

Whole Faith

October 12, 2025

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten men with skin diseases approached him. Keeping their distance from him, ¹³ they raised their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, show us mercy!” ¹⁴ When Jesus saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” As they left, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ One of them, when he saw that he had been healed, returned and praised God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He fell on his face at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus replied, “Weren’t ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ No one returned to praise God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then Jesus said to him, “Get up and go. Your faith has healed you.”



Today’s story about the ten lepers is familiar. We know the facts: ten lepers were healed but only one came back to thank Jesus.

This fact stands out to us because being thanked is something that we expect, isn’t it? And proper thanks is something that we are supposed to give, right? Do you remember when you were young, and someone did something nice for you? You’d get the mom look and she would lean close and ask, ‘Now what do you say?’ Back then it wasn’t a suggestion. So you said, ‘Thank you.’ We did say it and we learned to do so because we’re taught that saying ‘Thank you’ matters. But it can go beyond being polite or respectful – in a negative way. Because of this, the questions: ‘Did you say, Thank you?’ and ‘Were you properly grateful?’ are important questions in our world today. They are important because if another person or group or people were not thankful or properly grateful, then it can excuse our reluctance to love our neighbors in ways that benefit our neighbor more than it benefits us. To place a requirement for gratitude on others can be a dangerous road to go down.

As we prepare to unpack this story and how it applies to our lives, let us begin with a word of prayer...

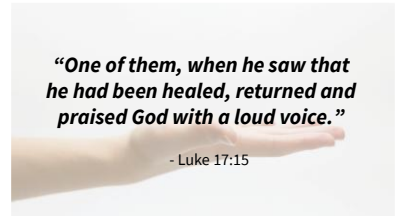
Turning to verse 11 we see that Jesus is traveling towards Jerusalem, walking along the border between Galilee and Samaria. From other details that come later in the story, one could assume that he was on the Galilean side of the border. As Jesus is entering a village along the border, ten lepers raise their voices and say, “*Jesus, Master, show us mercy!*” The lepers would have to raise their voices because the Law required that they kept their distance from those who were “clean.” Because of the Law, lepers had to live in colonies outside of the villages and cities, totally isolated from family and friends.



As is often the case with outsider or marginalized communities, bonds form around what isolates or marginalizes them. In the past, for example, when immigration was booming in the United States, “Little Italies” and “Chinatowns” were common in many cities. Today, there is a deep bond found amongst folks in the homeless communities in many places. They look out for one another and they share resources and information. In today’s parable, we see this as the one Samaritan that finds community amongst nine Jews – amongst people who would otherwise alienate and likely even drive out this “foreigner.” Their common skin disease and the isolation that it generates was what bound these ten men together.

Jesus responds to this request from the lepers with a simple directive: “*Go, show yourselves to the priests.*” As the ten men begin to make their way, as a group, towards the priest, the one with the power to declare them “clean,” the one with the authority to grant them access back into society, they are all cleansed. That’s the word Jesus uses – not “healed” – but “cleansed” because there is much more at work here than simply being healed.

For the ten to begin to make their way towards the priest was first an act of faith, and it was an act done in community. The Samaritan would have no reason to go to the priest, but it was still an act of faith for him to follow Jesus' instructions. And, again, the ten were cleansed as they acted in faith. Then, in verse 15 we read, *"One of them, when he saw that he had been healed, returned and praised God with a loud voice."* The Samaritan does not continue on to the priest. Instead, he returns and praises God in a loud voice, falling at Jesus' feet as he thanks Jesus for being healed.



It is then that Jesus asks, *"Weren't ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"* Maybe our first thought is to think of our mom at this point. But Jesus is not offended that the nine did not come back to say, 'Thanks, Jesus.' There is no indication in the scripture that Jesus' feelings were hurt by the lack of a proper response. There is no sign that he considered withdrawing the cleansing, because they did not express gratitude, returning the nine to their former isolated state. No, these questions are not about Jesus – at all. Jesus' concern is really about the wholeness of those who were healed. For Jesus, there is a difference between being healed and being made whole.



Even though they did not express it verbally, the other nine were likely as grateful as the Samaritan was for being cured of their disease. The reality is that once cured, the next step was to go to the priest so that they could reenter society. It is very probable that the nine were in fact oozing with gratitude when they arrived at the priest's door and submitted themselves to the scrutiny that was required to be declared "clean." And from there, their next step was to do something other than to go find Jesus to thank him.

Maybe they were so overcome with the thought of seeing loved ones that they simply forgot to go back to thank Jesus. We do not know what happened next for the nine. Maybe they started sharing the good news with others. We are just guessing here. We don't have a real clue about what happened after they left Jesus, other than the fact that they were cleansed. I think that we want to understand the nine, though, because it helps us to understand our actions or inactions when we too get it wrong, when we fail to be grateful in ways that lead us to praise and glorify God. We do fail. We do get it wrong.

While we do not know the “why” for the actions or inactions of the ten lepers, we can know something about why Jesus asks these questions. First, we can notice the language that Jesus uses. He says, “*made clean*.” A lot of the time, it does not seem that Jesus cares about the Law or the rules of the society in which he grew up. There are times when Jesus greatly offends the Pharisees or other religious leaders because of his obvious disregard for the Law. Eating with tax collectors and other sinners and touching those who were clearly ritually unclean – a prostitute or dead person – are great examples of times when Jesus utterly disregarded the Law. But at other times, it seems like Jesus is pretty focused on precisely following the Law. In today's passage he instructs the lepers to go to the priest. This is the necessary first step to be declared clean.

But, for Jesus, this was only a first step towards being whole. This was Jesus' real concern for the nine who did not return. For him, they were not done yet. For Jesus, there was more that this new relationship could and should offer. Yes, the lepers were clean, within the framework of the Law. But he wanted more. Jesus wanted them to be well, to be made whole. That much is clear in what he says to the Samaritan in verse 19. Here Jesus says to the one who did return, “*Your faith has healed you.*”



The Samaritan's faithful act of following Jesus' instruction cured him of his skin disease, yes. But his faith expressed through gratitude and thanksgiving when he came back to Jesus, that is what is beginning to bring complete healing, and, eventually, wholeness. This step into relationship, into community, is a move towards wholeness.

This teaching moment extends to the crowd there that day and it extends to us gathered here today. Jesus is teaching them and us that faith is a process and that being healed of something – be it a disease, a sin, a broken relationship, whatever – that is just a first step towards having a faith that makes us whole. The first teaching moment comes from Jesus' choice to call the Samaritan a *“foreigner.”* In casting the Samaritan as the faithful one in the story, Jesus is reminding his Galilean audience that God loves all people, not just the Jews. Jesus also reminds us today that God loves all people, not just the ones sitting in churches this morning.

Understanding this truth, we can possibly receive the next thing that Jesus wants to teach. Jesus is trying to open our minds and maybe even our hearts to the idea that God is not an exclusive or line-drawing God. Jesus wants to show us that God is a God that desires to remove barriers – whether physical, cultural, religious, or emotional – in order to draw people into community and into relationship. When Jesus said to the Samaritan, *“Your faith has healed you,”* he is speaking into the reality that the one who returned has begun a relationship with the one who cured him of his disease. The curing of that which separates is the first step. The gratitude that led to praise, the acknowledgement of God's power and presence in one's life – that begins the process of being made whole. Wholeness then comes from both action and reflection, from the works of faith wrapped in worship and praise.



Once we are in the habit of thanking God, we then begin to better see how God works through those around us. Cultivating a habit of gratitude that leads to praise, in fact, requires that we pay attention to all who bring God's presence and love into our lives. This, in turn, enables us to be grateful for the people in our lives who reveal God's love and forgiveness to us in concrete ways. In the story, for the Samaritan, this was the person of Jesus.

This week in the Upper Room's devotional *Disciplines*, author Mark Werthington focuses on an ancient spiritual discipline first developed by Ignatius of Loyola called the Examen. This regular practice looks back and reflects on a period of time, usually a day. A modern take on this 16th century practice offers us the five R's as a means to remember the steps: request, relish, review, repent, resolve. The practice begins with requesting God's presence during this time of reflection and introspection. One then relishes God's presence and blessings in that day. This is followed by a review of one's day - what sins and failures were there? The movement turns next to repenting of the ways that one fell short and, lastly, one resolves that through God's grace one will strive to live more like Christ in the next day.

The Examen (Ignatius of Loyola)

- 1) Request
- 2) Relish
- 3) Review
- 4) Repent
- 5) Resolve

For those who have not been reading about this practice in my blogs this week, let's take a moment to unpack these five steps to draw closer to God. In the story of the ten lepers, the plea "*Jesus, Master, show us mercy!*" was a plea to enter Jesus' presence. While Ignatius' original intent was to simply enter into God's presence in heart and mind, the lepers add a petition to their desire to be in the presence of the divine. They need to be healed. We too can move quickly from requesting to be in God's presence to requesting something from God. As I wrote about on Tuesday, Ignatius sought God's presence to deepen his relationship with God. The lepers, as we often do, added a transactional piece to their request to be in God's presence, to be in relationship with God.

The Samaritan that returned relished in the presence of the divine. This is expressed in his praising God and falling at Jesus feet as an expression of his gratitude. We relish in God when we offer God our praise and thanksgiving for the many ways that God was present to us and for the many ways that God blessed us. For me, this is my little “Thanks” journal that I do every morning when I first sit down at my desk at home. I write out and then offer God thanks for the 5-7 ways that God blessed or was present in my day.

To request to be in God’s presence and to relish in God’s acts in our lives is to prepare ourselves for the next steps of the Examen. To enter God’s presence and to rejoice in how God has been at work in our lives puts our hearts and minds in the proper place to review our walk of faith from the previous day. From a place of humility and surrender, we can honestly and transparently review our day, gauging where we fell short, where we sinned. This honest, transparent time of reflection naturally leads us to a place of repentance and then on to declaring our resolve to strive to live more like Jesus the next day. To give time to God each day, to slowly walk through these steps, to be open and honest with God, to provide time and space for the Spirit to speak into our hearts, this will allow us to develop the whole faith that Jesus yearns for us all to experience.



To daily practice these five steps is essential to our walk of faith because it can be easy to take God’s grace and blessings for granted. We are often among the “nine” who forget to offer thanks. There is a reason. This story is about gratitude, but it is also about privilege. The one who does return to give thanks is a Samaritan — to Israel, he is one of the bad guys. The more privilege we’re given, by being white, middle class, well-educated, Christians, the easier it is to assume we’re the center of the world, and that we deserve good treatment from life. Tragedy happens to other people. Privilege engenders entitlement.

But those who are routinely marginalized know not to expect such privilege, and are more acutely grateful for every blessing. Though we can't deny our privilege, we can be mindful that everything, even what society says we "deserve," is actually a gift from God. Sometimes we just forget to give thanks. This story from Luke 17 asks us the same questions that is asked the lepers: How have you been healed? Are you grateful?

These questions are important to ask because gratitude is not a feeling. It's a practice. It's the action of taking stock of what we've been given; letting go of all our sense of entitlement; and receiving those blessings as unearned, unwarranted, undeserved gifts. Gratitude recognizes that all things are the overflowing of God's grace and love. Truly beholding them as unearned, unwarranted, undeserved gifts sometimes leads us into deeper repentance of our sense of entitlement, which deepens our gratitude. It's not that blessed people are grateful. It's that grateful people are blessed. The more grateful we are, the more we experience things as gifts, the more we discover deeper joy, and the more whole our faith becomes. As we strive for wholeness this week, may our practice of gratitude draw us closer to Christ. May it be so for you and for me this week. Alleluia and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. How might practicing the Examen (request, relish, review, repent, resolve) this week lead you to a more whole faith? Won't you try it this week?
- 2) *Pray*. For your prayer time each day this week, practice the Examen, a spiritual discipline that works through the five steps: request, relish, review, repent, resolve.
- 3) *Study*. Read Luke 17:26-37. How might Jesus' description of the coming kingdom of God influence people to practice spiritual disciplines that deepen their walk of faith?