

Gratitude: Key To Wholeness

Luke 17:11-19

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Have you noticed what God has done for you lately?

GRATITUDE IS not just a nice addition to a generally good character. It is indispensable to Christian character.

There is a story in the Gospel of Luke that focuses on this very trait: the story of the ten lepers cleansed by Jesus:

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"



When he saw them, he said, "**Go, show yourselves to the priests.**" And as they went, they were cleansed.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, "**Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?**" Then he said to him, "**Rise and go; your faith has made you well**" ([Luke 17:11-19](#)).

Three things about the grateful leper make him so exemplary that Luke uses his story as a prime illustration of gratitude.

AN EYE FOR GIFTS

First, the grateful leper recognized that he had received a gift. Ten were cleansed, but only one recognized that it was Christ's gift. Returning to Jesus and casting himself before Him, the one grateful leper poured out heartfelt thanks. Others were cleansed, but they forgot their own call for help and Jesus' response.

Notice that Jesus didn't tell any of them to come back and thank Him. He told them to show themselves to the priests, but He didn't tell them to return. Gratitude can never be solicited. It can only be freely given. No one can make another thankful. Gratitude is our free response. But while Jesus never demanded thanks to Himself, He did tell people to thank the Father, and He demonstrated such thanksgiving when He received power to feed the five thousand and to raise Lazarus.

Meaningful thanks can only come from a truly grateful heart. The seventeenth century English statesman Sir George Savile, Lord Halifax, wrote, "*Gratitude is one of those things that cannot be bought. It must be born with men, or else all the obligations in the world will not create it.*"

Think of all you have received from Christ and from others. If this story is indicative of human nature as it commonly is, we probably miss about nine out of ten opportunities to be grateful. Have you thanked Christ lately for His specific provisions? Have you thanked others for all they do to enrich your life?

GREAT THANKS FOR GREAT GIFTS

Second, the grateful leper's thanks corresponded in magnitude with the greatness of the gift. Jesus healed him of a dreadful, terminal disease that made his body loathsome not only to others but even to himself. His life was radically improved, so he responded with radical gratitude at the feet of Jesus, soiling the very flesh that had been made clean and "**praising God in a loud voice.**" Perhaps he even kissed Jesus' feet, as did the thankful prostitute when He forgave her ([Luke 7:45](#)).

Many new Christians are awkward, even disruptive, in expressing their thanks to God. But their enthusiasm is infectious and leaves little doubt about their sincerity. It is a far cry from the self-elevating "**gratitude**" of the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not a sinner like the tax collector. As we mature in Christ, we may learn to express our gratitude to God in manners more sensitive to those around us, but we should never lose the freshness and sincerity of the new believer's gratitude.

GRATITUDE: GOOD FOR THE HEART

Third, the grateful leper experienced not only outward cleansing but also inward healing. Ten were cleansed, but to only one did Jesus say, "**. . . your faith has made you well.**"

When I first read the story, I thought, "Weren't all ten made well?" No. The nine were no longer leprous, but they were still sick at heart. Only one was so changed that he turned about and praised God.

Gratitude helps make us whole. It is in part a display of humility, dependence, and appreciation for God's (and others') goodness toward us that fills us with joy. It is not only a symbolic act of worship, but also the extravagant outpouring of an appreciative soul. It brings healing and wellness even to the clean, by acknowledging God's benefits.

God forbid that any who claim Him should be counted among the nine. What do you have to thank God for?

HOW TO CULTIVATE GRATITUDE

Can thanksgiving become a more integral part of your life?

First, practice thanking God for every circumstance. Select three present circumstances involving you, and enumerate things in them for which to thank God. You may think of your marriage, an old friendship, or your present job (or joblessness). don't focus just on the circumstances you nominally would call wonderful. Ask God to reveal to you how even your difficulties are working to make you more like Christ, and thank Him for them ([Romans 8:28–29](#)).

Make thanksgiving part of every prayer. You might use the helpful acrostic "ACTS" (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication) to guide your prayers. James wrote, "**Every good and perfect gift is from above . . .**" ([James 1:17](#)). If it all comes from Him, then gratitude should be as large a part of prayer as petition.

Second, be grateful for little things. Jesus said, "**Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much . . .**" ([Luke 16:10](#)). This surely applies to stewardship of the heart as much as to stewardship of resources. If you are grateful in small things, even in a small way, you will naturally express gratitude in great things.

Third, consider what you possess rather than what you lack. Many notable Christian leaders from previous centuries exemplify this in their lives. Polycarp, Augustine, Francis, Anselm, a' Kempis, and Fenelon filled their writings with expressions of thanks to God. Even though most lacked much of what their contemporaries enjoyed, they focused not on their deprivation but on their riches in Christ. They agreed with Paul, who wrote, "**. . . I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances**" ([Phil. 4:11](#)). The less you concentrate on future needs, the more you will enjoy present privileges.

Fourth, do not let pride stand in the way of thanking others. The one leper gave thanks in a way that would embarrass most people. Once you have learned to recognize favors done for you, humble yourself: show your appreciation. Emotion won't kill most people. Go ahead and show it. No part of the Body of Christ can stand by itself (**cf. [Romans 12](#); [1 Cor. 12](#); [Ephes. 4](#)**). Let those who help you know that you need them—and that you appreciate the strength you gain from them.

The practice of gratitude might change your whole outlook on life. Begin in prayer, then dust off the old stationery and telephone and catch up on lost or neglected business.