

TRANSFORMING GRATITUDE: Giving Praise to God

Luke 17:11-19

On Thursday afternoon, I was sitting at remote picnic table on the west side of Ada Hayden Park, papers, books, some pens spread out on that beautiful windless afternoon. And I found myself watching the leaves fall off a set of trees, just off in the distance. One by one they fell, eventually, thousands of them. And in those few minutes, I suddenly got a refreshed picture from the Spirit of God, a fresh understanding of what actually goes on in the world every moment of every day, 24/7.

I'd like to attempt a description of this, though I'm quite sure I won't tell the whole story. But here goes.

- **Every day**, among the almost 10,000 species of **birds** worldwide,ⁱ among the estimated 300 billion+ birdsⁱⁱ alive on our planet, there isn't one of them (on any given day, at any given moment) that falls from flight but that God Himself is immediately aware of which bird it is, precisely what happened to that bird, and exactly where it fell (cf. Matthew 10:29ⁱⁱⁱ; the Audubon Society estimates that 1 billion North American birds die each year in migration, colliding into tall concrete buildings with windows or into artificial lighting^{iv}).
- Scientists and biologists are at a complete loss at estimating the number of **living organisms** in the world. 10,000 new species are discovered every year, some estimates suggest 8.7 million species—6.5 million species on land, 2.2 million species in the oceans.^v The number of actual living organisms on the earth is incalculable...and what should blow our minds is that "the Lord God made them all" (cf. Acts 4:24, 17:24).
- Each year, the earth is covered with **rainfall**, on average about 39 inches of rain everywhere on the planet. Enough rain to fill ½ million 100 story skyscrapers. This rain produces at least 4 billion tons of **food** every year, 11 million tons per day...and all of it the seeds and the sun, the rain and the harvests, are directly given by God Himself (cf. Matthew 5:45^{vi}).
- **Every day**, among the 7.6 billion individuals on our planet, there are 360,000 births each day and 160,000 deaths.^{vii} Every hour, 15,000 new babies. Each day, there are 200,000 more people in the world. And every moment of every day, God immediately knows exactly the number of the hairs on the head of every human being in the world (cf. Matthew 10:30^{viii}).
- On average, each person in the world, at rest, takes about **16 breaths** per minute (more, of course, if exerting physically). This means we breathe about **960 breaths** an hour, **23,040 breaths** a day. Multiply 23,040 X 7.6 billion to understand the # of breaths that humanity draws on the planet every day...and God gives each breath to each human being every 3.75 seconds (cf. Isaiah 42:5).

Perhaps you are getting my drift? John the Baptist declared, "No man receives anything unless heaven gives it."^{ix} Writing to Hebrew Christians, the author disclosed it: *God the Son...upholds the universe by the word of His power* (Hebrews 1:3). Paul the Missionary declared to Athen's philosophers: ^{Acts 17:24-25} *The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as*

though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

My drift is this: Whether we realize it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, every human being is constantly being gifted by a relentlessly gracious and all-powerful God who gives everyone every thing every moment of every day.

So HOW do you give thanks? I mean, what is true gratitude, and why does God search for it?

May I direct your attention to Luke's gospel, chapter 17?

Luke 17:11 On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance ¹³ and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." ¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

This is one of the most fascinating episodes in Jesus' life, and there are a hundred different questions we might explore to unzip all Luke intended us to see. This is a story about God's mercy, about God's extraordinary, miraculous giving. As one Pit-Crew participant said last Monday afternoon, Jesus is the star--Jesus is the hero--in this interaction.

But the Spirit would have us dig deeper. The key question here is WHY?

- **Why** does God so often, so freely, so generously give us everything we have?
- And **why** is He so responsive when we cry out for mercy?
- Does God's lavish generosity toward us happen because He somehow feels obligated—like He has to--as if He worries that we wouldn't think highly enough of Him if he didn't?
- And in all of His giving, **does God expect anything** from us, any response, or is He simply content to keep giving and giving and giving regardless of whether we acknowledge him at all?

Let's hunt down some answers by unpacking some important details.

First, as Luke is writing his account of Jesus' life, he's at the point of the story where Jesus is traveling north-to-south on a final journey through His homeland, destination Jerusalem.

- ✓ Jesus first took his disciples north to a pagan worship center at Caesarea Philippi, where the god Pan was worshipped, where children were sacrificed, where individuals had sex with animals in worship, where you could find in a cave plunging down into deep rock "the gates of hell" (cf. Matt. 16:13-20, cf. Luke 9:18-20). A stone's throw away, there, Jesus asks "Who do you say that I am?" and promises to build a church that will prevail over the gates of hell they were beholding
- ✓ Now they begin back south because (Luke 9:51) "Jesus **set his face** to go to Jerusalem."
- ✓ He sends out messengers ahead of him (Luke 10:1-12) "into every town and place where he

himself was about to go” with one simple message: ***The Kingdom of God has come near to you.***

So the word gets out; the Messiah is on the move. He’s coming through. Luke’s account journals that down the dusty roads He’s teaching and training his disciples. He’s evicting demons (Luke 11:14-23), dialoging with skeptical lawyers (Luke 11:37-52), calling out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Luke 12:1-3), making crystal clear the cost of discipleship (Luke 14:25-33), telling parables about how much God loves lost people (Luke 15).

Seven chapters later, in Luke 17:11-12 *On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village...and on the fringes, 10 lepers see him and call out. “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”*

Who are these people? They are simply described by their disease...and in that day, if you had leprosy, it was your identity. ^x

- ♦ **LIVING DEATH:** It was called “living death,” and if you had it, you were considered to be under God’s curse, likely because you or your family lineage had grievously sinned
- ♦ **GROSS DISFIGUREMENT:** It’s caused by a “slow, growing bacteria...which multiplies and incubates very slowly, sometimes up to 20 years, infecting mainly the skin and peripheral nerves. ...the nerves and skins outside the brain and spinal chord...[but spreads to the] hands, feet, face, and earlobes... It can also strike the eyes and thin tissues lining inside the nose. The main symptom of leprosy is disfiguring skin sores, lumps, or bumps that do not disappear after several week or months.
- ♦ **MUTILATION:** 90% of patients present with numbness first, sometimes years before the skin lesions appear. Temperature is the first sensation that is lost. Patients cannot sense extremes of hot or cold. The next sensation lost is light touch, then pain, and finally deep pressure. These losses are especially apparent in the hands and feet. Unable to feel leads to unwitting mutilation of limbs, fingers, toes, etc.^{xi}
- ♦ **EXCLUDED:** Lepers were so despised and loathed that they were not allowed to live in any community with their own people. They also had to wear torn clothes and were not allowed to come within six feet of any other person, including their families. If the wind were blowing, the demanded perimeter 150 feet.
- ♦ **UNCLEAN:** Lepers lived in leper colonies until they either got better or died. No employment, no home, no gathering with others to worship. Socially, financially, relationally---in every way—diseased. Alone, avoided, thought less-than-human, wretched.

And so 10 of them, perhaps having heard from the previously sent messengers that Jesus would be coming, anticipate his arrival. They see him and, keeping their distance, ask for mercy.

So they call out, and the term they use (vs.13) in calling out to Jesus is interesting: “Master.”^{xii}

It meant they recognized he was more than just “Jesus of Nazareth” from just a few miles up the road. His presence was significant, that His power and authority were capable, that His choice in their situation and His word could make all the difference. They could be released from “living death.”^{xiii}

And Jesus the Master says “Yes!” Leon Morris notes:

[When Jesus saw them] ...he responded. He did not come to them or touch them. He did not even say, “You are cured!” He [simply] told them, leprous as they were, to go and show themselves to, the priests.^{xiv}

Leviticus 14^{xv} outlines the law for verifying when a person was final and fully clean of leprosy. An extensive (32 verse) protocol – examination outside the camp, the sacrificial ceremony, a staged reintroduction to his home family, lamb offerings, grain offerings, thank offerings, atonement offering...all for the priests to certify the cleansing.

So, they turn and go. And as they turn taking their first steps to wherever they might find local, available Levitical priests, the Master did it. Within a few yards, amazed they look at their hands, their skin, their feet. Perhaps they saw, and touched each other’s faces; perhaps they began hugging each other, clapping each other on the backs, began shedding their torn, filthy clothing. “All right!...where are those priests!”

But the heart of this episode comes next – Luke 17:15-18

Luke 17:15-18 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”

Look...if our question is “What does God expect from those to whom He gives so freely, so generously?” find the answer in the 3 questions Jesus asks as only 1 is on his face at Jesus’ feet.

- ✓ Were not 10 cleansed?
- ✓ Where are the nine?
- ✓ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?

I love so many of the observations that our Monday Pit Crew group generated

- Nine were more interested in the GIFT; One more interested in the GIVER
- The one realizing he had been GIVEN MUCH, LOVED MUCH^{xvi}
- The least likely – the Samaritan – understood that genuine gratitude meant expressive worship

And, please, don't miss what Jesus says to the one—it's the climax of the story (vs. 19): "Rise and go on your way; your faith has made you well" (lit. "your faith has SAVED you"). Jesus, in his giving, in his mercy, was looking to do more than merely heal 10 guys of leprosy. He was looking to see them COMPLETELY transformed. He was looking to see their soul made well. Nine walked away with clear skin and restored limbs; one walked away with eternal life, with internal regeneration, with healing both inside and outside.

CONCLUSION

So what does Luke 17:11-19 teach? Simply this:

GOD'S GIFTS ARE INTENDED TO NOT MERELY TO PROVIDE, BUT TO TRANSFORM

The truth from Scripture is this: Jesus, God the Son, did not do miracles just to do miracles. He didn't heal people simply because He was personally against sickness, or because of a simple commitment to relieve human suffering...and then let people go on their merry way. Jesus healed and Jesus extended mercy because he had an agenda. His agenda was that mercy shown and healing given would lead to a deep, overflowing thankfulness to the TRUE GOD. Lead to a faith-praise that recognized who Jesus truly was. A physical mercy that would transform and lead to a spiritual mercy.

And quite frankly, when it doesn't, Jesus is disappointed. God's intended

**PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IS ABORTED
WHEN GENUINE GRATEFUL PRAISE
IS NEGLECTED (negatively)**

**TRANSFORMATION HAPPENS WHEN
GENUINE GRATEFUL PRAISE
IS UNLEASHED (positively)**

Here's the truth: the basic problem with humanity today boils down to one thing. We are not fully, genuinely grateful. Paul fingered this in Romans 1:19-21

¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they did **not honor him as God** or **give thanks to him**, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

What's missing in millions and millions of hearts--of tens of thousands of hearts in our won city and county--is a gratefulness grounded in faith that Jesus alone is the One whom my life needs. We are all lepers, and He is the Master. We are all needy from the inside out, and He alone is the giver. He deserves loud, expressive, faith-filled praise.

So Jesus stands there with one deeply grateful worshipper at his feet, and wonders, "Where are the other nine?" I finish with these 3 applications:

#1 **BEWARE:** Beware of, and be sobered by, the lack of true gratefulness in your heart, expressed in your life, to God.

It is, Paul wrote in Romans 2:4, "the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience that leads you [or can] to repentance."

#2 **SHARE:** Talk to those around you, those close to you (spouse, kids, friends, colleagues, workmates, neighbors) about the goodness of the giving God that you know.

A four year old boy's eyes were not good, and early on he was required to wear glasses. But he said he was thankful for them. "Why?" someone asked. "Because," he grinned, "it keeps the boys from hitting me, and the girls from kissing me."

Just about 200 times in the book of the psalms themselves, we are urged to have our hearts and our mouths filled with praise, shouting praise singing praise, offering praise, rehearsing praise to God for all of His goodness.

#3 **PRAYER:** Pray for those around you who have not yet had their lives transformed by Jesus. Pray that the Spirit of God will help them recognize God's goodness and kindness in their lives FOR EVERYTHING, and that this recognition will wake them up to their need to bow in faith at Jesus feet.

"Lord Jesus, may --- recognize your generous goodness so fully that it leads to her/his transformation"

Copyright 2018 © David A. Staff
All rights reserved

ⁱ <https://www.amnh.org/about-the-museum/press-center/new-study-doubles-the-estimate-of-bird-species-in-the-world>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.birdlife.org/sowb2018>

ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? [a] And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father" Matthew 10:29.

^{iv} <https://www.audubon.org/yearofthebird>

^v https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1&ei=6KLCw-DSDpOJwTKnaAY&q=number+of+animals+in+the+world&og=number+of+animals+in+the+world&gs_l=psy-ab.1.0.0j0i2j30i5.4.12884.418120.420892...0.0.0.264.4321.0j26j2.....0.....1.gws-wiz.....0i71j35i39j0i131j0i67j0i20i263j0i131i67.sODPke7xpX4

^{vi} Jesus: "...For he makes his sun rise **on the evil and on the good**, and sends **rain on the just and on the unjust** (Matthew 5:45, ESV)

^{vii} <http://www.ecology.com/birth-death-rates/>

^{viii} Jesus: "But even the hairs of your head are all numbered." Matthew 10:30. (ESV)

^{ix} John 3:27 "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is **given** him from heaven." (ESV)

^x The following bulleted information comes from Alyssa Teodosio in "Leprosy in the First Century," <https://prezi.com/dnwuknid133j/leprosy-in-the-first-century/> ...called Mycobacterium leprae, (M. leprae) which is a rod-shaped bacillus that is an obligate intracellular (only grows inside of human and animal cells) bacterium. Today known as Hansen's disease, which was named after a scientist who discovered M. leprae

^{xi} This bullet's information from <https://web.stanford.edu/class/humbio103/ParaSites2005/Leprosy/clinical.htm>

^{xii} Used in vocative form 6 times in Luke, with the sense of a recognition that Jesus is unique in the given situation, that His presence and word carries significant weight. In 5 of the occurrences, it is used by Jesus' disciples. Here (Luke 17) by a group of lepers.

(1) Luke 5:4-5 ⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "**Master**, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."

(2) Luke 8:22-25 ²² One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, ²³ and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. ²⁴ And they went and woke him, 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. ²⁵ 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?"

(3) Luke 8:44-46 She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter[a] said, "**Master**, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!" But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me."

(4) Luke 9:32-34 Now Peter and those who were with him were with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "**Master**, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

(5) Luke 9:49-40 John answered, "**Master**, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us." But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you."

^{xiii} Leviticus 13 is an extensive chapter on laws to rightly handle those with leprosy.

^{xiv} Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (Tyndale Series, Erdmans, 1974), 258.

^{xv} ESV Leviticus 14 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "This shall be the law of the leprous person for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest, 3 and the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall look. Then, if the case of leprous disease is healed in the leprous person, 4 the priest shall command them to take for him who is to be cleansed two live[a] clean birds and cedarwood and scarlet yarn and hyssop. 5 And the priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh[b] water. 6 He shall take the live bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. 7 And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the leprous disease. Then he shall pronounce him clean and shall let the living bird go into the open field. 8 And he who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe himself in water, and he shall be clean. And after that he may come into the camp, but live outside his tent seven days. 9 And on the seventh day he shall shave off all his hair from his head, his beard, and his eyebrows. He shall shave off all his hair, and then he shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and he shall be clean.

10 "And on the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish, and one ewe lamb a year old without blemish, and a grain offering of three tenths of an ephah[c] of fine flour mixed with oil, and one log[d] of oil. 11 And the priest who cleanses him shall set the man who is to be cleansed and these things before the Lord, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. 12 And the priest shall take one of the male lambs and offer it for a guilt offering, along with the log of oil, and wave them for a wave offering before the Lord. 13 And he shall kill the lamb in the place where they kill the sin offering and the burnt offering, in the place of the sanctuary. For the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest; it is most holy. 14 The priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the priest shall put it on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. 15 Then the priest shall take some of the log of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand 16 and dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand and sprinkle some oil with his finger seven times before the Lord. 17 And some of the oil that remains in his hand the priest shall put on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, on top of the blood of the guilt offering. 18 And the rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed. Then the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord. 19 The priest shall offer the sin offering, to make atonement for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness. And afterward he shall kill the burnt offering. 20 And the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean.

21 "But if he is poor and cannot afford so much, then he shall take one male lamb for a guilt offering to be waved, to make atonement for him, and a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and a log of oil; 22 also two turtledoves or two pigeons, whichever he can afford. The one shall be a sin offering and the other a burnt offering. 23 And on the eighth day he shall bring them for his cleansing to the priest, to the entrance of the tent of meeting, before the Lord. 24 And the priest shall take the lamb of the guilt offering and the log of oil, and the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the Lord. 25 And he shall kill the lamb of the guilt offering. And the priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. 26 And the priest shall pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand, 27 and shall sprinkle with his right finger some of the oil that is in his left hand seven times before the Lord. 28 And the priest shall put some of the oil that is in his hand on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, in the place where the blood of the guilt offering was put. 29 And the rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed, to make atonement for him before the Lord. 30 And he shall offer, of the turtledoves or pigeons, whichever he can afford, 31 one[e] for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, along with a grain offering. And the priest shall make atonement before the Lord for him who is being cleansed. 32 This is the law for him in whom is a case of leprous disease, who cannot afford the offerings for his cleansing."

^{xvi} Cf. Wayne Stewart, "as the woman who loved much, because she understood she had been forgiven much." Cf. Luke 7: