

Gracious God, give us humble, teachable, and obedient hearts, that we may receive what you have revealed, and do what you have commanded. Amen.

Luke 17:11-19 Common English Bible (CEB)

Jesus heals a Samaritan

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.”

The Gratitude Path: Grounded in Gratitude

Today we come to praise God! We come to thank God. Today we fall on our faces at Jesus’ feet in gratitude and thanksgiving. We have been given the gift of our lives and our family and our friends.

Especially on this day we are grateful for the saints in heaven whose lives have touched ours. We have many, many things both large and

small to thank God for. And so, maybe that is what makes today's scripture startling.

Jesus heals ten lepers. He gives them back their health and so much more, and yet only one bothers to say, "thank you."

You probably know that leprosy was a dreaded disease in ancient times. It is an infectious disease caused by a bacteria. It is somewhat contagious passing from continued contact from someone infected--it spreads through mouth and nose droplets. And so in ancient times it resulted in a huge stigma and infected people were shunned and forced out of their homes and communities. And the ten men in the story were basically outcasts living on the margins of everything they had once been a part of.

And in this story Jesus heals the men's bodies, and he allows them to return to their synagogue to worship; he allows them to return to their families and their homes. He restores them not just in their bodies but in their relationships and in their ability to worship in the community of

God. This is truly a miracle on so many levels. And yet, we are shocked to learn that only one returns to thank Jesus. A 10% rate of gratitude is pretty weak, isn't it?

Today we are going to be thinking about being grounded in gratitude as a practice for living a generous life -- as a way of expressing thanks for all the blessings that God gives us. We continue to think about generosity as a part of our spiritual growth and our faith and trust in God. Last week we talked about how we are born to be generous. We read the story of how God created us in God's image. And if God is love, we are filled with that same love. We are hard-wired to be generous just as God is overwhelmingly generous with us.

And did you know that not only is gratitude a part of who we are and part of our spiritual growth, there are lots of other benefits as well. Researchers have found that people who are thankful take better care of themselves physically and mentally, get more exercise, eat a healthier diet, are more mentally alert, schedule regular physical exams, cope

better with stress and daily challenges, feel happier and more optimistic, have stronger immune systems and maintain a brighter view of the future. (<https://www.healthline.com/health/depression/giving-thanks#1>).

I have to say, I think there's a lot of good evidence that God intends for us to live as thankful people and as generous people. It's good for our physical, mental and spiritual health!

Today I'm going to focus on two core ideas about gratitude and share with you a couple of stories. First: we are called to: **give thanks in every situation.**

1 Thessalonians 5:16 says: Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

I want to tell you about Pastor Rinkart who lived in the 1600s

He was a Lutheran pastor of the walled city of Eilenburg in Germany during the Thirty Year's War. Eilenburg was a city of refuge for political and military fugitives, which meant it became severely overcrowded and experienced deadly pestilence, poverty and famine. Armies overran it three times. Even though Pastor Rinkart had barely enough to provide for his own family, he opened his home to provide food and shelter to countless people in need. In 1637 the people of Eilenburg experienced a severe plague and as the only surviving pastor in the city Pastor Rinkart

conducted as many as fifty funerals a day for those who died during the plague. Pastor Rinkart's wife also died of the plague, and he conducted his own wife's funeral.

One might think that a pastor who had experienced so much pain, suffering and death might be upset with God or have a negative view of his life.

However, in the midst of a plague that killed thousands of people including his beloved wife, Pastor Rinkart wrote a powerful hymn of gratitude and thanksgiving to God. (Kent Millard, *The Gratitude Path*, 16-17).

See UMH 102 - Now Thank We All Our God.

Now thank we all our God,
with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
in Whom this world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

Oh, may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace,
and guide us when perplexed;
And guard us through all ills
in this world, till the next!

All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given,
The Son, and Him Who reigns
with Them in highest Heaven—
The one eternal God,
Whom earth and Heav'n adore;
For thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.

Despite the tragedies all around him, Pastor Rinkhart wrote that God had done wondrous things, given countless gifts; he asked that God would keep us and guide us and guard us. Pastor Rinkhart gave praise and thanks to God! May we be so filled with the presence of Christ that we might offer praise and thanksgiving in every situation we face. My prayer for us today is that we might be grounded in gratitude.

The second core idea I want to share with you today is that being grounded in gratitude includes **thanking God for what God has already done for us. When we look back and count our blessings, we become grateful people.** I want to share another story with you – this is one that the president of my seminary Dr. Kent Millard wrote

about. He talked about how he did not grow up attending church because for the first ten years of his life, his dad was a practicing alcoholic. He grew up in Texas, but his family moved around a lot because his dad would go on a drinking binge, miss work for a week, and get fired – forcing them to move to another town.

The family eventually ended up in a town called Faith, South Dakota. His mother ran a café, and his dad just kept right on drinking. There was one bar in Faith and it was owned by the city, and the bar keeper was also the sheriff. And so, Dr. Millard's dad would get drunk and then the sheriff would arrest him for public intoxication – put him in jail, he would pay a fine and get out.

As a kid Dr. Millard's mom would send him to the jail with money to bail his father out. And this happened over and over again. Until one night when the bartender/sheriff decided that instead of putting him in jail, he would take him to a meeting of a new group called Alcoholics Anonymous. Dr. Millard says this is what happened:

Those men took my dad under their wing. They took him to a ranch about 20 miles away from town to dry out and learn the steps of AA. Dad says he was walking across the prairie one day trying to memorize the steps of AA. The first couple of steps are to admit that we are powerless over alcohol but that there is a power that can save us from this addiction. Dad said to himself, “I am powerless over alcohol. I have stopped drinking a thousand times, but I always go back to drinking.” Dad continued, “Believe there is a power that can save us from this addiction.” Dad thought to himself, “I wish that was true.”

Then he felt it. He felt as though he was surrounded by a bright light and a living presence. He fell to his knees and cried out, “God if you are real, save me because I can’t save myself.”

In that moment of total surrender, Dad felt the presence of God come into his life and give him a peace he had never known before. When he got up from the prairie he knew he would never drink again.

When Dad returned to town and told [his family] he would never drink again, it came from his deep spiritual experience and he never took another drink of alcohol for the rest of his life.

Then Dad said, “Now we need to go to church.” I was ten years old and had never attended worship. I didn’t know why people went to church. I asked, “Why do we have to go to church now? Dad explained, “We need to go to church to thank God for getting me sober.”

Like Dr. Millard’s dad, like Pastor Rinkhart, like the one healed leper – let us **thank God this day for what God has already**

done for us! Let us thank God every day for what God is doing no matter the circumstance. Let us be grounded in gratitude to God the one who gives all good and perfect gifts.

Lord, teach us to be thankful and help us to live as generous people. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Challenge - Spend some time this week being grounded in gratitude -- especially give thanks to God for the people both in heaven and on earth who are important in your life. Take the time to write a note or tell someone “thank you” in person.

Blessing

Filled to the brim with the goodness of God;
the nourishment of Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life,
and the power of the Holy Spirit,
go now with gratitude and thanksgiving to serve God in all that
you think, do and say. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. AMEN.