in the coming kingdom than one's self* (Derickson & Radmacher, 43).

In fact, during that same evening, Luke 22:24 records, "Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest."

⁸ Luke 9:22, 44; 18:31.

⁹ Luke 22:14-18.

The disciples were too self-absorbed to put two and two together. They were so focused on themselves they couldn't see what was coming. It's as if Jesus was telling them that He's going to suffer and die, and they responded with a collective, "Yeah, whatever." I wouldn't really want to be around these guys in my greatest hour of need.

- C. But John 13:1 ► says, "He loved them to the end."¹⁰ He became their servant. He washed their feet.

In His hour of greatest need, Jesus focused on serving others.

III. There is a third remarkable way in which Jesus loved His disciples. ► In His feelings of greatest betrayal, Jesus served His betrayers.

- A. Moments before Judas was to betray Jesus, John 13:11 ► says that,

^{NKJ} John 13:11 . . . He [Jesus] knew who would betray Him . . .

That is to say, Jesus knew Judas Iscariot would betray Him by turning Him over to the authorities who would have Him crucified. It was a conspiracy already in motion.

Put yourself in Jesus' sandals. You've invested years discipling Judas. You have loved him unconditionally. You have entrusted yourself to him. He now repays the favor by siding with your enemies in the arrangement of your torture and crucifixion. How would you feel? Can there be a greater feeling of betrayal? Can there be a more hurtful wound? Wouldn't you feel angry and discouraged and broken hearted? I suspect Jesus felt all these things.

Nevertheless, Jesus washed the feet of Judas. Not only did Jesus wash his feet, but later during supper, Jesus identified His betrayer by dipping a piece of bread and giving it to Judas. In that day, dipping and giving a piece of bread was a customary way to convey courtesy and respect to a special guest.¹¹

- B. And Judas was not the only source of feelings of betrayal. Jesus knew that every one of His disciples would desert Him that night.¹² Every one. And His main man, Peter, the leader of the disciples would deny Jesus repeatedly within hours. Jesus knew all about the upcoming desertion and denials. I think it hurt Him the way it would hurt us.
- C. Nevertheless, in His feelings of greatest betrayal, Jesus served His betrayers. He washed their feet.¹³

¹⁰ This can mean Jesus loved them to His last breath; it can also mean that Jesus loved them completely (*Nelson Study Bible*).

¹¹ Derickson & Radmacher, 67.

¹² Mark 14:27-31.

¹³ Don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that you should remain in an abusive situation. I'm not saying that you shouldn't draw appropriate boundaries in relationships. I'm not saying there's no place

- IV. Okay, so now we have ► the three remarkable ways that Jesus loved His disciples. In His position of greatest authority, Jesus became the lowliest servant. In His hour of greatest need, Jesus focused on serving others. And in His feelings of greatest betrayal, Jesus served His betrayers.

Do you notice a theme here? These are three examples of surprising acts of loving ► service. These are about love expressed in serving people. And it's not just ordinary serving. It's startling. Unusual. Extraordinary. Not-normal. Unexpected. It's not what people would expect from a creepy person. It's not what people would expect from someone who is trying to control them, or oppress them, or moralize them. Jesus went out of His way to serve people in an unexpected way, to love them in a way that far exceeded the norm.

Why? Partly because this takes the creepy out of seeking. If one of your seven is not yet convinced about the "big story" of Jesus, but she is convinced by your loving acts of service that you aren't trying to control her or oppress her or moralize her, she'll be more open to hear your story.

If one of your seven has lingering questions about Christ, but he gets the feeling that you're not trying to sell him or brainwash him or slip one over on him, but rather, you have shown by your loving acts of service that you have his best interests at heart, he'll be more likely to ask you some of his questions.

It makes sense. Serving takes the creepy out of seeking. In fact, that's the ► big idea of my sermon: Serving takes the creepy out of seeking. And it's not run-of-the-mill serving. It's surprising serving. It's let's-give-em-somethin-to-talk-about serving.

Want to take the creepy out of seeking your seven? Serve them in a way they don't expect. Find a surprising way to help them see that you care about them as a person, not just as a prospect.

And surprising doesn't have to be monumental. In terms of physical degree of difficulty and time commitment, Jesus' foot-washing was not that big of a deal: getting dirty for maybe twenty minutes. But the idea behind it is huge. Two thousand years later, we're still talking about it.

For us, it can be a note of encouragement. Or a visit to the hospital. Or a meal provided. Or taking the time to listen when nobody else does. Or cleaning the neighbor's cat box while they're away. Or remembering the date when they lost a loved one. Or teaching English as a second language to people who are not embraced in our culture. Or even going out of your way to say hello to a stranger on Sunday morning.

When Jesus says to His followers, "love one another; as I have loved you," I think He's saying, "Let's give em somethin to talk about." Let's demonstrate a love so surprising that it gets people wondering about the story behind it.

for tough love and discipline.

That's what Kris Hogan did. Hogan is the football coach at Grapevine Faith, a Christian high school in Texas. Hogan had a surprising, let's-give-em-somethin-to-talk-about idea that played out last November. The story is told by ESPN columnist, Rick Reilly.¹⁴

They played the oddest game in high school football history . . . down in Grapevine, Texas.

It was Grapevine Faith vs. Gainesville State School and everything about it was upside down. For instance, when Gainesville came out to take the field, the Faith fans made a 40-yard spirit line for them to run through.

Did you hear that? The other team's fans?

They even made a banner for players to crash through at the end. It said, "Go Tornadoes!" Which is also weird, because Faith is the Lions.

It was rivers running uphill and cats petting dogs. More than 200 Faith fans sat on the Gainesville side and kept cheering the Gainesville players on—by name.

"I never in my life thought I'd hear people cheering for us to hit their kids," recalls Gainesville's quarterback and middle linebacker, Isaiah. "I wouldn't expect another parent to tell somebody to hit their kids. But they wanted us to!"

And even though Faith walloped them 33-14, the Gainesville kids were so happy that after the game they gave head coach Mark Williams a sideline squirt-bottle shower like he'd just won state. Gotta be the first Gatorade bath in history for an 0-9 coach.

But then you saw the 12 uniformed officers escorting the 14 Gainesville players off the field and two and two started to make four. They lined the players up in groups of five—handcuffs ready in their back pockets—and marched them to the team bus. That's because Gainesville is a maximum-security correctional facility 75 miles north of Dallas. Every game it plays is on the road.

This all started when Faith's head coach, Kris Hogan, wanted to do something kind for the Gainesville team. Faith had never played Gainesville, but he already knew the score. After all, Faith was 7-2 going into the game, Gainesville 0-8 with 2 TDs all year. Faith has 70 kids, 11 coaches, the latest equipment and involved parents. Gainesville has a lot of kids with convictions for drugs, assault and robbery—many of whose families had disowned them—wearing seven-year-old shoulder pads and ancient helmets

So Hogan had this idea. What if half of our fans—for one night only—cheered for the other team? He sent out an email asking the Faithful to do just that. "Here's the message I want you to send:" Hogan wrote. "You are just as valuable as any other person on planet Earth."

Some people were naturally confused. One Faith player walked into Hogan's office and asked,

¹⁴ Rick Reilly, "Life of Reilly," December 23, 2008, *ESPN The Magazine*.

“Coach why are we doing this?”

And Hogan said, “Imagine if you didn’t have a home life. Imagine if everybody had pretty much given up on you. Now imagine what it would mean for hundreds of people to suddenly believe in you.”

Next thing you know, the Gainesville Tornados were turning around on their bench to see something they never had before. Hundreds of fans. And actual cheerleaders!

“I thought maybe they were confused,” said Alex, a Gainesville lineman (only first names are released by the prison). “They started yelling ‘Defense!’ when their team had the ball. I said, ‘What? Why they cheerin’ for us?”

It was a strange experience for boys who most people cross the street to avoid. “We can tell people are a little afraid of us when we come to the games,” says Gerald, a lineman who will wind up doing more than three years. “You can see it in their eyes. They’re lookin’ at us like we’re criminals. But these people, they were yellin’ for us! By our names!”

Maybe it figures that Gainesville played better than it had all season, scoring the game’s last two touchdowns. Of course, this might be because Hogan put his third-string nose guard at safety and his third-string cornerback at defensive end. Still.

After the game, both teams gathered in the middle of the field to pray and that’s when Isaiah surprised everybody by asking to lead. “We had no idea what the kid was going to say,” remembers Coach Hogan. But Isaiah said this: “Lord, I don’t know how this happened, so I don’t know how to say thank you, but I never would’ve known there was so many people in the world that cared about us.”

And it was a good thing everybody’s heads were bowed because they might’ve seen Hogan wiping away tears.

As the Tornados walked back to their bus under guard, they each were handed a bag for the ride home—a burger, some fries, a soda, some candy, a Bible and an encouraging letter from a Faith player.

The Gainesville coach saw Hogan, grabbed him hard by the shoulders and said, “You’ll never know what your people did for these kids tonight. You’ll never, ever know.”

And as the bus pulled away, all the Gainesville players crammed to one side and pressed their hands to the window, staring at these people they’d never met before, watching their waves and smiles disappearing into the night.

Were the Gainesville players creeped out by the Bibles and notes of encouragement? I don’t think so. Serving takes the creepy out of seeking.