



MAUNDY THURSDAY AT HOME EXPERIENCE GUIDE: FOOT-WASHING CEREMONY

It is often a practice of Christians to celebrate Maundy Thursday with two elements: the Lord's Supper and a Foot Washing Ceremony.

FOR BACKGROUND & REFLECTION:

by Pastor Jim Caler

Why do we do this foot washing ceremony?

The idea for this ceremony comes from John 13:1-17. In this passage, Jesus was celebrating an ancient festival with His disciples, called Passover. The Passover (or Seder) meal was the lynch-pin in this feast, as it carried so many reminders of what God had done for His people when He rescued them from slavery in Egypt.

But before the meal, Jesus took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around His waist. He poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of His disciples.

If you've ever washed your feet (or your child's feet) after playing outside in flip-flops all day, you may have an inkling of how dirty a job this was. But not only was this job dirty, it was degrading. Only servants washed feet. But when He was done, he spoke these words:

"Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 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 13:12-17)

What He had done was meant to be an example of how His people were to treat others – with humility.

Washing someone's feet and having them wash yours can change you for many reasons:

1. It can start the healing process in a broken relationship. Can you imagine washing the feet of your spouse after they've hurt you, and them letting them wash yours? Powerful stuff. I have seen adult weep hot, salty tears during this ceremony as walls break down in their hearts.
2. It strips the normal hierarchy from groups. Pastor and child are alike when we wash each other's feet.
3. When our feet are being washed, we grow a little more trust as we vulnerably let our dirty feet be touched and seen.

Really, isn't that what Easter and the Kingdom of God are all about?

Are we literally supposed to wash everyone's feet?

Probably not, no. Jesus often spoke on multiple levels.

One one level, He was saying, "Literally, wash each other's feet as a sign of humility, like I have done for you."

And on a deeper level, He was saying, "Humble yourselves and live sacrificially, as I have done for you. Serve each other, even in the most uncomfortable places and ways."

Practicing this literal foot-washing is a great training ground for learning to serve, and be served. The first time I saw this done with children was when a children's pastor friend of mine did this with a large group of kids. She wrapped a towel around her waist, poured a basin of water, and proceeded to choose a child. Most kids scooted their feet back, unwilling to be served in this way.

When a child finally accepted the offer, there was much nervous giggling around the room.

Why do they giggle, I wondered?

Was being served in such an intimate way SO uncomfortable that they couldn't even handle watching?

There was something so deeply moving about the object lesson that they found it easier to stay on the surface. Afterward, the pastor talked to them about how they felt, and showed them that it felt uncomfortable because we weren't used to such displays of humility – both from the foot-washer and the foot-washed.

What about adults? Should we do it too?

I have also experienced the foot washing ceremony with peers. Once it was at a youth camp when the tittering could be chalked up to youthful self-consciousness. But other times I did it with adults, and it was just as uncomfortable, maybe more. There may have been a few giggles in those groups as well.

Why was it so uncomfortable?

I think it's because we don't like being vulnerable. Often, as Christians, it's easier to be the one doing the foot-washing than to have our feet washed. It's hard to open ourselves up, with our warts (literally), fungus, and squidgy toes.

It's humbling to wash someone's feet, yes, but it's almost MORE humbling in our culture to receive the foot-washing. Both are necessary, and help us develop humility.

Maundy Thursday (the day before Good Friday) is the day that ancient Christian tradition has done this foot washing ceremony.

In the passage on the previous page, we see that Jesus commanded His followers to wash each others feet, following his example.

Maundy Thursday is the same day that Jewish people celebrate the Passover (Seder) meal. Do you see the connection?



FOOT-WASHING SERVICE:

Here's a simple approach you can use on Maundy Thursday or at any point in your Easter celebration to experience a foot washing.



**SEEING
JESUS**
THE SERVANT MESSIAH

Please note: If you are alone and want to participate in this experience, I see two possible approaches:

1. Simply follow the "ceremony" below and instead of washing your own feet, consider how you can serve someone around you humbly during this time. Is there someone in your neighborhood that could use a phone call? Is there garbage on your street that needs picked up? Is there an elderly person you can help shelter in place by doing their grocery shopping with?
2. The second approach will take a little more imagination, but perhaps you could connect with others via zoom or something similar. You again would walk through the ceremony and when you get to the foot-washing piece – maybe you could share ideas together of how you could sacrificially serve either each other or someone in your neighborhood/community. Could you each donate some money to help someone who's lost a job? Could you each take turns checking in on someone who is struggling with the social isolation during this time?

What you need:

- A Bible
- If younger kids are present, a copy of the *Jesus Storybook Bible* (find it on Amazon) or *Easter Love Letters from God* (find it on Amazon).
- Two towels (one for under the basin, and one to dry with)
- A basin or roasting pan (don't have either? A big bowl?)
- Warm water
- Soap (optional)

Read John 13:1-17. (If you prefer, you can read pages 286-288 in the *Jesus Storybook Bible* or page 8 of *Easter Love Letters from God**)

Say: We're going to do this, just as Jesus commanded.

Do: Wash each other's feet, making sure that every person has a chance to wash and be washed.

Ask: Afterward, ask:

- What were you thinking while you washed his/her feet?
- How did you feel?
- Why do you think you thought/felt that way?
- What were you thinking while having your feet washed?
- How did you feel?
- Why do you think you thought/felt that way?
- How does it make you feel that Jesus would wash our dirty feet?
- Why do you think Jesus wants us to do this?

Pray: Close with a pray of gratitude for the love of God shown to us through the sacrificial service of Jesus, and that He entrusts us to share that love with others around us.

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We would love to see your Maundy Thursday experience!
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