Love that takes the first step

Grades 1–5 • 60 minutes • John 13:1–17, 34–35; Galatians 5:22–23

What children are learning

Jesus washed his friends' feet because he loved them. Children will practice showing love with the Holy Spirit's help: notice who could use a hand, offer to help and listen to the answer.

Before class

For you. Find John 13:3–5, 12–15, 34–35 in your Bible before class. Keep a bookmark there for the reading. You'll also use John 13:34 for the memory verse.

Print before class. Print pages 5 and 7 for each child. Keep an extra copy of page 7 to demonstrate. Print one family page (page 6) per household.

For the table. A Bible, the printed pages, three pencils for the opening, and pencils or crayons for the children. A clean towel is optional for the Bible reading.

Words children may ask about. Love means caring about someone and choosing to do them good. To serve someone is to help them, as Jesus helped his friends.

Teach with care. A clean towel makes a simple visual for Jesus' service, with no touching or foot washing needed. Love and healthy boundaries belong together; children can seek trusted help with harm or unsafe secrets.

A note for the teacher. This outline is here to help you prepare and teach. As you teach, feel free to adjust the pace, change an activity, or spend more time on a child's question as the Holy Spirit leads you.

When the children arrive, begin on page 2. Teach pages 2–4 in order.

Love that takes the first step

0–5 min · Welcome the children

Begin. Hold three pencils and a stack of lesson sheets. Let one pencil roll onto the table. Ask, “If you saw that happen while my hands were full, what might you say?” Hear two offers. Answer one as you would if a child offered to help.

5–10 min · Worship and opening prayer

Worship together. Sing a familiar song of praise. If you are leading without music, invite each child to finish “God, thank you for…” aloud or quietly.

Pray. God, thank you for bringing us together. Help us hear what you want to teach us today. Amen.

10–23 min · Open the Bible together

Lead into the reading. Jesus was eating with his friends when he got up from the table. Listen for the job he chose to do for them.

Read aloud. Read John 13:3–5, 12–15, 34–35 aloud from your Bible. Pause briefly before you ask the first question.

Background for you. If the children need more of the story, use the details below from John 13:1–17, 34–35; Galatians 5:22–23.

Jesus knew that his time with the disciples before the cross was nearly over. At their meal he did something surprising. He got up, wrapped a towel around his waist, and began washing his disciples’ feet. Feet became dusty on the roads, and this was usually a humble job. Their teacher chose to serve them.

Peter struggled to accept what Jesus was doing. Jesus explained that his friends needed what he would do for them. Afterward, Jesus asked them to think about his example: if their Lord and teacher served them, they should serve one another. Jesus did not stop being Lord when he took the towel. His love showed what his leadership was like.

Jesus also gave his disciples a command to love one another as he had loved them. This love would help others recognize his followers. We do not earn Jesus’ love by doing kind jobs. We receive his love and ask the Holy Spirit to help it grow into loving actions, including toward people who cannot repay us.

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23–31 min · Talk about what you heard

Ask. What did Jesus pick up, and what did he do with it?

Listen for. He took a towel and used it to dry his friends' feet after he washed them.

Keep talking. Jesus was their teacher, and he still washed their dusty feet. What did he ask his friends to do for one another? If needed, read John 13:14–15 again.

Connect to Jesus. Jesus loved his friends enough to wash their feet and give his life for them. We can ask his Spirit to help us notice who needs a hand.

31–47 min · Love takes a useful first step

Give out the materials. Give each child an activity sheet. Point to each heading as you read it aloud. Notice a need / Ask and listen / Offer useful help.

Try it together. Tell a partner, "I'm new here. Where do I put my things?" Have the partner point to a place and offer to walk there with you. Switch roles. This time the newcomer says, "Thanks, I can find it." Practice hearing that answer, too.

For younger children. Let a child be the newcomer who points to where their bag should go. Practice asking, "Would you like help?"

For older children. Give two different answers when a partner offers help. Ask, "What would love look like if the answer were no?"

Tidy up. Keep the pencils or crayons out for page 5. Ask children to set their finished work beside them.

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47–51 min · Give children a moment to respond

Offer the student page. Hand out page 5 and read the choices aloud. Each child can answer one. Take a spoken answer, or give them a quiet minute to draw or write.

51–55 min · Remember a verse

Read and echo. Read John 13:34 in your Bible. Invite everyone to echo one short phrase at a time. Ask which word or phrase they would like to remember.

55–60 min · Take it into the week

Ask. Who might appreciate a little help today? What could you ask them so they get a say?

Pray together. Lead the children in a prayer about what they learned today.

Example prayer. Jesus, thank you for loving us first. Holy Spirit, help us notice and serve others.

At the door. Send home each child’s work. Give one Family Connection page to each household.