

Where Are the Nine?

Luke 17:11-19 New American Standard Bible

### Ten Men with Leprosy Healed

*<sup>11</sup> While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> And as He entered a village, ten men with leprosy who stood at a distance met Him; <sup>13</sup> and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” <sup>14</sup> When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed. <sup>15</sup> Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, <sup>16</sup> and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup> But Jesus responded and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? <sup>18</sup> Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” <sup>19</sup> And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”*

### Introduction

Would you like to be a **character** of gratitude (being good at being thankful)? For those who would, I wanted you to know that character cannot be built or developed overnight. It takes time and practice. How can we become a character of gratitude? By being thankful to the Lord in **all** circumstances.

How can we be thankful in **all** circumstances (especially in adversities)? By being constantly in worship of the Heavenly Father. Worship is the seed. Thanksgiving is the fruit. Like you cannot have any fruit without planting the seed first, you cannot be thankful without staying in the attitude of worship. Without worship thankfulness in all circumstances is impossible.

I would like to present one person who thanked God in a most difficult life situation. His name was Job. One day, the bandits stole away all his possessions. Not long after that, all of his ten children perished under one roof due to tornado. When he was struck with such bad news, one after another, he said, *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”* (Job 1:21). It wasn’t the sheer exercise of will power that enabled him to bless the LORD in such a situation. Rather, he was able to do so only after he **fell to the ground and worshiped** (Job 1:20). The Scripture says, *“In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong-doing”* (Job 1:22). Please notice the sequence: worship (v. 20), blessing of the LORD

(v. 21), and not sinning against God (v. 22). In bad circumstances, we fail to stay in worship of our Heavenly Father and end up blaming Him for our misfortune.

Let me repeat: worship is the key to thankfulness, because in worship we acknowledge the Almighty God whom we trust. In worship, God shifts our attention from ourselves to Himself. Worship provides us with a divine perspective so that we may look at our lives as God does. Worship prepares us to be thankful in all circumstances.

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Today, I am going to talk about the importance of not losing the opportunity to thank. Thank **now** rather than later. And, make it a habit of it.

It seems to me that there are four types of people when it comes down to expressing gratitude (see the Table 1 in your bulletin).

Table 1

	Don't See the Need	Would Like to Thank
Fail to Express Gratitude	I	III
Do Express Gratitude	II	IV

Let's begin with Type I people: a story of John and Tim.

- *“John, the CEO of a sales organization, sent an email to Tim, an employee several levels below, to compliment him on his performance in a recent meeting. Tim did not respond to the email.*
- *About a week later, he was in John's office applying for an open position that would have been a promotion into a management role, when John asked him whether he had received the email. Yes, Tim said, he had. Why, John asked, hadn't he responded? Tim said he didn't see the need.*
- *But Tim was wrong. John's email deserved, at the very least, a "thank you."*
- *Tim didn't get the promotion. Was he passed over solely because he didn't thank John for the positive feedback? No. But was Tim's lack of response one piece of the Tim puzzle that convinced John he should choose a better candidate? Undoubtedly.”* (Peter Bregman—Harvard Business Review, blog)

Type II represents the people (such as children) who don't see the need to thank but are instructed/forced to do so.

Today's story shows the other two types of people (Types III and IV).

- One day Jesus, along with His disciples, was traveling through Galilee and Samaria. He entered a village (very likely *Ginae*), the town about 50 miles north of Jerusalem.
- There, he encountered ten men with leprosy. Note here (v. 12) that they stood **afar** from Jesus. There's a reason for that.
- According to Leviticus chapters 13 and 14, when a man has a suspicious skin disease, he must go to a priest for examination. After a careful examination, the priest then pronounces him either "unclean" (that is, infectious such as leprosy) or "clean" (that is, non-infectious skin disease such as burn). The unclean patient, then, is put in quarantine separated from the community and is to live in isolation outside the camp or village. If there were more than one unclean person, then they would form a group. Whenever the group travels on the road or converses with people in the village, they must cry out aloud "Unclean! Unclean!" in order to keep a certain distance between them (Leviticus 13:45-46). That's why the ten lepers stood at a distance. As soon as they saw Jesus, they began shouting out to the Lord, "Have mercy on us!" (v. 13)
- Let's think about the sentence for a moment: have mercy on me. In my opinion, these are the most beautiful and effective words we can use in our prayers especially when we don't know what to say to God. Simply repeat in prayer, "Have mercy on me." The Lord would hear you and respond to your needs. In today's story, even before the lepers specified their needs to Jesus (which was healing), Jesus already knew and granted their wish. Because they still needed the declaration of cleanness from the priest (that, by the way, would ensure the restoration to their families and to the society), Jesus commanded them to go and show themselves to the priest.
- Not long after they started walking to the priest, the healing took place in all of them. The other nine continued on their journey. However, one of them turned around and started running back to Jesus. As soon as he found Jesus, he fell to the ground on his face and worshiped Him, thanking and glorifying God for the healing. Here, I want you to see what happens when we thank God. Through our thanksgiving, we glorify God. Thanksgiving and praises to God go hand in hand (v. 16 and v. 18). That's why it is so crucial for us to give thanks to God all the time.
- Let's think about the man who came back to Jesus. He was a Samaritan (v. 16). Who were the Samaritans? They were a victim of a post-war practice among the ancient kingdoms. The winner would uproot the inhabitants of the loser kingdom from their homeland. More specifically, they would transplant the captives into a foreign land.

For instance, when the Assyrians invaded and destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., they took away many Israelites to a foreign land and imported foreigners to Israel. Sort of a people/land swap. Sooner or later, the interracial and intercultural marriages between foreigners and the remnants of Israel took place. That's how the Samaritans came into existence. They were the children of those mixed marriages. They were called Samaritans because they were born and resided in the province of Samaria. Ordinary Jews would despise such mixed-bloodline of Samaritans, because to a typical Jewish mind, keeping everything pure including one's marriage and bloodline was very important. Such a prejudice against Samaritans persisted for centuries even to the day of Jesus when Jews and Samaritans didn't talk to each other or do business together.

- That's where the story gets really interesting. The only one who came back to Jesus to properly thank Him was the Samaritan (v. 18). The other nine supposedly God-fearing people and who supposedly knew better never came back to thank Jesus for the healing.
- Statistics: I consider today's story a non-scientific survey done with ten people. One in ten took time to say thanks. Are we any better than the people 2000 years ago? I am not sure.
- Here's one example: eight years ago, a poll was done in England: the poll of 2,000 people by the Food Network UK for Thank You Day, which was marked on November 24, 2012. Five per cent of the participants in the poll said *"a formal 'thank you' was now not often needed in everyday conversation."* The poll also shows that *"our friends and family get the brunt of our bad manners with half admitting they're rubbish at thanking those closest to them - many justifying the lack of thanks because their family 'already know I'm grateful.'"* Really? Do we already know that they are grateful? Yes, but we still want to be appreciated, don't we? Listen more: *"It follows that 85 per cent of people will be annoyed at not getting the gratitude they feel they deserve."* ([www.Dailymail.co.uk/news/article\\_2065313/Thank-replaced-cheers-fab-cool.html](http://www.Dailymail.co.uk/news/article_2065313/Thank-replaced-cheers-fab-cool.html)). Most of us still would like to get the thanks from those whom we helped.
- Concerning proper thanksgiving, listen to Mr. Albert Schweitzer who won the Nobel Peace Prize (1952) for his philosophy of "Reverence for Life."
- Back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the age of 5-6, each Christmas, the boy Schweitzer would write thank you **letters** to his uncles and aunts for the gifts that he had received. For him, it turned into a life-long habit of writing thank-you letters and notes. My family took his example and we still practice the same thing every Christmas.

- Schweitzer’s interpretation for today’s story is: *it is not that the other nine didn’t want to thank Jesus for the healing but that they lost the opportunity to do so.* I agree.

**Conclusion**

- So, what’s the lesson for us? Don’t wait until it is too late, or you lose the momentum. Don’t lose the opportunity to thank God and thank people. Of course, God knows we are appreciative, and people know that too, but they deserve to hear our “thanks.” Remember the nine lepers who missed the great opportunity to thank Jesus for the healing. Don’t be one of them. Be the one (see the Table 2).

Table 2

	Don’t See the Need	Would Like to Thank
Fail to Express Gratitude	Tim	The Other Nine
Do Express Gratitude	Children	The Samaritan

Amen.