



THE NINE
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The Crossing Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

OPENING

This week we are beginning a study called **79 Miles With Jesus**. This series leads up to Easter as we walk with Jesus and His followers 79 miles from The Galilee to Jerusalem during which stories about people they encounter will teach us lessons about the priorities of Jesus' Kingdom. We begin this week with a lesson about gratitude. This journey to Jerusalem was to celebrate Passover Week and Jesus' followers were hoping to see Him, at some point in His ministry, overthrow the Romans. Instead, they were heading toward Jesus' death – and RESURRECTION! Easter was awaiting them as it us in 2021.

SCRIPTURE¹

Luke 17:11-17 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!” When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

OBSERVATION

As Jesus and His followers were travelling, they heard ten voices calling to Jesus for mercy and healing of their disease. It was their condition that brought them to Jesus. We can't imagine the **1) Physical trauma**. They had the worst condition of their day which was a skin disease that attacked their bodies -- its effects were horrendous. It took 30 years to run its course and in that time limbs could even fall off; **2) Emotional trauma**. Imagine the pain they would have experienced being emotionally cut off from people. Leprosy was such a contagious disease, the Old Testament gave instructions that there could be no contact with friends, spouse or children. The lepers were to be immediately removed from the community when they were diagnosed. There was no kissing their wives goodbye or hugging their children - it was leave immediately. And there was shame that went along with all of that. Always forced to stand at a distance. They were never allowed to come into the walls of the city. They were forced to be isolated with others who were also suffering. We understand this better than we ever would before the challenges of quarantine and always trying to stay six feet apart. And everywhere that lepers went they had to cry “Unclean, Unclean!” Imagine their identity being wrapped up in what they have to say about themselves. They suffered **3) spiritual trauma** because more than being physically ill and emotionally disconnected, they could not enter into the temple. They could not enjoy worship, couldn't make a sacrifice, couldn't be part of that faith gathering. Their lives were summarized by one word -- pain.

QUESTION: How is our Covid-19 experience like the impact of leprosy?

APPLICATION Jesus told the men to go to the priests and show them their newly healed bodies so they started walking and were gradually healed. They were obedient, which is always important in following Jesus, but nine were not

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture referenced here is NIV

repentant. Ten men were healed, but only one turned back to thank Jesus. That's ten percent, right? All ten had their lives returned to them through the mercy of God yet nine of them went on with their lives as if the event was just a blip on a computer screen. Of course, we don't really know if or how their lives may have changed, but if they weren't grateful at the time of their healing, why would we think they were grateful after it? The tenth man, a Samaritan who was already ostracized by Jews because of his ethnicity, embodies gratitude and also paints a picture of repentance. This is the story of ten men whose lives were tormented by leprosy, but we all have our own afflictions that distract us from being grateful for God's wonders in our lives. It is interesting that the same way leprosy caused separation from society, sin causes separation from GOD.

QUESTION: When have you known someone who was blessed by God and showed no gratitude?

QUESTION: Under what circumstances have you been compelled to fall on your knees in gratitude to God?

QUESTION: Why do you think gratitude has such healing power?

We all have scars. They often go back many years. And we have highs. We can be grateful for both because, even though some caused great pain, guilt, and emotional suffering, they are part of our story and contributed to who we are today. If it were not for the pain we may not have sought God. If it were not for trials, difficulties and hardship, would we have pressed into Him? There is something about these difficulties – things that we would rather take a pass on – that bring a desperation and a crying out that move us toward God -- something within us that causes us to say, "God, we need You!" **Henri Nouwen** wrote, "To be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives is easy, but to be grateful for all of our lives – the good as well as the bad, the moments of joy as well as the moments of sorrow, the successes as well as the failures, the rewards as well as the rejections – that requires hard spiritual work. As long as we keep dividing our lives between events and people we would like to remember and those we would rather forget, we cannot claim the fullness of our beings as a gift of God to be grateful for."

QUESTION: What difficult experiences in your past have molded you into who are today?

QUESTION: What about the past year do you attribute to God's working in you?

QUESTION: How often have you expressed gratitude to God during this past day, month, year?

Jesus tells the repentant man, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." He had been more than cleansed – he had been made well. He had experienced forgiveness, wholeness and salvation. When gratitude leads us back to God we are not just cleansed we are made whole. The way of the world says, "If I had more joy, I would be more grateful," but the way of the Kingdom is, "If I had more gratitude, I would have more joy." The root of joy is gratefulness. When we realize we are entitled to nothing, we become grateful for everything.

QUESTION: Under what circumstances do you experience joy?

The presence of God is manifested throughout the many moments of our day. It may be through music, a conversation with a good friend, a game played with our kids, a rainbow that stretches across the sky bringing a promise of joy, a memory of a past amazing moment – all accumulate together into a moment when we are overcome with gratitude. It is a constant turning back to see where the goodness has come from and pursuing our God who is the source. So how do we become better people of DEEP and AUTHENTIC GRATITUDE? **1) REPENT.** Repent of our complaining, comparing, coveting and claiming entitlement. Let's identify the ways we have been complaining and comparing our lives to others' lives. The way we have been coveting a life God hasn't given us to live. Let's repent of all the ways we haven't been grateful, because to repent is to encounter the grace of God and, when that happens, we can turn around and go in a new direction. If our lives are shaped in any of these ways, gratitude has probably not taken root in our hearts as it should and as God wants it to. **2) REFOCUS.** Let's begin to identify all the ways God has been good to us – all the ways He has provided – the ways He has forgiven us – the ways He has protected us – the ways He has healed us and begin to refocus on His presence every day and in every aspect of our lives.

QUESTION: How much time do you give to comparing, complaining, coveting and claiming entitlement?

QUESTION: What could keep you from repenting of your lack of gratitude for God's working in your life?

QUESTION: When do you experience the presence of God most powerfully?

QUESTION: How is this Easter season going to be honored by you with gratitude as you experience the full meaning of forgiveness, redemption, and salvation provided by Christ Jesus?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we have become so overwhelmed by difficulties and painful experiences without remembering that it is through these times You are strengthening and growing us. Help us this Easter season to repent of our ingratitude and refocus on our Kingdom values, not the least of which is gratitude for Your love, healing and divine presence. In Jesus' name. Amen.

QUESTIONS

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