

“The Other Nine”

The Gratitude Campaign – part #1

Luke 17:11-19

[49] Play along with me for a moment. I want to count up by “Q’s”. One Q. (Two Q.) Three Q. (Four Q.) Five Q. (Six Q.) Seven Q. (Eight Q.) Nine Q. (Ten Q.) What? (Ten Q.) What? (Ten Q!) Oh, you’re welcome, you’re welcome, you’re welcome!

[50] Should it be surprising when someone tells us, “Thank you”? Probably not. Still, there are times in my life when I have been thanked and it really left an impression. A few years ago, I introduced myself to the principal and band director at a local high school, saying, “If you need anything, please call me.” I ended up volunteering a lot, leading Cub Scouts, working with the marching band, offering grief counseling, and even substitute teaching. I didn’t really feel like I had done anything spectacular, but one night, the principal invited me to the senior awards presentation, where they gave me an award. (Show them the shoe trophy.) This trophy almost brought tears to my eyes. I wasn’t looking for anything in return, but when I received this, it was very clear that they had appreciated what I had done.

[51] I often keep thank you notes I’ve received and go back to re-read them. It’s not to inflate my ego. They simply remind me of what God has done in my life because I have made myself available to others. Each one of those cards is a little surprise to me, and I am blessed by them all.

Thank you cards always make us feel good. When someone says, “Thank you” sincerely, that’s a great feeling for both the giver and the receiver. We can never say thank you enough, especially to God. That’s why today we are starting the “Gratitude Campaign.” We will look at what God does in our lives and in our church, and ask how we “Thank you” with our words, actions and giving. We were created to be grateful, generous people, and flexing our gratitude muscles keeps them from getting atrophied.

[52] Praising God and thanking Jesus go hand-in-hand, as evidenced in our scripture today. Jesus, of course, was known for performing many miracles. Here we find Jesus completing his last missionary journey before heading to Jerusalem,

making a pit stop on the border between Galilee and Samaria. While he enters the town, ten men approach him at a distance. The Bible tells us that they had leprosy, which could be any number of skin diseases, all of them bad.

Getting leprosy was about the worst thing that could happen to you in 1st century Palestine. The disease marked you as an outcast. Literally, you had to tear your clothes and live in caves outside the towns. Whenever someone came near, you had to yell, “Unclean!” so that they didn’t get too close. (Leviticus 13:45)

Somehow these men hear rumors of Jesus. They know this great healer is coming to their area, so they take the risk of approaching him, albeit at a respectful distance, and cry out, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” They probably looked very pitiful with their rags and sores. It must be humiliating to call out to a stranger, “Lord, have mercy on me!” Still, Jesus looks right at them and says, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” For a leper to be officially healed, they have to be physically inspected by the priest and proclaimed clean again. Presumably, these men are healed as soon as they turned to go to the temple, but they still need that final priestly blessing.

[53] It would be incredible to be healed of leprosy. That would mean you could re-enter society, see your family and loved ones again, and have a normal life. Jesus gives these men an incredible gift. However, in the excitement, only one remembers to return to thank Jesus. Even though it appears that all ten have the faith to believe and be healed, only one has faith that “blossomed into joyful praise of God and gratitude to Jesus.”¹ Only one actually says, “Thank you, Lord.”

Jesus is surprised, if not wholly indignant. He asks, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?” (Luke 17:17) Any of us reading this story can see, the gratitude was lacking in some of these men.

[54] The one who came back literally throws himself down in the dirt at Jesus’ feet. Why? After all, the leper could have gone anywhere to praise God. All ten were all on their way to the temple. What better place to praise and thank God? The gospel writer is telling us an important truth here: praising God and

¹ Tannehill, Robert C. Tannehill, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Luke*. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1996.

thanking Jesus are intimately connected. You can't do one without the other. This man, a Samaritan, not a Jew, was the one whose faith is placed on a pedestal. He is our example to follow.

This story raises a lot of questions about ourselves. Are we grateful for what Jesus has done? Do we really show it? Do we even know what God has done for us?

[55] God created us, loved us, redeemed us, and gave us eternal life in his Son. God never holds our sins against us. God gives us our very lives. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat – all of these are from God. When we are down, God provides his people to comfort us. When we rejoice, God rejoices with us. Even though you were sleeping last, God never stopped thinking about you, loving you, and calling you to himself.

[56] I have one thought for you to consider today, as we undertake this Gratitude Campaign in our church. Is Jesus surprised by your gratitude, or by the lack thereof? We should not try to impress Jesus with our giving. Remember, God's love in Christ is unconditional. However, Jesus wants what is best for us and our hearts. The Bible speaks clearly on generosity and gratitude:

[57] Psalm 50:23 (ESV) - “The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!”

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV) – “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Jesus said whoever is forgiven much should love much. (Luke 7:47) He knows that a pure, grateful heart causes us to see God. (Matthew 5:8) A Gratitude Campaign is not focused on the dollar amount we give to the church; instead, we focus on the state of our hearts. You can tell a lot about your heart by tracking your spending. If you have abundant joy (John 10:10), then your gratitude overflows. (Psalm 23:5) If your heart is hardened, then you will cling tightly to the things you think will make you happy, even though that happiness is temporary and elusive.

[58] The other nine lepers also experienced the grace of God. They were miraculously healed. Jesus didn't take back their healing. He blesses whom he

bleses. But in their excitement or simply carelessness, these other lepers never came back to Jesus to even say thank you.

Think about it. What causes a man with brand new skin to throw himself down in the dust? Nothing but pure, exhilarating gratitude for new life.

That is the same gratitude we can display when we encounter the amazing power of God offered to us through the grace of Jesus Christ.

[59] If there were one thing I would hope for this church, one tangible practice that we could all be known for, it would be gratefulness. We all must practice our gratitude to God in visible ways. I never want to be one of the other nine who never said, “Thank you, Jesus.” I hope and pray you feel the same. Our goal for our church is not to have 10% of us praising and thanking God, it is to have 100% praising, worshipping, giving, and thanking God.

Do whatever it takes to stay thankful. Keep a gratitude journal by your bed. Each day, write five ways that God has blessed you. Count your blessings before each meal. Talk with your family about the importance of saying thank you to others and to God. When you do this, you will cultivate a heart of gratitude, a pure heart that will see God and respond in faith and thanksgiving.

[60] This week you will receive a letter explaining the Gratitude Campaign. On October 3rd, World Communion Sunday, we will all be given an opportunity to present a Gratitude Card with our estimates of giving for the following year. We are asking everyone to fill out a card and bring it back, both as a sign of commitment to this local church and as a practical way to show your gratitude for what the Lord has done for you.

I ask you to prayerfully consider how you express your gratitude to God for this congregation. I believe that our response will be joyful and generous, because that is the proper response for all the Christ has done for us.

[61] Let’s pray.

Memory Verse: Psalm 50:23 (ESV)

“The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me;
to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!”

Reflection Questions:

1. Describe a time when have you shown your appreciation for something someone else did for you.
2. Can you remember a time you did something for someone else and they did not thank you? How did you feel?
3. Why do you think Jesus pointed out that the leper who returned was a Samaritan and not a Jew? What does this indicate about the kind of faith and practice Jesus looks for?
4. Do you regularly show your thanks to God? Why or why not? How?
5. How is giving to the church connected to our gratitude for what Christ has done for us? How does it teach others to be grateful?