

An Attitude of Gratitude
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Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' When he saw them, he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'

Do you realize:

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep ... you are richer than 75 percent of this world of ours.

If you have money in the bank, cash in your wallet and spare change in a dish someplace ... you are among the top 8 percent of the Earth's wealthiest people.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness ... you are more fortunate than the million who will not survive this week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation ... you are ahead of 500 million people in the world.

If you can attend this worship service, or any other religion-related meeting, without fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death ... you are fortunate. Billions of people in the world cannot.

It should not be hard for us to count our blessings, should it?

Most of us could quickly and easily jot down a rather lengthy list, including thanks for family, for friends, for food, for clothing, for cars, for a home, for a

job, for health, for freedom, for opportunity, and so on.

But think about this.

If we follow this logic, then it means that if we lack these things, we cannot give thanks. We can count our blessings only if we have stuff to count.

Listen to these words found in Luke's Gospel

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In today's passage, Jesus is on a road trip, moving between Samaria and Galilee on his way to Jerusalem. As he enters a village, 10 lepers approach him and call out from a distance, raising their voices in unison, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" (Luke 17:13). They are desperate for healing, but as unclean people they don't dare rush up to Jesus. They know that they are supposed to keep their distance, and live outside the community.

Jesus sees them and feels a desire to be merciful toward them. Then he gives them a rather unusual command: "Go and show yourselves to the priests" (v. 14). To us, these words sound odd, but in the time of Jesus a leper who was fortunate enough to be healed had to show himself to a priest. Only a priest could certify that a person was truly clean and able to return to the community.

Something is going on here, something wonderful and mysterious and tingling with the healing power of God. As the lepers make their way toward the priests, they are miraculously cleansed, and one of them turns on his heels and races back to Jesus, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrates himself at Jesus' feet and thanks him profusely (vv. 14-16).

Only one gives thanks. One out of 10. "Were not ten made clean?" asks Jesus, sounding miffed. "But the other nine, where are they?" (v. 17). Only one takes the time to count his blessings. Only one bothers to come back to Jesus and

say thanks.

A 10 percent return. That's pretty pathetic. But are we doing any better today?

Keep in mind that the other nine lepers did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They were obedient. They followed instructions. They were doing the will of God. Can't fault them for that.

But gratitude and thanksgiving move us beyond the standard, the acceptable, the ordinary. A gracious attitude and lifestyle make one extraordinary, unusual, blessed, a cut above the rest.

Recent studies have shown that an attitude of Gratitude can make your life better. Robert Emmons' book: *Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier* looks at the science behind gratitude. Emmons and his colleagues at the University of California at Davis are among the pioneers in research on gratitude, part of a larger movement called positive psychology. Positive psychology, instead of focusing on illness and emotional problems, studies health-promoting behavior and the pleasurable parts of life.

What they have found is astounding. People who pause each day to "count their blessings" — in the study they had them journal the good things that happened in their lives — those folks felt better about their lives overall, were more optimistic about the future, and reported fewer health problems than the other participants.

In a related study, researchers at the University of Connecticut found that gratitude can have a protective effect against heart attacks. Studying people who had experienced one heart attack, the researchers found that those patients who saw benefits and gains from their heart attack, such as becoming more appreciative of life, experienced a lower risk of having another heart attack.

Summarizing the findings from studies to date, Emmons says that those who practice grateful thinking "reap emotional, physical and interpersonal benefits." People who regularly keep a gratitude journal report fewer illness symptoms, feel better about their lives as a whole, and are more optimistic about the future. Emmons conclusion is that gratitude is a choice, one possible response to our life experiences.

But what exactly should we be grateful for?

In the classic book *The Little Prince*, the fox character is saying goodbye to the little prince, and as he leaves he says:

"And now here's my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

"What is essential is invisible to the eye," the little prince repeats, so that he will be sure to remember.

That is the same thing that Paul says to the Church in Corinth:

"We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

What is essential is invisible to the eye.

Ponder the perspective of the apostle Paul. He doesn't give thanks for gold jewelry, Game Cubes, leather jackets, personal care products, computer games and DVDs. He refuses to focus his gaze on the things that can be seen, because he knows that these things are temporary.

Instead, he looks only at the essential and eternal things that are invisible to the eye. When he counts his blessings, he lists absolutely nothing you can buy, and nothing you can own - only faith, love, a spirit of wisdom, a spirit of revelation, God's inheritance, God's power.

There is a great line in the movie Bruce Almighty when Bruce tells God:

"I just gave everyone what they wanted."

And God says, "Since when does anyone have a clue about what they want?"

We think we want the house, the car, this certain relationship. We have no idea what we really want.

And that is the problem, isn't it?

When we WANT the wrong things, we are not grateful for the invisible gifts that we have.

A few years ago in Parade Magazine, Bob Kerrey made the following comment: Character begins with gratitude. And the great challenge for America is that gratitude and wealth are sometimes at odds. The more we have, the less grateful we may be. The easier our lives become, the more we may forget how lucky we are to be free. Our parents struggled to make certain that our lives would be better than theirs. But, by giving us more, they may have prepared us less for those moments when our bank account will not help us.

In my first year at New School University, I observed that foreign students come to the United States with more gratitude and enthusiasm than native-born students. The immigrant students are less likely to be burdened by the presumption of entitlement. Most of them do not begin with a demand that we do everything for them. As a consequence, they do more for themselves and are more likely to find happiness as a reward for their labor.

God challenges us to slow down and say THANKS.

So how do we gain an attitude of gratitude?

Brother David Steindl-Rast suggests: "Ninety-nine percent of the time we have an opportunity to be grateful for something. We just don't notice it. We go through our days in a daze".

Every thing that I read this past week suggested one main way to gain an attitude of gratitude.

And it is so simple that most of us will not take the time to do it.

But if you want to have a happier and healthier life — everything suggests that we need to do this.

And that is, start a gratitude journal.

Write down the things that you are grateful for —> EVERY DAY

A doctor who used to see a lot of depressed and unhappy patients used to prescribe a "thank-you" cure. He told his patients that for six weeks they had to say "Thank you" for every good thing that happened to them and keep a journal of the incident. The cure rate was remarkable.

Truth is simple. And we want to make it complicated. In *A New Earth*, Eckhart Tolle writes, "You don't need to own anything to feel abundant, although if you feel abundant consistently things will almost certainly come to you. Abundance comes only to those who already have it. It sounds almost unfair, but of course it isn't. It is a universal law. Both abundance and scarcity are inner states that manifest as your reality."

It might not be easy. But it is pretty simple.

Take the time — and begin to develop an Attitude of Gratitude.