

What a Desperate Leper Can Teach Us About a Crucial Command in the Bible

The 21st century's top 10 list of endangered species must undoubtedly include a sincere thank you. True thanksgiving is becoming increasingly rare in our society. Sadly, this isn't only just among those who claim no relationship with God. The church too often seems to be in lack of the attitude of gratitude.

But thankfulness is a big deal with God. An act of thanksgiving, no matter how small, is key to the preferred future God has for each of us. A simple and sincere thank you is the small hinge upon which large doors swing. The psalmist understood this when he wrote, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise; be thankful to Him, and bless His name" (Ps. 100:4). Gratitude causes the gates to swing wide into destiny.

In the Gospel bearing his name, Dr. Luke records a fascinating story. It is the account of 10 men who were considered the living dead of their generation: lepers. The thief called leprosy stole their families, fortune and future. But Jesus passed their way.

Lifting their raspy voices to grab His attention, they cried for mercy. Jesus stopped, looked their way and spoke just one sentence to them. He didn't move toward them or ask for their story. He didn't touch them, though He had touched other lepers before. He merely said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests" (Luke 17:14b). Many would be turned off by what appears to be such a cold approach to these hurting men, but they simply obeyed. "And as they went, they were cleansed" (Luke 17:14c).

Somewhere along the way, they all were cleansed and cured by obedience to His word. All were healed, yet only one of them took the time to go back and say thank you. Overwhelmed by the goodness shown to him, the one whose journey home would take the longest decided he could spare another 30 minutes to give thanks for the lifetime extended to him. Surely, he ran! How could he not? Turning the last corner, He began yelling the praises of God at the top of his lungs. And when he got to Jesus, he fell at His feet and gave thanks.

His gratefulness for mercy, life and restoration poured out of him like a geyser. Jesus looked around and pointed out to the crowd that only one of 10 returned to say thanks. And he was a Samaritan. The nine were Israelites. The one gushing with gratitude was not.

Perhaps Jesus points out this detail because it is at the root of the ingratitude found in the nine. Did they feel entitled to the healing? After all, they were descendants of Abraham. They knew God revealed Himself to Moses and their forefathers as Jehovah Rapha, their Healer. So they rejoiced in the freeing miracle but rushed to the priests and then into the arms of their loved ones, giving little thought to act of saying thank you to Jesus. After all, healing belonged to them. Healing was their inheritance. Why say thank you for what is rightfully yours by birth?

The Samaritan, on the other hand, knew that this gift did not come because He deserved it. It was a direct answer to the specific request for mercy. He understood it was not His because He earned it. This act of power was mercy in action! And so, He gave thanks.

The heart of gratitude is humility. It is the recognition that we need something beyond our ability to produce. It is the acknowledgment that God does not owe us anything. His gift of love makes us righteous, victorious and His child. With this family status comes a beautiful, mind-boggling inheritance.

Blessing abounds on every hand. We receive the right to become the children of God, and we can boldly lay claim to every promise given. But we must not forget that it is only by HIS grace we are positioned to receive the promises.

A sincere, "Thank you" to God or a fellow human not only reminds us of our limitations and our need for others in our lives, but it also opens doors of opportunity that otherwise remain closed. Far too many miss God's preferred future because of the attitude of entitlement. Let's you and I make a lifetime decision to choose humility and gratitude over the prideful entitlement mentality so prevalent in modern culture.

Look at what happened to the one who chose gratitude: Luke 17:19 records Jesus' words: "Rise, go your way. Your faith has made you well." The word translated "well" is also translated "whole" in many places. Jesus tells a man previously healed of leprosy to go into wholeness as a result of his faith. I believe that this one out of the 10 walked into a level of the miraculous the others did not. I think His thankful attitude released a dimension of healing that restored the outer extremities taken by the disease. Imagine it. Perhaps his fingers or toes were destroyed by leprosy; they were restored by the power of God.

All 10 received cleansing healing, but only one left whole. Why? He utilized the key of thanksgiving and opened a higher dimension. I wonder what will open for us as we intentionally and consistently choose the attitude of gratitude? I pray this season will be a fresh beginning of the gates of glory opening in your life as you give thanks! {eoa}

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