

# “The Savior’s Touch

(Luke 5:12-16)

## Introduction

➤ It is difficult for us to fully or truly empathize with a leprous person, from biblical times. Leprosy was the most feared disease in the ancient world. To contract leprosy was to almost inevitably face a slow, horrible and certain death. To have leprosy was, in effect, “to die in slow motion.”

Contrary to conventional thinking, “Leprosy does not deteriorate or eat at the flesh but rather desensitizes the nerves. Unprotected by the warning signals of pain, the leper wears down his extremities or suffers cuts, burns, and infections without knowing he is being injured” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans*; 2:11-15).

➤ In Biblical times, the physical disease of leprosy was not only extremely deadly but also highly contagious and incurable by man. Thus, the lepers were often quarantined into isolated, and infected, colonies where they would literally die together – isolated from the rest of the population – in relative obscurity and infamy (see Lev.13:45-46; Num.5:2). The disease was so serious, and so contagious (communicable through touch or breath), the leper had to announce himself “*Unclean, unclean*” (Lev.13:45) whenever other people were around. The life of the leper was practically hopeless and utterly helpless as they watched their bodies slowly erode into death, and hoped beyond hope that they would somehow get better.

✓ Illust: In his book *Unclean! Unclean!* L. S. Huizenga graphically describes some of the horrors of leprosy: “The disease which we today call leprosy generally begins with pain in certain areas of the body. Numbness follows. Soon the skin in such spots loses its original color. It gets to be thick, glossy, and scaly. ... As the sickness progresses, the thickened spots become dirty sores and ulcers due to poor blood supply. The skin, especially around the eyes and ears, begins to bunch, with deep furrows between the swellings, so that the face of the afflicted individual begins to resemble that of a lion. Fingers drop off or are absorbed; toes are affected similarly. Eyebrows and eyelashes drop out. By this time one can see the person in this pitiable condition is a leper. By a touch of the finger one can also feel it. One can even smell it, for the leper emits a very unpleasant odor. Moreover, in view of the fact that the disease-producing agent frequently also attacks the larynx, the leper’s voice acquires a grating quality. His throat becomes hoarse, and you can now not only see, feel, and smell the leper, but you can hear his rasping voice. And if you stay with him for some time, you can even imagine a peculiar taste in your mouth, probably due to the odor” (*The MacArthur’s New Testament Commentary: Matthew*; 8:1-4).

✓ Illust: “Josephus, the Jewish historian, summed it up by saying that lepers were treated ‘as if they were, in effect, dead men’ – dead men walking. Indeed, to the rabbis the cure of the leper was as difficult as raising a person from the dead” (R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word: Luke v.1*, p.167).

➤ To make matters unimaginably worse, those who contracted leprosy were physically and spiritually unclean. While this designation was to keep the deadly disease from spreading, many wrongly assumed that all human suffering was a direct result of God’s discipline for personal – which is simply not the case (see Job 1:8, 22; 2:3, 10; Jn.9:1-3). The Jews considered leprosy to be a severe punishment from God – which it sometimes was, but not always [e.g. “Miriam” (Num.12:10-11) and “Uzziah” (2Chron.26:20)].

Among the sixty-one defilements of ancient Jewish laws, leprosy was second only to a dead body in seriousness. Once a person was identified by the priest as having leprosy (Lev.13:2-3), his life was immediately and radically changed – physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Often relegated to the life of a beggar, the leper was sentenced to live with an incurable, likely fatal, disease, that rendered him a social/religious outcast and physically/spiritually unclean.

➤ As we come to our scriptural passage for this morning, we find an encounter Jesus had with a leper. This story is recorded in all three synoptic Gospels, and occurred during the time when Jesus’ popularity was increasing rapidly (“*And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee*”; Mk.1:28; see Lk.4:37).

**Luke 5:12-16** ~ “While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’ <sup>13</sup>And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will; be clean.’ And immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>14</sup>And he charged him to tell no one, but ‘go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.’ <sup>15</sup>But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. <sup>16</sup>But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.”

Mark 1:40-45 ~ “And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, ‘If you will, you can make me clean.’ <sup>41</sup>Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, ‘I will; be clean.’ <sup>42</sup>And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. <sup>43</sup>And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, <sup>44</sup>and said to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.’ <sup>45</sup>But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.”

Matt 8:1-4 ~ “When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. <sup>2</sup>And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’ <sup>3</sup>And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will; be clean.’ And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. <sup>4</sup>And Jesus said to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.’”

➤ In order to help us mine the truths found in these verses, I have outlined this passage with six distinct headings.

### 1. The leper's desperate condition (vs.12a)

➤ While we do not know which *“one of the cities”* (vs.12) this encounter took place, we do know that it occurred with Jesus was in the region of Galilee (the northern part of New Testament Palestine). It was during this time that Jesus was teaching, preaching, and performing miracles. People were captivated by His authoritative preaching and amazed by His ability to heal the sick and cast out demons.

It was at this time that *“there came a man full of leprosy”* (vs.12; *plērēs lepra*). As a doctor by trade, Luke alone gives this description. This man's condition was severe, and terribly advanced. The effects of his leprosy would most likely have marred his appearance and putrefied his odor.

➤ This man would have been highly contagious, and his approaching Jesus (or any non-leper) was strictly forbidden – especially in his advanced condition. A leper wasn't allowed to come within six feet of any other human, including his own family. The disease was considered so revolting that the leper wasn't permitted to come within 150 feet of anyone when the wind was blowing.

The fact that this man approached Jesus shows us just how desperate he was. He really had nothing to lose. He was terminally (incurably) ill, facing a horrific and imminent death. If he once had thoughts of getting better, at this stage those thoughts likely were gone. But then he saw Jesus!

### 2. The leper's reverent faith (vs.12b)

➤ We then read that *“when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face”* (vs.12). In abject humility, with his knees and face on the ground before Jesus (see Matt.8:2; Mk.1:40), the leper struck the posture of lowly servant or beggar. In fact, Matthew's description could be translated as “worship” (*proskyneō*; i.e., “a leper came and worshipped Him”; Matt.8:2).

What an alarming, potentially disturbing, sight this must have been. Breaking social protocols, and Levitical laws, this man prostrated himself just feet (or inches) away from Jesus.

- The leper then pleaded with Jesus, calling Him “*Lord*” (*kyrios*), to heal him: “*he ... begged him, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean’*” (vs.12). This was quite a request! Remember, in the ancient world, the disease of leprosy was incurable. What this man was asking was for Jesus to do the “impossible” – to perform something supernatural, a miracle.

Amazingly, it seems as though the leper had no doubt at all that Jesus *could* heal him, he just did not know if Jesus *would* heal him: “*Lord, if you will, you can make me clean*” (vs.12; *ean thelō dynamai egō katharizō*; “if you are willing, you can cleanse me”).

- What reverence! What humility! What faith! The leper did not command Jesus; he did not try to bargain with Jesus; he did not claim that “life is unfair”, he did not believe that he deserved to be healed. He did not foolishly think that he could make demands of Jesus (“name it and claim it”), nor did he arrogantly think that he had anything to offer Jesus. He did not come to Jesus angrily or proudly or defiantly or conditionally. He hoped for God’s grace (getting what he did not deserve) and pleaded for God’s mercy (not getting what he did deserve).

**Luke 17:11-13** ~ “On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup>And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance <sup>13</sup>and lifted up their voices, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.’”

**Luke 18:13** ~ “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’”

**Luke 18:35-39** ~ “As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. <sup>36</sup>And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. <sup>37</sup>They told him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.’ <sup>38</sup>And he cried out, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ <sup>39</sup>And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’”

- Unfortunately, there are many people today who approach Jesus as if He is their servant (and not the other way around). They view Him as some cosmic genie or bellhop who solely exists to make their lives better – to keep them from sufferings or sorrows – and if He does not perform to their expectations they respond by being “mad at God” or by “deconstructing” their faith. In essence, they come to Jesus only on their own terms, and only if Jesus obeys all of their demands and fulfills all of their wishes.

This leper demonstrates how everyone should come to Christ – humbly, desperately, worshipfully, unconditionally – with sacred reverence and sincere faith.

### 3. The Lord’s supernatural power (vs.13)

- Jesus was indeed gracious and merciful to the man with leprosy. In Mark’s account of this narrative, Mark 1:41, we read that Jesus was “*moved with pity*” (*splanchnizomai*; i.e. gut-wrenching, visceral, compassion). This is what moved Jesus to reach out to the leper: “*Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him*” (vs.13). Jesus was clearly not afraid this contagious and deadly disease. In fact, Jesus touching this leper did not render Jesus unclean but resulted in the leper being clean! He did not rebuke the man or command that he keep his distance. In fact, Jesus closed the distance by putting His hand on the leper. The Jews were forbidden to touch a leper because to do so would cause the disease to spread. The only thing more “unclean” than touching a leper was to touch a dead body. I think the simple fear of a pandemic would keep most people from even associating with lepers let alone touching them.
- We must not make the mistake of thinking that Jesus had to touch the leper in order to heal him. Jesus could have healed him with just a word (as He often did). In fact, Jesus did not even need to be near the man in order to heal him. For various reasons, Jesus healed people in many different ways – but, with divine authority (*fiat*), He only needed to speak or will the healing into existence.

**Luke 7:11-17** ~ “Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. <sup>12</sup>As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town

was with her. <sup>13</sup>And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion [*splanchnizomai*] on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.' <sup>14</sup>Then he came up and touched the bier [i.e., coffin], and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise.' <sup>15</sup>And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. <sup>16</sup>Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and 'God has visited his people!' <sup>17</sup>And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country."

**Luke 8:24-25** ~ "And they went and woke [Jesus], saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. <sup>25</sup>He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?'"

**Matt 8:5-13** ~ "When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, <sup>6</sup>'Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.' <sup>7</sup>And he said to him, 'I will come and heal him.' <sup>8</sup>But the centurion replied, 'Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>9</sup>For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.' <sup>10</sup>When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, 'Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. <sup>11</sup>I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, <sup>12</sup>while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' <sup>13</sup>And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.' And the servant was healed at that very moment." (also Lk.7:1-10)

**Matt 15:21-28** ~ "And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup>And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.' <sup>23</sup>But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she is crying out after us.' <sup>24</sup>He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' <sup>25</sup>But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' <sup>26</sup>And he answered, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' <sup>27</sup>She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' <sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly." (also Mk.7:24-30)

**Mark 8:22-27** ~ "And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. <sup>23</sup>And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Do you see anything?' <sup>24</sup>And he looked up and said, 'I see people, but they look like trees, walking.' <sup>25</sup>Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. <sup>26</sup>And he sent him to his home, saying, 'Do not even enter the village.'"

**John 9:1-7** ~ "As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' <sup>6</sup>Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud <sup>7</sup>and said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing."

**John 11:43-44** ~ "When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.' <sup>44</sup>The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"

- As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus did not need any medical or medicinal resources. He did not need to touch the diseased person or shout away the illness. He did not use incantations or employ theatrics. With just the divine authority of His Word (His will) Jesus performed miracles – suspending or defying the very laws of nature.
- Simply put, Jesus touched the leper as a demonstration of His compassionate love and divine power. It is likely that the leper had not felt the touch of another human in a long time. Just moments before, this man desperately pleaded with Jesus to heal him, saying, “*Lord, if you will, you can make me clean*” (vs.12). And now he felt the Savior’s touch and heard Him say, “*I will; be clean*” (vs.13). Jesus touched this unclean, disease-infested, sinful man and made Him clean by the authority of His divine will.
- Interestingly, all three (synoptic) Gospel accounts reveal that the leper was “*immediately*” (vs.13; *eutheōs/euthys*), and completely (“*the leprosy left him*”; vs.13), cured of his leprosy. The man did not slowly or gradually get better (see Lk.1:64; 4:39). Miraculously, Jesus instantly healed this man of an incurable and terminal disease.

#### 4. The Lord’s purposeful commands (vs.14)

- But Jesus is not finished with this man, for the man needed to “*show [himself] to the priest, and make an offering for [his] cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them*” (vs.14). This was not only according to Mosaic law, but would also rightly restore this man in society. The extensive instructions for this process, which lasted eight days, are described in Leviticus 14. This was not a suggestion from Jesus, but a direct command [“*show*” (*deiknymī*) and “*make an offering*” (*prospherō*) are imperative verbs].
- In addition, Jesus “*charged*” (*parangellō*; to announce or command) the man to “*tell no one*” (vs.14) about his healing. Mark recorded that Jesus “*sternly charged*” (*embrimaomai*) the man, which carries the idea of seriousness, intensity, or even agitation (Mk.1:43; see Jn.11:33, 38). At the very least, it seems that Jesus did not want this man to tell everyone that Jesus had healed him until after he had been regarded as clean by the priests. It is also possible that Jesus did not want him to say anything about his healing until after Jesus rose from the dead. Of course, not wanting to be known only as a miracle-worker, Jesus may have wanted the man to keep this healing private.

Matthew recorded that Jesus did this many times.

**Matt 9:27-31** ~ “And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David.’ <sup>28</sup>When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to him, ‘Yes, Lord.’ <sup>29</sup>Then he touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith be it done to you.’ <sup>30</sup>And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned [*embrimaomai*] them, ‘See that no one knows about it.’ <sup>31</sup>But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.”

**Matt 12:15-21** ~ “Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all <sup>16</sup>and ordered them not to make him known. <sup>17</sup>This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: <sup>18</sup>‘Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup>He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; <sup>20</sup>a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; <sup>21</sup>and in his name the Gentiles will hope.” (also Mk.3:7-12)

**Matt 16:18-20** ~ “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup>I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ <sup>20</sup>Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.”

**Matt 17:9** ~ “And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, ‘Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.’” (also Mk.9:9; Lk.9:36b)

**Luke 8:51-56** ~ “And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. <sup>52</sup>And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, ‘Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping.’ <sup>53</sup>And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. <sup>54</sup>But taking her by the hand he called, saying, ‘Child, arise.’ <sup>55</sup>And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. <sup>56</sup>And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.” (also Matt.9:18-26; Mk.5:21-43)

- Obedience always follows true saving faith (see Eph.2:8-10; Lk.6:46-49; Jn.5:14; 8:11; 14:15, 21). We are called to obey our Lord whether we agree with or fully understand His commands. A person cannot truly receive Jesus as their Savior, if they do not also respond to Him as their Lord!

**Luke 5:4-5** ~ “And when [Jesus] had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’ <sup>5</sup>And Simon answered, ‘Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.’”

- Our obedience to Christ is to be unconditional. That is, not conditioned upon our agreement or our understanding (see Prov.3:5-6; Is.55:8-9). The Lord has His reasons for the commands that He gives, and (unlike ours) His knowledge is perfect, exhaustive, and eternal. He is the Potter, and we are the clay (Is.64:8; Jer.18:1-6).

## 5. The leper’s evangelistic disobedience (vs.15)

- While understandable, it is unfortunate that the man healed of leprosy disobeyed Jesus’ command and, according to Mark’s Gospel, “*went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter*” (Mk.1:45). Ironically, the disobedience of the one who had been forced to live in isolated places (i.e., the leper), caused the One who healed him to be forced to live in isolated places (i.e., Jesus).

This man, so overwhelmed and thankful that he is no longer a leper, seemingly could not resist telling everyone what Jesus had done. While we cannot minimize this man’s disobedience – after all, Jesus did clearly forbid him to say anything about this to anyone – we surely can understand why he would want to tell the whole world about what Jesus had mercifully and miraculously done. It’s not a surprise to find a man who has been cured of leprosy bursting at the seams to tell everyone what had happened and how it happened. What would be surprising is if this man didn’t want to testify about who Jesus was and what He had done.

For example, it is surprising when someone who believes that Jesus forgave them of all their sins and yet refuses to tell others about their Savior or their salvation. The man who was cured of leprosy sinned by commission in that he did what the Lord told him not to do. When we fail to evangelize those who are lost, we sin by omission by not doing what the Lord has told us to do. The man who was cured of leprosy was told not to tell anyone, and he seemingly told everyone; we are told to tell everyone, and often do not tell anyone (see Matt.28:19-20; Mk.16:15; Acts 1:8).

- Consequently, because of the man’s disobedience, as recorded by Luke, “*now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered*” (vs.15). It is difficult to overstate Jesus’ popularity, and the following He had. Throughout the Gospels, we find many different summaries of extent of Jesus’ renown.

**Luke 4:14-15** ~ “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup>And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.”

**Luke 4:40** ~ “Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.”

**Luke 6:17-19** ~ “And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, <sup>18</sup>who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. <sup>19</sup>And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.”

**John 3:26-27** ~ “And they came to John and said to him, ‘Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness – look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.’” [i.e., Jesus’ disciples baptizing (see Jn.4:2)]

**John 12:18-19** ~ “The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. <sup>19</sup>So the Pharisees said to one another, ‘You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.’”

- It was extremely difficult for Jesus to get away from the crowds, who were coming to Him in droves. Many (if not most) of them, were not coming to believe in Him as the Messiah but *“to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities”* (vs.15). Because of the man’s disobedience, Jesus was forced to travel on the outskirts of town lest He be mobbed by the crowds.

## 6. The Lord’s devout prayers (vs.16)

- Luke alone records that Jesus *“would withdraw to desolate places and pray”* (Lk.5:16). Thronged by the crowds of people, Jesus had to fight to find time and a place to pray. He would seek out *“desolate places”* (*erēmos*; remote or deserted places) so that He could pray without interruption or distraction. While we cannot truly relate to the pressures Jesus faced, probably all of us can relate to the struggle find time and place to pray without interruption or distraction.
- Simply put, prayer is the human heart in communication with its Creator. True prayer is a spiritual and humble act of worship to God. For it is through prayer that we are amazingly and spiritually granted permission to go into the throne room of God and speak into the hearing of His sovereign and majestic presence, and are able to utter our humble requests according to His holy name and will (Heb.4:16).
  - ✓ Illust: “The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray” (Samuel Chadwick).

**Prov 15:8** ~ “The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.” (HCSB)

**Prov 15:29** ~ “The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.”

- The act of prayer is not difficult, but it is amazing. To have a great prayer life does not require great intelligence or great strength, but it does require great sincerity and great humility. Prayer is both simple and sacred. Personally, I have never met a Christian who would say that they prayed too much or even that they pray enough. Prayer is the continual communion with God and passionate pursuit of God. We must not make prayer more than it is (that is, by overcomplicating or distorting it) or make prayer less than it is (that is, by undervaluing or trivializing it). True prayer is simply the sacred communication of a believer to their God!
  - ✓ Illust: “Prayer is the spontaneous response of the believing heart to God. Those truly transformed by Jesus Christ find themselves lost in the wonder and joy of communion with Him. Prayer is as natural for the Christian as breathing” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts*; 9:10-12). “Prayer is living life in a God-conscious way” (John MacArthur; *The Master’s Plan for the Church*; ch.3, “Prayer”).

➤ Of course, Jesus is our perfect example. With the crowds increasing and intensifying (with pressures and demands mounting) we read that Jesus “*would withdraw to desolate places and pray*” (vs.16). The adjective “*desolate places*” (*erēmos*) does not describe a geographical location as much as it does a physical setting. That is, Jesus looked for a remote or deserted place where He could pray to God without interruption or distraction.

**Rom 12:12** ~ “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant [*proskartereō*] in prayer.”

**Col 4:2** ~ “Continue steadfastly [*proskartereō*] in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

**1 Thess 5:17** ~ “pray without ceasing [*adialeiptōs*]”

➤ The Greek construction of this sentence indicates that Jesus would often or regularly “*withdraw to desolate places*” (vs.16; see Lk.3:21; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1; 23:46). Prayer was an essential and integral part of Jesus life and ministry. He did not merely pray when He “needed something.” He did not use prayer as a “break glass in case of emergency.” He did not pray only when it was safe or convenient or seemingly beneficial. He fought to find time and space to pray to God His Father. And we must do the same (see Eph.6:10-20)

## Conclusion

➤ It is important – after rightly interpreting the story of the leper – that we understand a correct application of this passage of Scripture (the application is not “how to receive your healing from God”). Every passage of Scripture has only one right interpretation, but it may have many applications. One central and direct application to the story of the unclean leper is the story of the unsaved sinner.

The story of every person’s hopeless and helpless condition before a holy and loving God. This real, historical, and supernatural event is a graphic illustration of sin. The story of the leper is an accurate illustration of what happens when a sinner receives Christ into their heart to be Lord and Savior of their life. Like leprosy, sin infects the whole person, and will cause a person to be desensitized to the reality that their condition is both fragile and fatal. Sin is ugly, loathsome, corrupting, contaminating, alienating, and incurable by man.

**Ezek 36:25-27** ~ “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup>And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

**2 Cor 5:17** ~ “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. ...”

➤ Here again we see the parallel between the leper and the sinner. The Bible refers to all the unsaved as depraved, desperately sick, wretched, godless, and helpless sinners (see Jer.17:9; Rom.3:10-12, 23; 6:23; Eph.2:1-2; Rev.3:17). Apart from the Savior’s healing touch, we are all unclean and unsaved, diseased and destitute, incurable and condemned. Therefore, we must all come to Christ pleading for His mercy, grace, and love. We are all unworthy and undeserving of God’s salvation, that comes by God’s grace through faith in Christ alone (Gal.2:16; Eph.2:5, 8-10; Tit.3:5; 2Tim.1:9). God does not love us because we are so lovable, but because He is so loving!

**Rom 5:8** ~ “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

➤ The physical reality and consequences of leprosy are an illustration of the spiritual reality and consequences of sin. Like the leper, Christians are those who have supernaturally been made clean by Jesus Christ. Everyone who truly receives Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, will have all their sins forgiven by the compassionate and cleansing touch of Jesus Christ. The repentant sinner falls on his/her face before Christ and pleads, “*Lord, if you will, you can make me clean*” (Lk.5:12) – “*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*” (Lk.18:13) – and Christ responds with the touch of saving grace and says, “I will, be clean!”