

12 CLUELESS MEN

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 REGULAR BAPTIST
Press

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12 Clueless Men

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PREFACE

As much as I hate to admit it, my male ego appears to be alive and well! My temper stirs when someone suggests that my way is possibly not the best. At times my stubborn, know-it-all attitude creates obstacles in keeping an open relationship with my wife and kids. My ego shows up when I am driving a business colleague and he points out that I missed a turn. My ire rises when my wife reminds me that I haven't yet done something she has asked me do. My pride surfaces in a meeting when coworkers point out an alternative approach that I refuse to consider because I think my way is better. I can experience feelings of resentment when another person is chosen for a position rather than me.

Choosing the title *12 Clueless Men* for this study is probably a poor marketing decision. What man would ever pick up this book? Just imagine walking up to a bookstore counter and handing *12 Clueless Men* to a female cashier. She would probably assume you are another version of Forrest Gump. Maybe what I am really hoping is that a woman—such as a wife, mother, friend, or colleague—will pick up the study and leave it in a place where a man will find it. Of course, she needs to place it where no one else would see him looking at it. Or maybe, just maybe, he will be able to say, just as I have, “I need to make some changes.”

The basis for this study is the real-life interaction in John 13–16. Jesus had twelve men with Him who were His students for three years. He was preparing them for an extraordinary assignment: communicate the message of eternal life to lost people, and plant local churches where the Word of God would be faithfully taught. The disciples were

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soon to graduate from Christ's tutelage and embark on their mission, yet they still were not grasping the concepts Jesus had been teaching them. These were truly 12 Clueless Men!

But amazingly, shortly after this time of instruction, the lights came on for these men (minus one), who went on to turn the world upside down. What could God do through us men if we got a clue? My prayer is that this study might help the lights come on for us.

Oh, by the way, if you are still feeling weird about purchasing this book from a female cashier, keep the front side down when you place the book on the counter. Maybe the cashier will swipe the barcode and not turn it over. It's worth a try.

SCENE

1

CLUELESS IN PURPOSE

The tagline “Life is in their hands—death is on their minds!” from the classic movie *12 Angry Men* captures the story line perfectly. Almost exclusively, the setting of the movie is a jury room, where twelve men are deliberating whether an inner-city youth is guilty of murdering his father. As the movie begins, it appears the jury will find the defendant guilty. But one juror pauses the process by suggesting that the legal requirement “beyond a reasonable doubt” demands a careful consideration of the arguments and evidence. According to movie critic Roger Ebert, the film is “a crash course in those passages of the Constitution that promise defendants a fair trial and the presumption of innocence.” What unfolds in the 95-minute movie is intense drama, character study, erroneous assumptions, prejudice and bias, personal baggage, conflict and tension, along with the methodical process of resolution until the assembled group reaches a final agreement.

ANOTHER GROUP ACROSS CENTURIES

Go back in time to a much earlier century and a similar setting of men sitting around a table. The scene unfolds in John 13–16 with Jesus and twelve men, His closest followers, gathered around a table in an upper room in Jerusalem. During the previous three years, Jesus had been teaching and preparing these men to carry the gospel to the world and establish the church. In reality, these men had *eternal life in their hands* as the ones who would carry the gospel, but they appeared clueless to the importance of that time in the Upper Room. All they could think about were their own interests.

We, too, are often clueless to the person of Christ and what He came to accomplish. We fail to recognize the important assignment God has given to us because we are caught up in our own interests.

OPENING-SCENE DRAMA

According to John 13:1–3, major factors in Jesus' life came together in the Upper Room. Several key phrases capture our attention.

“Feast of the Passover” (v. 1). The Jewish holy day had originated centuries earlier, when God liberated His covenant people, Israel, from slavery in Egypt. The book of Exodus contains the account of the cruel bondage and eventual release of the Hebrews. To demonstrate their faith in God, the Israelites were to place the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their homes. Then God sent the death angel to pass over, exacting divine judgment against the Egyptians. The blood on the doorposts served as a symbol of loyalty to God and protection behind the substitutionary death of another.

“His hour had come that He should depart” (v. 1). This statement refers to Jesus' impending crucifixion as the substitute for sin that would satisfy the righteous demands of the holy God. This was the climax of Jesus' mission on earth.

“Having loved His own who were in the world” (v. 1). Christ's deep love for His comrades demonstrated His unselfish commitment to others, especially in light of their many shortcomings.

“And supper being ended” (v. 2). “Supper” refers to the Passover

Seder, the ritual feast that begins Passover. This annual observance commemorates the supper that took place shortly before the death angel acted in judgment on Egypt and the people of Israel were liberated.

“The devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot” (v. 2). This foreshadows Judas’s betrayal later in the evening. This reference also introduces the Devil into the story line as an instigator and archvillain.

MODERN-DAY SCENARIO

Picture yourself at work as part of a multi-person department. Your boss is prepared to give a raise to one person in the department. He explains that he will interview each member of the department individually, asking a single question, “Why should I give the raise to you instead of anyone else?” You see yourself as deserving the raise. You think of the many reasons why you should get the raise rather than another colleague.

1. In the business world, why does self-promotion seem necessary?

2. What makes us feel compelled to promote ourselves?

DISTRACTIONS

As Jesus’ twelve disciples concluded their dinner, their thoughts were distracted.

3. What was most on their minds, according to the parallel account in Luke 22:24?

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As we think of the significance of this occasion and the critical point Jesus was facing, the disciples' actions appear rather childish. It doesn't seem possible they were squabbling over who was better! But then again, I ask myself, Have I ever been more concerned about my petty agenda and self-interests than about the Lord's agenda and His instruction? I am embarrassed to say that I have been guilty. How about you?

4. What vivid imagery had Jesus used earlier in the Passover dinner (Luke 22:14–20)?
5. How did the rivalry cause these men to miss the point of the imagery and the message?

Have you ever been in a Communion service where you were distracted, thinking more about someone who had wronged you than about the significance of the Lord's Table? Ask yourself how the Lord views that distraction in light of what the service means.

THE RIGHT FOCUS

Jesus then brought the disciples' focus back to Him by using an object lesson. John 13:4–17 tells how He washed the disciples' feet to illustrate the attitude they would need to carry out their assignments of taking the gospel to the world and establishing the church. Without any announcement or fanfare, the Lord descended from His position as the host and central figure. He removed His outer garment, took a bowl and a towel, and knelt to wash their feet. Christ assumed the role of a servant.

6. (a) Describe the possible outcomes of using this approach to ministry: I'm better than you.

(b) Describe the possible outcomes of using this approach to ministry: I'm here to serve you.

7. Read John 1:14–18. How would Jesus' act of service have revealed God's character?

8. Why would this act of service demonstrate the heart God wants us to have? See Romans 8:29, Ephesians 4:13, and Philippians 2:3–8.

THE RIGHT HEART

The first time Jesus referred to the act of washing (John 13:10), He was referring to washing all over, as one would when taking a bath or shower. The second time He used the term, He selected a word that speaks of a more selective cleansing, such as washing one's hands or, in this case, feet. After showering in the morning, you don't typically need to shower again during the course of the day, but you do need to wash your hands. In the setting of this passage, the men may have cleaned their bodies, but they had dirt on their feet from walking. They didn't need to wash all over; they needed to clean only their feet.

9. What exception to the washing metaphor did Jesus suggest in John 13:10 and 11?

That night the disciples did not yet understand Jesus' teaching. But the next day Jesus would be crucified as the substitute payment for sin. Through His blood a person would be totally cleansed of sin. That

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great truth would be the heart of the gospel message by which all who believe the message of salvation in Christ are saved. Once a person believes in the gospel—having been thoroughly washed of sin by the blood of Christ—he needs only isolated cleansing from the spiritual dust of daily sin that accumulates in the normal routine of life.

Have you believed the gospel and been entirely washed of your sin? If not, now is the time to believe. Christ took your sin upon Himself, paying the penalty of death demanded by God so that you could be washed (saved) from your sin. If you have believed, God desires that you regularly clean up from the dirt and grime you pick up from this life. The blood of Christ that washed you all over is able to cleanse you if you will confess your sin honestly to God. What do you need to confess to God?

A SURPRISE BENEFIT

10. What surprising by-product would come from following Jesus' approach of humble service as suggested by Him in John 13:17?

11. How does this outcome contradict what the disciples had been arguing about earlier in the evening?

12. Conduct an honest self-assessment. On the following continuum, mark where you currently are in your attitude. Are you more interested in pursuing your interests or in serving others?

SELF ← 5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5 → OTHERS

13. What are ways you might serve the following people?
 - (a) A close family member

 - (b) Your pastor

(c) A widow in your church

(d) A neighbor

(e) A colleague

14. Describe a time you served someone. How did it make them feel?
How did they respond? How did it make you feel?

Ask God to help you take an honest look at yourself. Thank Him for loving you and being willing to bear your sin and die in your place so you might have eternal life. Confess your attitude of self-centeredness. Ask Him to help you develop a consistent pattern of serving others.

The disciples were confused and sidetracked in the Upper Room that night. As the days continued, they would become increasingly aware of their mission. Let us pray that the Lord will give us increasing clarity in our work for Him.