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RUF Bible Study – The Gospel According to Peter  
Oct. 4, 2006  
Washing Your Feet – John 13

*John 13:3-6 Jesus knew that the Father had put him in complete charge of everything, that he came from God and was on his way back to God. So he got up from the supper table, set aside his robe, and put on an apron. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his apron. When he got to Simon Peter, Peter said, "Master, you wash my feet?"*

*7 Jesus answered, "You don't understand now what I'm doing, but it will be clear enough to you later."*

*8 Peter persisted, "You're not going to wash my feet—ever!"*

*Jesus said, "If I don't wash you, you can't be part of what I'm doing."*

*9 "Master!" said Peter. "Not only my feet, then. Wash my hands! Wash my head!"*

*10-12 Jesus said, "If you've had a bath in the morning, you only need your feet washed now and you're clean from head to toe. My concern, you understand, is holiness, not hygiene. So now you're clean. But not every one of you." (He knew who was betraying him. That's why he said, "Not every one of you.") After he had finished washing their feet, he took his robe, put it back on, and went back to his place at the table.*

*12-17 Then he said, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Master,' and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet. I've laid down a pattern for you. What I've done, you do. I'm only pointing out the obvious. A servant is not ranked above his master; an employee doesn't give orders to the employer. If you understand what I'm telling you, act like it—and live a blessed life.*

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*31-32 When he had left, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is seen for who he is, and God seen for who he is in him. The moment God is seen in him, God's glory will be on display. In glorifying him, he himself is glorified—glory all around!*

*33 "Children, I am with you for only a short time longer. You are going to look high and low for me. But just as I told the Jews, I'm telling you: 'Where I go, you are not able to come.'*

*34-35 "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other."*

What defines greatness for you? What would you say would help you be on top, be great? In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins looks at companies that he claims made the transition from good to great. He analyzes their strategies and business plans, and he interviews their presidents and workers. He claims that a certain type of leadership, confronting the brutal facts, never giving up hope, getting the right people on the team, being disciplined, and getting ahead of technology instead of behind it make a company, and possibly a person great.

What about you? What about on our campus? What makes people great? Who do you want to be like? Who do you want to hang around? What makes a great sorority, a great senior, a great scholar, a great businessman, a great boyfriend, or for that matter, a great campus ministry?

I contend that, like most places, what makes people or groups great is a combination of: beauty, wealth, charisma, family name, hard work, innovation, and an ability to amass a certain amount of people to accomplish a task that seems important to people.

Those aren't bad things. It's just that – and this might be important – Jesus disagrees. Wholeheartedly disagrees. And he shows Peter that those qualities aren't what it takes in his kingdom to lead.

### ***What Jesus Did***

This is the night of the Passover.<sup>2</sup> He has sent his disciples out to prepare the room and the meal. Peter is one of those who has gone to help. I wonder what Peter thought about that. He was Jesus' best friend, and here he was running around town getting things ready. What happened to Jesus' posse? His entourage? Wasn't he supposed to be treated with

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[www.ouruf.org](http://www.ouruf.org).

For this series, I used commentaries all throughout the gospels. I also used as my base text Michael Card's book, *The Fragile Stone*. I consulted sermons by Rev. Tim Keller found out [www.redeemer.com](http://www.redeemer.com) in many instances. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

<sup>2</sup> I realize there is some debate over the timing of this. It is either a different way to say the same thing as the Synoptics or else John is reporting the tradition that some people celebrated the Passover a night early.

respect and honor? In fact, Luke 22 tells us that they were arguing that night again about who would be the greatest in the group. Who would get to sit next to Jesus in the place of honor? Who would be greatest in the kingdom?

He was helping with the preparations. And then they all showed up in this room. What a group. Not particularly the most distinguished group of men ever assembled, but still they were there and others weren't. They would have been standing around waiting for – oops. Something has been forgotten. The meal is all set out. The chairs are ready, The table set. And there would be a bowl for washing. They needed a servant to wash their feet so they could be ready.

Jerusalem, like any city or any place, was dirty. The men would have bathed before they came, but with the sandals and the dirt, they would have needed a foot washing before they could sit down. The way they sat would have been more of a recliner, or a pool chair, so it was more important that their feet be clean. This was a job for a slave. And it was a job for a Gentile slave, as the Jews thought it was beneath their whole race of people.

Just keep in mind that their feet weren't any nicer than ours. I have warts on my big left toe. Plantars warts that I can't get off. I've dug them out with a knife. I've frozen them. I've sealed them off from air with duct tape. They're still there. Washing my feet means washing my toe warts. Disgusting.

There they all stood, waiting, wondering what would happen. No one moved. They had forgotten the slave.

Then, and I would guess you could hear a pin drop, something incredible happened. Jesus took off his garments, and wrapped a towel around his waist, took the bowl and stooped down to wash their feet.

Have you ever forgotten to do something and then it was done when you got there? Someone else did it for you?

Have you ever had a friend who was doing something completely inappropriate and embarrassing?

Combine those two moments and you have something like this. They couldn't believe, couldn't comprehend that the Son of God, the Messiah, the living and true God, the Word made flesh, the prophet, priest and king, the only redeemer of God's elect, would wash their feet. The Savior isn't supposed to suffer, submit or serve. And by the end of the day, he'll have done all three.

Let me point out that Jesus washes all of their feet, including Judas'. He extends his grace and service that far. He showed them love in a way they could not comprehend. Augustus Toplady wrote the hymn O Love Incomprehensible.

Jesus shows them a parable, illustrating his words in Mark 10: *Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage.*"

We'll talk about Peter's reaction to this, but I want you to see that this is the night before his arrest, trial and death. What would you be thinking about? What would you be like? Sweating bullets? Would you be nervous, jittery, need a smoke? Would you get drunk and wasted?

Jesus is thinking of others, and he is in complete control. As you look at the rest of the passage, you see that Jesus is making sure that his friends know that he knows. He doesn't want them to think he's been taken by surprise, but he also doesn't want them to stop things from happening. The Son of Man must die. But don't think he was surprised by it. That is what is happening when he sends Judas away, when he talks in mystery. He is deeply troubled, to be sure, but he is in control all the way through.

His humility is astounding. Think of Philippians 2 and what is really happening here. God is washing dirty feet.

### ***What Peter Did***

We love Peter. Peter helps us so much when he starts talking. The other disciples are stunned into silence. They keep their mouths shut when they don't understand. Not Peter. He blurts out, No way, Jesus!

This is inappropriate. This is embarrassing. This isn't what God does – act like God! This first response of Peter's is really that of the irreligious. I don't need to be washed by you Jesus. Again, this is a pattern we see in the gospels, even in Peter's life.

He is very content to have Jesus be a good teacher, a wise man, a rabbi who says profound things. But when Jesus starts to talk about death and dying, when he moves into sin and payment for sin, redemption, then we have to draw the line. Simon says no to Jesus. He's the only one who does that to his face, though of course it happened and happens all the time. This wasn't a rejection of Jesus' friendship, but a denial of who Jesus really is – their Servant Lord. Of all the inappropriate things you've done, this is the most inappropriate, Peter says. This is embarrassing, Jesus.

Why is this? Because pride gets in the way. Pride tells us that we don't need to be washed, not by God. "Pride has moved from being the chief of the Seven [deadly sins], the root of much evil, to being the root of all virtue, a positive good to be lovingly practiced and cultivated. Pride has been rehabilitated from being a vice to be avoided and has become a great virtue to be cultivated – Black Pride, Gay Pride, Southern Pride, and on and on."<sup>3</sup>

"Pride is misdirected love, as love perverted and misapplied. This points to the insidious, subtle quantity of much of our sin. If sin were a matter of performing some self-evident, obvious wrong, then we would never be sinners. Yet sin is rarely self-evidently bad. It takes training, analysis, and much living and reflection, prayer and quiet consideration to be a

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<sup>3</sup> William Willimon, *Sinning Like a Christian*, 33-34

sinner – that is, to know sin when one does it. The rest of the world, uniformed by the story of Jesus, considers Pride an essential characteristic of the well-functioning personality. Christians are taught to be more suspicious.”<sup>4</sup>

Peter is saying that he would rather eat the meal with dirty feces feet right by the food than allow a good man to serve him. That is pride.

Jesus was showing humility, and Peter was showing irreligious pride. Jesus answers that pride though. He says something more severe: Unless I wash you, you have no part of me.! This is a throw down. Unless Jesus does this, there is no salvation for Peter. If Peter denies the humility of the Suffering Servant, he cannot take part in what Jesus is doing. His refusal to be served by Jesus renders him unusable as a future servant of Jesus. Until Peter submits to who Jesus really is, how can he become one of his disciples?

If you're too good to be served by Jesus, then you don't understand anything at all about him. Will you allow yourself to be washed, to be served by Jesus?

But then we get something more, another outburst by Peter. This is the religious answer. Then Peter's passion goes overboard. Wash all of me, then! Does Peter really mean this? Is he really going to strip down and get a sponge bath in front of the others to show his devotion to Jesus?

What Peter is doing here is overdoing it. He is making a show of how pious he is to be washed by Jesus all over. How willing to be served he is. How unwilling again he is to let Jesus set the agenda of what it is he is doing for him. Peter wants an even greater experience. He wants to minimize the dirtiness of his feet by adding to that the cleanliness of his body. Thus, the percentage of dirtiness goes down.

Jesus' answer points out that he's trivializing Jesus' work on his behalf by saying that it isn't good enough to only wash his feet. It's another form of pride. It is the pride of the older brother in the prodigal son story. The one who moved away from the love of the father by doing everything right.

All of this is an illustration by Jesus of our spiritual condition. He is showing us by serving us. But he is showing also that if you are clean on the inside, if you are justified and in him, his friend, his disciple, then you are okay. But you still need your feet washed. You need sanctification. You are not all the way clean all the time yet. You still get dirty and still need the work of the servant on your behalf.

He makes sure we know that this is his point, by talking about Judas. Judas had clean feet, on the outside, but not on the inside, not in his heart. He was a poser, pretending to be served by Jesus when in fact he had already betrayed him.

### ***What We Do***

What makes us great? Anything but service. Not true service. That's just too much for us. I can only find one book on my shelves about serving others. Do I not own any? Are there any written? Is it just so obvious that why write a book about it? If I read one, would it really make any difference to me?

Humility and love go together. They are inseparable. Jesus is down on his hands and knees, and we are ashamed of him, ashamed for him. He is so uncool when he does that.

Amy Carmichael, the intrepid missionary to India in the first half of the 20th century, used to require higher caste converts to hew stones and dig foundations for a house right in front of low caste coolies. In Indian culture, nothing could be more degrading than for a high caste person to perform work that was strictly low caste labor, and it was even worse to do that work in public where everyone could see. No sterner test could be found. She pointed out that she could have given these new Christians any amount of other work to do and it would not have required any of the spirit that Jesus showed here. As she put it, "It is honorable to preach and grace in teaspoons would have been enough for a preaching tour. But ditch digging lent dignity to nobody. Grace in rivers was required for this. Day by day they grew in manliness." [E. Elliot, *A Chance to Die*, 264]

How do you react to that story? What do you think about this "lesson" Carmichael was teaching the converts?

What keeps us from serving?

Democracy – We are a people preoccupied with our rights. We are worried that someone may be gaining an advantage in the state, in the world, in our town and that means that we are gaining a disadvantage. The worry about rights all the time will keep you from serving.

Egalitarianism – if you think you earned everything you have, then you will be very reluctant to give any of it up.

Self focus – it's hard to even think of others and know their needs when you cannot see them because you're so interested in yourself, your career, your stuff, your grades, your... everything.

Pride – we've mentioned this, but it is worse than we think. Because we can even be prideful about our good things. It's really hard to do anything and be humble about it. In his book, *Sinning Like a Christian*, William Willimon looks at the seven deadly sins and writes: "I don't like to stoop. Do you? I don't like to turn and become as a little child. I like to be in charge, in command, on top. In my more dishonest moments, I think I may be somebody who has done something, something approximating the immortal. Thus Pride is virtually unavoidable. I may keep my nose clean of Gluttony, Lust and even Envy, on my better days. But Pride is me all over, good days and bad, a byproduct of the world's

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<sup>4</sup> Willimon, 41

acclaim when my life is doing well, a strategy for self-preservation when my life is not doing well. I might be able to present myself to you as a basically good person, were it not for Pride being the first of the Seven. I sin, and sometimes when I'm doing the best I can, that, thanks to Pride, is my worst sin.

There's another thing that keeps us from serving others, something David Goetz in his book *Death by Suburbs* calls the Shirker personality. This term comes from a man who studies deer (cervids is the broader class) with the funky name of Valerius Geist. He says that most of the award-winning antler racks come from bucks who have shirked their duties to fight their peers. If a buck doesn't engage in the fight, then his antlers are left to grow and grown and they also will grow straight and symmetrically since they won't ever get broken. These bucks hide from the group, hang out by themselves and are passive in the herd. It's these shirker bucks that hunters most like to kill.<sup>5</sup>

Goetz says that life in our world today is much like these shirker bucks. They look good, but they lack courage and substance. Goetz explains: "One sure sign of a Shirker is his or her relentless, unreflective pursuit of significance. I want to make a difference with my life. I want to make my life count. I want more from my life than investment banking. I'm weary of making money; I want to help poor people become suburbanites just like I am. I want to go on a mission trip and give money to help train church leaders worldwide.

"The problem isn't with the act of service but with its motivation. The fifth key spiritual practice is to move from the pursuit of significance in your life to simple obedience to the things of God. One feeds the self, the other starves it. One promises self-fulfillment, the other actually delivers it, but not in the way you expect. (101)

Religion in the burbs tends to be more a program to join than it is an experience that changes your life. The more I participate in the programs, the further I remove myself from the deep suffering of the world. That's too bad. The entrance to the thicker, deeper life in Christ goes directly through the suffering of others. (108)

When you feel the thirst for more of Jesus Christ, find a hopeless case or a hopeless cause. (116) I have a friend who is a counselor. One of his first clients was a woman who was really angry at being there. She told him that. He asked, "What do you want to talk about?" She sat in silence. So he did too, waiting for her answer. And he squirmed. And he sweated. And he prayed. And he worried. And finally he said, "Well, our hours up. See you next week." That went on for months. Months. He served her in the tough way of silence. She actually ended up serving him by making him trust in God instead of his own talking, counseling abilities.

As I progress spiritually, I should feel less need to do only that which promotes my self and the extension of my self (my kids, for example). My life becomes a reverse flow. Instead of collecting religious experiences, I expend myself with not thought of results.

"The odyssey into the thicker life in God is always 'active and practical, not passive and theoretical. It is an organic life-process... which the whole self does; not something as to which its intellect holds an opinion.'" (120-121)

Blah, blah blah. So what? Okay, so we don't serve enough. Are you convinced? Let's talk about how we can serve.<sup>6</sup>

We can serve our *campus*.

How are you serving the community in which you live? Have you considered volunteering for the pregnancy resource shelter, or getting involved in places and ministries that deal with racial reconciliation, homeless shelters, English as a second language? Those would be great places to serve, no matter what the results are. It is our goal to be a ministry FOR the campus not simply a ministry ON the campus.

We can serve our *neighbors*.

How are you loving people in your house or dorm or sorority, radically like Christ? Do you ever do the dishes, clean the bathroom, take out the trash when it is not your turn? Do you ever take the time to show your roommates that you really care enough not to be in a hurry and ask them sincerely how they are?

We can serve *RUF* and *the church*.

How are you serving Jesus through this ministry? Do you look to RUF to serve you primarily or to you look to serve RUF? Do you look to serve your church or do you look to for your church to serve you? Why do we approach ministries/churches and ask "what can this do for me?" Why do we so often say, "I am not getting much out of this..." Why, if we do say something we are more likely to complain about something than to ask how we can serve... In our culture, in our socioeconomic group, you have been taught to ask "What can you do for me?" You are afraid of weakness, you are afraid of messiness, you are afraid that you won't be doing something significant. You are afraid that is won't be able to go on your resume.

Most of us want to serve in ministries that give us strokes. But the junior high ministry with five people, some of which are just weird and awkward and messed up – it needs your help. Talking with old people in the nursing homes. Being friends with someone who really may never get better. Setting up and cleaning up for meetings. Don't be swayed into thinking that all the hype will really make you know God better. Serve the needy. Trust in God.

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<sup>5</sup> You can read about this at: <http://www.rmef.org/bugle/pages/04JF/geist.html>

<sup>6</sup> much of this comes from adapted thoughts from RUF cm Brent Harriman in an email to me.

We can serve through *our relationships with the opposite sex*.

Do you think of serving or of using others? Have you thought of how you can serve each other in dating? How you can be serving each other as friends, serving in humility instead of defensive sarcasm. How you can be aware of others needs instead of only promote your needs. To be honest, most of us don't want to be served, we want to be worshipped.

Men, do you know that you can serve the women by taking them out on dates and talking to them. Do you know that most complain that only nonChristian guys will ever ask them out? You can serve them by going places with them as their friends. Ladies, you can serve the men by saying yes when they ask you out. It takes courage, so make it easy for them. If they keep asking you out, you can say no too, but friends do things together. You can go out on a date and not be dating. It is possible. We can serve and love each other by spending time together and being friends this way.

Do you all know that marriage is committing to serving one another, above anyone else, for the rest of your life? It's not about status or sex ever day or feeling good, but really about commitment, gospel and serving. Here's a good question to ask yourself when you're thinking about marriage: Can I see myself serving this person for the rest of my life? Are you really going to mean it when you get up there and say you'll be faithful into the future "through sickness and health, through rich and poor, through beauty and affliction, through glory and suffering...?"

Have you thought about what that might mean. Do you know what it's like to clean up your wife's vomit? That's pretty bad. But what if your spouse becomes mentally ill? Will you serve her then?

Jesus shows us that we can help others by serving in humility. Look around you. These are people to serve. Walk back home. Those are people to serve. Not because of all that you're going to get. Forget about the new ways you'll be able to do them. They will know we are Christians by our.... Love.

When you look around there are so many needs. Are you interested in meeting any of them? Without fanfare or accolades, just because the need was there and you could help? Will you wash feet? Will you serve?

Probably not, for the reasons I mentioned. The good thing is that Jesus Christ came not for servers. This isn't a test of our salvation. No, he came to seek and to save sinners. He came for the lost, the proud, the selfish, the religious and the irreligious. He came for Peter, the one who would be sifted like sand by Satan, the one who would that very night betray him. He came to serve you. Does that move you in any way?

If so, then we get to participate with him in just that sort of radical redemption of the world. Jesus calls us to give up our power, not collect more and more of it. He says that we are rich when we are poor, that we are free when we are bound to him, that we live when we follow the cross and die. Christians are called to be good rather than great, called to be saints rather than heroes. Michael Molinos, the sixteenth century [sic – Miquel Molinos lived from 1628-1697] Christian mystic, wrote, "We labor without personal interest. We labor merely for the glory of God... We are like the young men who work in the field with their father. At the end of the day, unlike the hired labor, we receive no pay. But at the end of the year, we enjoy all things."<sup>7</sup>

I'll let Rick Reilly, not usually known for his sermon illustrations, finish this one off for me:  
[From Sports Illustrated, By Rick Reilly]

*I try to be a good father. Give my kids mulligans. Work nights to pay for their text messaging. Take them to swimsuit shoots. But compared with Dick Hoyt, I suck.*

*Eighty-five times he's pushed his disabled son, Rick, 26.2 miles in Marathons. Eight times he's not only pushed him 26.2 miles in a Wheelchair but also towed him 2.4 miles in a dinghy while swimming and Pedaled him 112 miles in a seat on the handlebars--all in the same day.*

*Dick's also pulled him cross-country skiing, taken him on his back mountain climbing and once hauled him across the U.S. On a bike. Makes taking your son bowling look a little lame, right?*

*And what has Rick done for his father? Not much--except save his life.*

*This love story began in Winchester, Mass., 43 years ago, when Rick was strangled by the umbilical cord during birth, leaving him Brain-damaged and unable to control his limbs.*

*"He'll be a vegetable the rest of his life;" Dick says doctors told him And his wife, Judy, when Rick was nine months old. "Put him in an Institution."*

*But the Hoyts weren't buying it. They noticed the way Rick's eyes Followed them around the room. When Rick was 11 they took him to the engineering department at Tufts University and asked if there was anything to help the boy communicate. "No way," Dick says he was told. "There's nothing going on in his brain."*

*"Tell him a joke," Dick countered. They did. Rick laughed. Turns out a lot was going on in his brain. Rigged up with a computer that allowed Him to control the cursor by touching a switch with the side of his Head, Rick was finally able to communicate. First words? "Go Bruins!" And after a high school classmate was paralyzed in an accident and the school organized a charity run for him, Rick pecked out, "Dad, I want to do that."*

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<sup>7</sup> Found in Goetz

*Yeah, right. How was Dick, a self-described "porker" who never ran more than a mile at a time, going to push his son five miles? Still, he tried. "Then it was me who was handicapped," Dick says. "I was sore for two weeks."*

*That day changed Rick's life. "Dad," he typed, "when we were running, it felt like I wasn't disabled anymore!"*

*And that sentence changed Dick's life. He became obsessed with giving Rick that feeling as often as he could. He got into such hard-belly shape that he and Rick were ready to try the 1979 Boston Marathon.*

*"No way," Dick was told by a race official. The Hoyts weren't quite a single runner, and they weren't quite a wheelchair competitor. For a few years Dick and Rick just joined the massive field and ran anyway, then they found a way to get into the race officially: In 1983 they ran another marathon so fast they made the qualifying time for Boston the following year.*

*Then somebody said, "Hey, Dick, why not a triathlon?"*

*How's a guy who never learned to swim and hadn't ridden a bike since he was six going to haul his 110-pound kid through a triathlon? Still, Dick tried.*

*Now they've done 212 triathlons, including four grueling 15-hour Ironmans in Hawaii. It must be a buzzkill to be a 25-year-old stud getting passed by an old guy towing a grown man in a dinghy, don't you think?*

*Hey, Dick, why not see how you'd do on your own? "No way," he says. Dick does it purely for "the awesome feeling" he gets seeing Rick with a cantaloupe smile as they run, swim and ride together.*

*This year, at ages 65 and 43, Dick and Rick finished their 24th Boston Marathon, in 5,083rd place out of more than 20,000 starters. Their best time? Two hours, 40 minutes in 1992--only 35 minutes off the world record, which, in case you don't keep track of these things, happens to be held by a guy who was not pushing another man in a wheelchair at the time.*

*"No question about it," Rick types. "My dad is the Father of the Century."*

*And Dick got something else out of all this too. Two years ago he had a mild heart attack during a race. Doctors found that one of his arteries was 95% clogged. "If you hadn't been in such great shape," one doctor told him, "you probably would've died 15 years ago." So, in a way, Dick and Rick saved each other's life.*

*Rick, who has his own apartment (he gets home care) and works in Boston, and Dick, retired from the military and living in Holland, Mass., always find ways to be together. They give speeches around the country and compete in some backbreaking race every weekend, including this Father's Day.*

*That night, Rick will buy his dad dinner, but the thing he really wants to give him is a gift he can never buy.*

*"The thing I'd most like," Rick types, "is that my dad sit in the chair and I push him once."*

Who are you in this story?