



What would it be like to sit and listen, one-on-one, to the wisdom of a wise, loving and funny man during the last months of his life? That's the experience we recorded in 1997 when the book, *Tuesdays with Morrie* was released. It quickly captured the hearts of readers. Two years later it was made into a movie. One year later it topped the *New York Times* non-fiction bestseller list.

I was a little slow to jump on the bandwagon because I didn't read the book until four years ago, many years into its publication. And as I carried the book into coffee shops or parks to read, I experienced a strange convergence of community: people wanted to talk with me about the book. Strangers would see me carrying the book and say, "Don't you just love that book?" or "Oh, you're reading *Tuesdays with Morrie*. I love that book." They ask, "Don't you just love that book?" or "I've heard such great things about that book, do you like it? I'm thinking about reading it."

I really liked this book because every page was packed with wisdom from Morrie Schwartz, a retired sociology professor. But there are a ton of books written by wise professors. What made this book stand out from them was the looming death of Morrie. His terminal disease heightened the importance of all his words. As you read the pages you're keenly aware that a dying man would not waste his breathe on trivial words. This is no casual conversation. These are words to savor and ponder. That's why *Tuesdays with Morrie* captures your heart.

This summer, we will be sitting and listening to the wisdom of another dying man: Jesus Christ. He's wiser, more loving, smarter and more interesting than any person in human history. He is the embodiment of all of our desires. In John 13-17 we get to eavesdrop on Jesus' conversation with his closest friends. What will he say to them? What do his words mean in the face of his looming death? As we read through these chapters each week we need to be keenly aware that a dying man does not waste his breath on trivial words. There is no casual conversation here. His death is coming in less than 24 hours and Jesus is sharing the last dinner he's going to have with his disciples before he dies.

Imagine yourself sitting at the table, sharing this meal with Jesus and your closest friends. You're not sitting in a chair; you're lying down, propped up on your left elbow, reaching for food and drink with your right hand. Strange that no one is there to perform the menial task of washing feet. Not that big of a deal; certainly some servants will be coming soon; one of them will do

it. So you recline at the table and start munching on the bread. Then Jesus does a very uncommon and unexpected thing. He gets up and washes the disciples' feet.

**It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "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 13:1–17).**

A much deeper service was foreshadowed in verse 10 when Jesus says, ***"Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."*** Jesus is foreshadowing his death and resurrection and the heart cleansing that comes from it.

Jesus should not be doing this. This menial task was for the lowest of servants. The disciples are stunned and confused—no surprise there. Afterward he talks about cleansing, tells them to wash one another's feet, reminds them to be like him; specifically in verse 15 Jesus tells them *“do as I have done.”*

It's like a master dance instructor who's just shown a new dance move and then he says to his students, “do as I have done.” It's like a parent who's just cleaned a room and then says to their child, “do as I have done.” Jesus, the greatest teacher ever, shows us the power of teaching by doing. He could have reclined in his spot and simply talked to them. He could have pointed out their failure to see the needs of others. He could have told inspirational stories of how he served in the past. He could have explained that he wants them to think not only of themselves but also the interests of others. He could have broken them into partners and had them wash each other's feet.

But that's not what he did because that kind of teaching is hollow. Jesus is a living example and model of what he expects: He is the Servant King.

Have you ever had an authority figure **show** you how, instead of only **telling** you how, to do something? When I was 12 years old my dad taught me how to mow and edge our lawn by showing me. First, he had me walk beside him as he walked back and forth with the mower. He showed me how to slightly overlap the rows in order to cut the grass smoothly. He showed me how to kick the bag and feel if the catch bag was ready to be dumped. He showed me how the grass begins to pile up if the catch bag gets too full. Then he showed me how to hold the weed eater upside down and walk steadily to create a straight edge. By the time I was released to do the job by myself, I had been thoroughly trained because he showed me. And when I made mistakes, he'd show me again.

Jesus knows the power of teaching by showing; he's the greatest teacher ever. After he's shown them the foot washing, he tells them, “Do as I have done.” Some understand this to mean wash one another's feet. Some churches regularly practice foot washing services. Neither myself nor the elders here at CPC believe this to be the meaning here. There's nothing wrong with washing someone's feet to symbolize servanthood and love. But Jesus didn't intend for this to be repeated for generations and generations like communion or baptism.

Instead, I think Jesus had more in mind than washing feet. The washing of feet was simply a powerful tool to show the greater lessons: Serve Others and Love Others.

### Serving Others

Verses 4–10 describe the foot washing. Serving is meeting a practical need of someone else. Serving is not doing something that you were planning to do that turned out to be helpful to someone else. Serving is intentionally choosing to put the needs

of others before yours, regardless of how unpleasant the task. Jesus lays aside his privileged status to serve them. Jesus chose to put their needs before his own.

It's insightful to observe what Jesus laid aside when he washed his disciples feet. He laid aside the honor and privilege associated with great knowledge:

Jesus knew it was time for him to die (v. 1).

Jesus knew he had power over everything (v. 3).

Jesus knew he had come from God (v. 3).

Jesus knew he was returning to God (v. 3).

Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him (v. 11).

Jesus knew that Peter was going to deny him three times in the next 12 hours (verses 8–10).

Usually the person in the room who knows the most is in charge. Jesus knows the most here. And yes, he's in charge. But he lays aside the natural prestige and notoriety that comes from knowledge and serves.

But knowledge wasn't the only thing Jesus laid aside. He also laid aside the chance to misuse his unlimited power. God had put all things under his power. Jesus had unlimited power! No doubt, the person in a room with the most power is in charge. That person can do whatever they want and there's no one there to stop them. With unlimited power, Jesus could have summoned people to wash feet. He could have called angels from heaven to wash feet, yet he chose to humbly serve them instead.

In Jesus' willingness to lay so much aside, we see the love and humility of Jesus. He was not interested in grasping power that comes with knowing everything and possessing all power, although that is exactly what people grasp for every day. Jesus had this inner confidence that freed him up to serve others. And after he showed his disciples he told them, “Do as I have done.”

Let's think about ourselves and our service to others. In order to help you identify if there is potential for growth and development in the area of serving, I've put together a Top 5 list for us that shows you have room to grow in serving others

#5 – Just leave it here and someone else will pick it up.

#4 – I don't do poop diaperers.

#3 – That's not the way I'd do it, so I'm not available to help.

#2 – That is someone else's job.

#1 – I used to do that before I made a lot of money.

When Jesus calls us to serve others, he levels the playing field and removes the ability for anyone to say or think comments like this. In verse 16 he threw down the trump card when he said, “no servant (that's us) is greater than his master (that's him).” If we follow him, we serve others.

### Loving Others

In addition to serving others, Jesus expects us to Love Others because he loved. Verse 1 says *“having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”* Having loved his dear companions, he continued to love them right to the end.

This is no surprise really. Throughout his life Jesus has been modeling and telling us to love others. When Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, he said *“to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. And the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself.”* The teaching of Jesus, as he washes the disciples' feet, is an exclamation point on what he's modeled and taught his entire life on earth: love others.

To show the range of his love, Jesus served two people that we probably would not have served: Judas and Peter. He washed Judas' feet, knowing that Judas had already struck a deal with the Pharisees to betray him. He washed Peter's feet, knowing that Peter would deny him three times in the next 12 hours. He washed their feet because he loved them unconditionally, extravagantly, perfectly.

It's natural and easy to love people who are nice and likable and grateful. It's unnatural to love people who are grumpy and mean and selfish. When Jesus says, “do as I have done” he's including the difficult people. He's saying Serve Others and Love Others.

Two years ago I started getting healthier—intensifying my workouts, eating better and drinking more water. The hardest part for me was the water intake. I don't really like water, yet my trainer was telling me to drink two liters of it a day: that's eight 8-oz. glasses. Who comes up with this stuff? That's a ton of water! I couldn't do it until I found Propel powdered packets. You drop one of these into a 16 oz. bottle of water and I get all the benefits of drinking the water and it tastes delicious.

Now, I know you water snobs are judging me right now. Go ahead. I can take it because I'm married to a water snob. Cassie thinks water is just the way God wanted it to be. It tastes delicious and it should not be tampered with. I'm saying, “Hey, give me a break. I'm drinking more water now. I'm healthy!”

I respectfully listened to her opinion and decided I disagreed with her. I'm drinking water my way. No problem, right? We're entitled to different opinions. Well, not so. Cassie refused to buy me the Propel packets when she went grocery shopping. I had to make a special trip to buy my own.

On a hot summer day I was taking the kids to the beach by myself and Cassie had prepared a bag of snacks and drinks for us. We're having a great time playing in the waves and digging a huge hole in the sand. After a while we're hungry and thirsty. We go to the snack bag and I start passing out items to the kids and I see a water bottle with my name on it. And what do I think? “I bet she gave me regular water.” She packed it up and put it in

the bag. She doesn't approve of Propel. She had all of the power to pack whatever she wanted. I cracked open that bottle, put it to my lips, tilted it back and it had the sweet wonderful taste of Propel. Oh, how I loved my wife at that moment!

Notice how she was doing what Jesus instructed in these verses. She was serving me and loving me. She was serving me by meeting a practical need and loving me by laying down her opinions. She did not change her opinion about Propel. She simply decided that she loved me more than she loved her own opinion.

And in this we see the deeper truth of what Jesus is saying here. While the structure is pretty clear from this passage—do as I have done—the heart of what's going on here is this: we serve who or what we love. Cassie decided she loved me more than her opinion, so she served me. Jesus loved his disciples more than his perfect knowledge, his power, his rights, so he washed their feet. Then Jesus did the ultimate. He went to the cross. Jesus loved his disciples and us so completely that he served us by dying on the cross and rising from the dead so we might be free.

### Conclusion

As we spend a few minutes thinking about how we put this truth into practice, the ushers are going to pass out little pieces of towel to symbolize and remind us to be servants this week. As the plate comes by take one piece out.

I've been thinking about how Jesus' example of serving others and loving others is applied to our lives. A person could get really inspired from these verses of scripture, leave here and kick in a frenzy of serving and miss the whole point if their service is not done with a motivation of loving others. I think a lot of “so-called service” is done because we love ourselves. Jesus isn't talking about that. Service and love are intertwined because we serve who or what we love.

Applying this to our lives gets complicated and messy. If I ask you, “How would you evaluate your level of serving and loving others,” some of you will evaluate yourselves way too low. You'd say, “Oh I'm so horrible.” And some of you would go to the other extreme and say, “Yea, I'm pretty good on this.” Why such a discrepancy?

Each of us will measure ourselves based upon whom we compare ourselves. Compare yourself to someone struggling along, you feel like a champ. Compare yourself to a high energy, over-achiever, you feel like a complete failure. And who wants to compare yourself to Jesus? You'll never serve or love others as much as he did.

So perhaps Jesus isn't expecting us to frame this like a competition at all—me versus you and you versus me. Maybe instead Jesus is revealing a principle to us here that we serve who or what we love. Jesus would say to each one of us today, “love me

first and then love your neighbor and don't compare yourself to anyone else."

As you seek to apply John 13 to your life, I encourage you to evaluate your level of service to others and your love for others. I've been evaluating all week. I bet you find something similar to what I've found. I have a predetermined amount of service I'm comfortable giving away.

If you came to my house in the evening, you'd see me serving quite a bit: I wash dishes, pick up stuff, engage the kids, wash them, read to them, make lunches and on and on. These are my

predetermined acts of service. And as long as I stay within that boundary, everything is fine. But if more is expected of me, that's the real indicator of who or what I love.

If we gladly respond with a servants' heart, then we love them. If we grumble, complain or get angry, then we love something else. What is it? Maybe this towel can be a practical reminder to you this week to love others and serve them.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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Catalog No. 1359-1FC