

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Worship Series: *Lord, Increase Our Faith*
Service Theme: *A Faith That Overflows with Gratitude*

Sermon Theme: *Gratitude from the Generosity of the Giver*
(October 9, 2022) Luke 17:11-19

This week, I asked Google a simple question: “How can I have more gratitude?” And Google answered with about 225 million results! There were countless life-hack articles with titles like, “**10 Ways to Become More Grateful,**” or “**40 Simple Ways to Practice Gratitude,**” and articles outlining all the reasons that having gratitude is important and impactful for your physical, mental, and emotional health. The articles came from famous universities like Cal-Berkley and Harvard, famous sources like CNN, Forbes, and WebMD, and basically every life coach, self-help guru, or psychology blogger under the sun.

The sheer amount of content you can find online regarding gratitude tells us a couple of things. First, that we know being grateful is important and impactful for our lives, so we want to be better at it. But second, out of all the different suggestions for how to be more grateful, none have captured the silver bullet. Otherwise, if everyone knew the answer to “How can I have more gratitude?” the businesses who depend on clicks to make money wouldn’t bother writing those articles anymore.

However, I would argue that the silver bullet for gratitude has already been discovered. Not in scholarly reports, business articles, or self-help blogs, but in today’s sermon text from God’s Word!

Throughout most of the summer and fall, we’ve followed Luke’s Gospel as he traces Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and rise again as the Savior of the world. Again in today’s text Luke reminds us, “***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!”

Because leprosy was highly contagious, God commanded the Israelites that anyone with leprosy needed to be separated from the rest of their society—either living alone, or with a colony of other lepers outside the city. Leprosy was a terrible disease, not only because of the horrific effects it had on a person’s body, but because it forced them separate and isolate from their family and friends. If you experienced the loneliness of isolation or quarantine during the height of COVID, you got a small, temporary taste of life with leprosy.

If anyone came near someone with leprosy, the leper was required to call out in a loud voice, “Unclean! Unclean!” to warn the person to keep their distance. But on this occasion, these 10 lepers called out with loud voices, pleading with Jesus for mercy and healing. Earlier, Luke records another occasion when Jesus healed a man with leprosy. So you have to imagine that word had gotten out among the leper community that this Jesus guy had the power to heal them!

When he healed that first leprous man, Jesus had been close enough to touch the man, and immediately cleansed him of his disease. But this time, Jesus simply tells these 10 lepers from a distance, “***Go, show yourselves to the priests.***” During the Israelites’ wandering in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land, God commanded that anyone who’d been healed of infectious skin diseases needed to show themselves to the priests, and if the priests confirmed that they’d been healed, they could then rejoin their family and society.

And that clues us in to what Jesus is doing here. By telling them to go to the priests, Jesus was testing their faith to see if they trusted in him enough to obey his command, even though they hadn’t been healed yet. But with this command, there was an implicit promise. Why tell them to go see the priests, if he wasn’t going to heal them?

Trusting in Jesus, they set off, and sometime during their trek to Jerusalem, they realized their trust was revealed as truth! Can you picture their hugs, joyful tears, and shouts of elation at what this meant

for them—no longer needing to be separated from fathers and mothers, spouses and children, friends and neighbors!

We're not told, but we can assume that 9 of the 10 former lepers ran off as quickly as possible to get cleared by the priests so they could return home again. But one—a Samaritan, the sworn enemies of Israel—*“came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him.”*

What made him different? What gave him so much gratitude in his life that he ran back to thank Jesus, while everyone else ran off to get back to life? Jesus tells us when he told the Samaritan. *“Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”* The Samaritan's gratitude flowed from his faith.

But we need to quantify that faith, because in a way, all 10 lepers had showed faith. All 10 trusted that Jesus could heal them, and called out to him for help. All 10 had enough faith to obey Jesus' command to show themselves to the priests, even though they hadn't been healed yet. All 10 exhibited faith. So what was it about the faith of the Samaritan that produced gratitude for Jesus which the other 9 lacked?

All ten of the lepers had faith that Jesus could heal them of their leprosy. But the Samaritan had faith that Jesus could heal him of something even deadlier—his sin. He had faith in Jesus not just as his healer, but as his Savior! In Greek, Jesus told him “your faith has **σώζω-ed** you.” That Greek verb can mean to physically heal someone, but it also means to “save” spiritually, in the sense of eternal salvation. While I can't read God's mind, I don't think it's a coincidence that Jesus used a word that can mean both healed and saved! Because the Samaritan's faith trusted both in Jesus' power to heal him physically, but more importantly, to save him eternally!

It's a beautiful reflection of his faith in Jesus that the Samaritan first comes to thank Jesus before running off to show himself to the priests. God had commanded the Israelites that not only did they need to be cleared by the priests before rejoining their society, the person who had been healed was also required to bring sacrifices—including a male

lamb, without defect. The blood of that sacrificial lamb would be shed for their sins, to bring peace between them and God. Only then could they rejoin their fathers and mothers, spouses and children, friends and neighbors.

But instead of first going to the priests to offer those necessary atonement sacrifices, the Samaritan first went back to thank the true, sinless sacrificial lamb, whose blood would be shed on the cross to bring peace between him and God. The Lamb of God who would cleanse him from the deadliest disease of sin, so that this Samaritan could be reunited with his heavenly Father! That's why Jesus was journeying to Jerusalem—to heal the world from something much worse than leprosy!

The Samaritan had more gratitude in his life than the other because he was focused on the Giver, not just the gift. The other 9 were so overjoyed with the gift they'd received, that they failed to express their gratitude to the one who gave it to them. But because the Samaritan's faith was focused on the Giver, his primary action was to thank Jesus. And that's the silver bullet for having more gratitude in our lives too. Faith in Jesus as Savior produces **Gratitude from the Generosity of the Giver.**

Is your life more like the Samaritan, or the other 9? Do your prayers usually prioritize thanking God for the gifts he's given? Or asking him to give you more gifts? Does your life reflect genuine gratitude to God? Or a gravitational pull to his gifts?

Focusing on the gift rather than the Giver has a drastic negative affect on our gratitude to God in two ways. The first problem is that we become so self-focused and convinced that we've earned everything we have for ourselves that we thank ourselves instead of God; or like the other 9 lepers, we get so caught up in enjoying our gifts that we forget to thank God for giving them.

Or, the second problem is we become so narrowly focused on the kinds and amount of gifts we think God should give us, that we become angry or jaded with the Giver if he doesn't give those gifts to

us! When our focus is on the gift rather than the Giver, our gratitude becomes dependent on receiving that gift!

We've all seen kids, or maybe been the kids on Christmas, who open the gift they want, and get so wrapped up in playing with it, that their parents have to remind them, "What do you say?" And the response is a quick, unthinking, "Thank you!" Or, if they don't get the specific gift they really wanted, they cross their arms and refuse to say thank you for the countless other gifts they received! If either one sounds like your life, you've probably been more focused on the gift than the Giver!

But if we're focused primarily on the Giver, then gratitude to God persists and takes a primacy in our lives, whether we've received the gift we want or not. When our faith clings to Jesus as our Savior, then our priority will be to thank him for the gifts we get to enjoy—like the Samaritan does. And if we don't receive some gift we wanted, our gratitude can still persist, because we know Jesus has given us the greatest gift of salvation and eternal life! With grateful hearts we can say, "If God has given me himself, then he'll give me whatever I really need!" That confidence translates to a life filled with gratitude to God, no matter what!

When you're focused more on the giver than the gift, you receive the gifts differently. A piece of paper covered in crayon scribbles is a priceless gift when it comes from your child or grandchild. A fishing tacklebox filled with old, used fishing hooks and lures is invaluable when it's a gift from your Grandpa who's now in Heaven. When we focus on the giver instead of the gift, we're filled with joy and gratitude, regardless of the gift looks. Likewise, when our faith is in the Giver, our gratitude isn't reliant on the gift. Our joy is found not in how God benefits us, but simply in God himself.

But if we're honest, we're far more often like the 9 than the 1, aren't we? So caught up in our lives that we fail to live with gratitude for the one who has given us life, livelihood, and eternal life. Because of our lack of gratitude, Jesus might as well be saying about us, "***Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God?***"

Spiritually, we ought to be the ones going around crying out, "Unclean! Unclean!"

But that's why it's so important that we focus on the Giver. Because lasting gratitude stems from people showing you love when you're completely undeserving of it. Lasting gratitude stems from people showing you love that is generous, above and beyond what is expected. Like the 10 lepers, we need to beg Jesus, "Master, heal us!" And he has! When Jesus went to Jerusalem as the sacrificial lamb who would end the separation between mankind and God that sin caused, he went with you in mind! Even though you're completely undeserving of it. Even though we're so often ungrateful for it. We can always have an unwavering gratitude to Jesus, because he's given you the most generous gift ever given—himself, to be your Savior!

So, back to the original question. How can I have more gratitude? There's one simple way: Through faith that trusts in Jesus as your Savior! When our faith and focus are on the Giver, we can be grateful at all times, because he has given us the most generous, undeserved gift of all. Himself! Rise and go, dear friends! Your faith in Jesus has healed you of sin, and saved you for eternity!