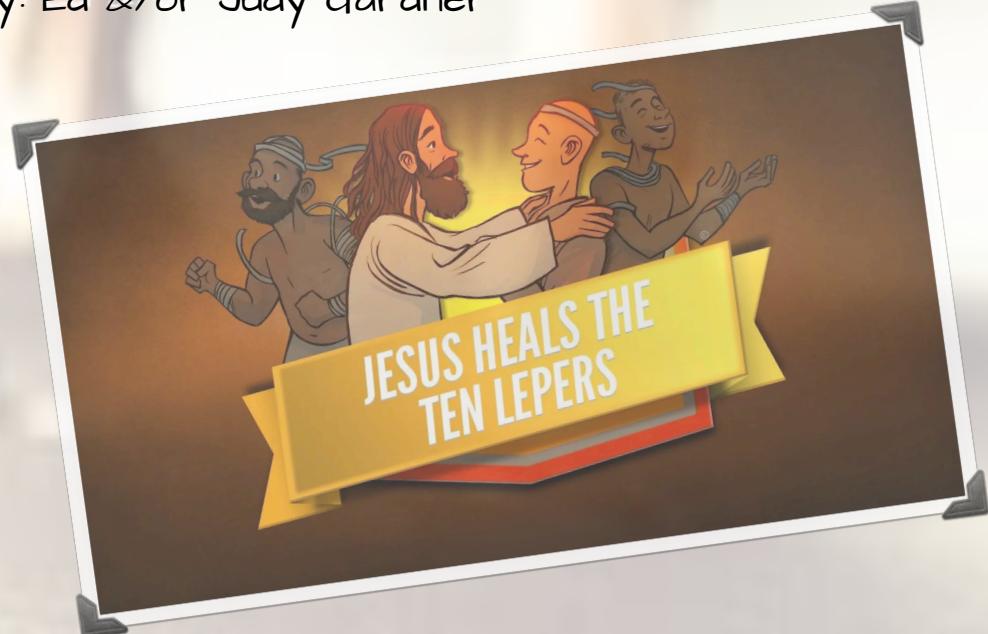


June 9-13, 2025 Edition

Following
The Year(s) Of Jesus Part 179
The One That (didn't) Get Away

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner



June 7/8, 2025

When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we're going to be looking at the concept of gratitude. Turns out gratitude is one of the most important virtues we can cultivate in the garden that is our lives.

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, trust him, too, for each day's problems. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with gratitude. Colossians 2:6-7 (NLT)

But where does gratitude come from? Is it something that can be manufactured or is it something that occurs naturally and organically in response to God's goodness? Well to a certain extent the answer is yes. Sort of. Let me explain.

Gratitude does flow from a heart that has seen God's hand at work in its life. But it doesn't necessarily flow from a heart that has seen God's hand at work in its life as we will see in this week's installment of the chronological life of Jesus. This week we're going to look at the story of Jesus healing 10 lepers so let's just read the entire story now and we'll keep coming back to it during the course of our week together:

As Jesus continued on toward Jerusalem, he reached the border between Galilee and Samaria. As he entered a village there, ten men with leprosy stood at a distance, crying out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" He looked at them and said, "Go show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed of their leprosy. One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, "Praise God!" He fell to the ground at Jesus' feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Didn't I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And Jesus said to the man, "Stand up and go. Your faith has healed you." Luke 17:11-19 (NLT)

Do you see what I mean? Just because God does something life changing for a person does not mean it will necessarily lead to gratitude. In fact if the numbers in this story are any indication of the general state of the human heart only 1/10 of us bother to express our gratitude to God for the things He's done for us. Now I'm not sure that's the lesson we're supposed to be getting here- an exact percentage of how many humans bother to express their gratitude to God for the gifts in our lives- but it's a striking story that shows how important gratitude is for us to cultivate in our lives.

So back to the question I asked in paragraph number 3- is gratitude something that can be manufactured or is it something that flows naturally from the heart in response to the goodness of God in our lives? It's kind of both. And it's kind of neither. We won't "feel" grateful until we experience God's goodness flowing into our lives but once we have experienced it we need to remind ourselves to actually open our mouths and say, "thank you!" So let's spend this week reflecting on the good things that God has done for us and how proficient we are at expressing that gratitude to God.

Tuesday Reflection: Ok so what are some of the things we learn about gratitude in the story of Jesus healing 10 lepers but only one returned to say thanks? Well the first thing I see in this story is that Jesus "sees" us. He sees us when nobody else will even look at us:

As he entered a village there, ten men with leprosy stood at a distance, crying out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." Luke 17:12-14 (NLT)

Ok so what's going on here? Well Jesus and His disciples are traveling and as He entered a particular village these 10 lepers stood at a distance shouting to get His attention. Why are they standing at a distance? Well, because as it turns out, that's the law. The Roman law said anyone with leprosy had to stay at least a stone's throw away from people who didn't have leprosy. How far would you estimate a stone's throw is? I guess it would probably vary depending on who was throwing the stone, right? I mean if we're talking about me at this age you could stand a lot closer than you could've when I was a younger man. And if you happened to be standing next to a major league baseball player you'd want to stand quite a bit further away.

The point is, society didn't want lepers getting too close. In fact society would just as soon not have to even think about lepers. They created leper colonies where people with leprosy were forced to live so that they wouldn't infect the clean people. And yes, I chose the word "clean" on purpose because if you had leprosy and someone accidentally got closer to you than a stone's throw away, you were required to call out, "unclean!" so the clean people would know to start throwing rocks at you.

So yeah, the lepers had to stand a good distance away while trying to get Jesus' attention because to draw near to Him might get them the David and Goliath treatment. But did you notice what they shout out to Jesus? They cried out, "have mercy on us!" Those are the magic words for Jesus. Those words always get Jesus' attention. It's fascinating to watch people try to get Jesus' attention and even impress Him in the gospels. What you find is that anytime anyone brings out their resume to show Jesus what all they've done to deserve whatever they're asking for He is never impressed. But cry out for mercy and it gets Jesus' attention every single time. Every. Single. Time.

So I'm going to share with you what I would consider to be the smartest thing you can say on the day that you stand before God's throne on judgment day. Do not pull out your resume and start telling Jesus all the reasons why you deserve to get into Heaven. Whenever that kind of scenario is presented in the gospels Jesus' response is always lukewarm at best and spicy at worst. So when I stand before God's throne here's what I'm planning on saying based on all of the interactions He had with people while He walked this earth. When God asks me why He should let me into Heaven I'm simply going to say, "Jesus, Master, have mercy upon me- a sinner".

Those words are powerful as it turns out. They get Jesus' attention. They got His attention with the 10 lepers and they get His attention in every other instance where mercy is begged for. So the first thing this story teaches us is that Jesus sees us- even us spiritual lepers who

have no reason to expect that He would have anything to do with us. So maybe today you and I could spend some time reflecting on what it takes to get Jesus' attention and His mercy.

Wednesday Reflection: The next thing we learn from this story is that obedience generally precedes healing and blessing. You can't really make a blanket statement like that with Jesus but generally speaking it's true. We don't generally experience the Grace of God until we start following His directions for our lives. Why would I say it's not universally true? Because of something Jesus says in the Sermon On The Mount:

Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.

Matthew 5:44-45 (NLT)

All of us benefit from the blessings of God to a certain extent. The sunshine and the rain are blessings that fall upon everyone on this planet whether we're grateful for them or even ask for them. So yeah, you can't make a universal statement that obedience ALWAYS precedes blessing but it is mostly true. We talked yesterday about God seeing us when others don't or won't. Turns out it's not happenstance that causes God's eyes to turn our way to see what we're doing- it's a purposeful gaze:

The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. 2 Chronicles 16:9 (NLT)

God's eyes are always on the lookout. For what? For those who have fully committed their hearts to Him. I love this verse. He's not on the lookout for people messing up (I mean how hard would that be for Him to find right?) but rather for people trying their best to do things the right way. And when He finds such a person He pours His strength into their hearts. I'll never forget when I was first getting serious about my faith I kept hearing that God wants all of us to join Him and work with Him. I couldn't figure out why He'd want my life- I mean I had pretty much destroyed my life up to that point. So why would He want me? The preacher who was mentoring me showed me the verse above and told me that the reason God wants me is because God's desperate. He told me there just aren't that many people in the world who are willing to fully commit their hearts to God and so when He finds one He pours in His strength. I expressed my thanks to my preacher friend- sort of. I had a sneaking suspicion I had just been insulted- kind of.

But what I've learned over the last 40 years is that my preacher friend was right. When God finds someone whose heart is fully committed to Him (meaning we do our best to obey His directions and instructions) He does pour His power into that person. And we see that principle at work in the story of Jesus healing the 10 lepers:

He looked at them and said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed of their leprosy. Luke 17:14 (NLT)

When were they cleansed of their leprosy? Was it before they headed out to follow His instructions? Nope. It was while they were obeying His instructions that they were cleansed. We'll talk a bit more about this tomorrow (and discover why Jesus told the lepers to go show themselves to the priests) but for today maybe you and I can spend some time reflecting on just how committed our own heart is to God. When His eyes are scanning the entire earth looking for those with hearts fully committed to Him does your heart catch His attention? What does a heart that is fully committed to God even look like?

Thursday Reflection: Yesterday we were looking at how the lepers weren't cleansed (and that wording is important so make a mental note- the lepers were "cleansed" as they made their way to the priests) until they followed Jesus' directions to go see the priests. But why did Jesus tell them to go see the priests? Because that was the law:

The following instructions are for those seeking ceremonial purification from a skin disease. Those who have been healed must be brought to the priest, who will examine them. Leviticus 14:2-3 (NLT)

Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priests because that's what someone who had been cleansed of a skin disease (like leprosy) were supposed to do. The lepers come and beg Jesus to cleanse them. And what does Jesus do? Well He doesn't touch them or say "be healed" or even make a mud pie for them like He did that blind guy we talked about last week- He simply tells them to act as though they've been cleansed. The lepers must have wondered what the point of going to show themselves to the priests was going to do when they still had leprosy but what did they do? They started heading to Jerusalem to show themselves to the priests.

I remember once when I was looking at a diagram of the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem. There were the main parts of the Temple where the priests dealt with the sacrifices that were part of the worship of God back in those days. But there were also these strange little buildings contained within the larger framework of the Temple and one of these little buildings was labelled, "chamber of the lepers". I remember being very confused because I had never heard about that (and at that point I had been preaching for 20 years or so). I had to do some digging but it turns out the Chamber Of The Lepers at the Temple was where ex-lepers would go to get a certificate that allowed them re-entry to Israelite society. The chamber was a little structure where the ex-leper would go into with the priest and the leper would strip down the priest would check every inch of their body for signs of leprosy (I'm guessing that staffing that particular priestly job was done as punishment for priests who needed to be disciplined ;o)

So when Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priests He was just telling them to start acting as though they'd been healed. And when they did, they were. We often think that what God wants from us is some grand gesture that will show Him how worthy we are

but that's not at all what God is looking for. In fact if we spend our lives thinking that God will only respond to grand gestures and impressive feats then we will trip over our own feet trying to earn God's approval and blessing. In fact that way of seeing things is a big part of what caused Israel's first king to lose his job.

King Saul was Israel's first king and when he simply followed God's directions and instructions he was blessed beyond all imagination. And so was Israel. But as Saul's accomplishments began to pile up he let it go to his head. He started believing that it was God who was lucky to have Saul rather than Saul who was lucky to have God. And while it began with very small deviations from God's instructions eventually it grew to be much more than that. At one point God tells Saul what to do after a battle with the Amalekites and Saul doesn't follow God's instructions. Instead Saul decides to do what Saul wants to do (and what will impress the people of Israel) and when the prophet of God (a man named Samuel) calls him on it Saul points out how big of a sacrifice that he is making to God. Saul is caught up in the classic human mistake of thinking God can be impressed by a donation when our hearts aren't willing to fully commit to Him and look at what Samuel tells Saul:

Does the Lord take as much pleasure in your burnt offerings and sacrifices as in your obedience? Obedience is far better than sacrifice. He is much more interested in your listening to him than in your offerings to him. 1 Samuel 15:22 (TLB)

To obey is better than sacrifice. In fact sacrifices made to God in order to appease Him for the fact that we have decided not to follow His directions are an abomination to Him. And that was the last straw for God- He had Samuel tell Saul that the kingdom of Israel was being taken from him and would be given to someone else:

But God removed Saul and replaced him with David, a man about whom God said, 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart. He will do everything I want him to do.' Acts 13:22 (NLT)

I remember when I was first getting serious about my faith I read that description of King David and wondered what it would even look like to live a life that caused God to look at someone and say, "there goes a man/woman after My own heart". I think there are probably many answers to that question but the simplest may be right there in God's words to Samuel- a man/woman after God's own heart at the most basic level is someone that does everything God wants him/her to do.

Tomorrow we'll finish up our time looking at the story of Jesus healing the 10 lepers but maybe for today you and I could spend some time reflecting on what it means to be a man/woman after God's own heart and ask ourselves, would God describe me that way? Am I someone whose heart beats with God's heart?

Friday Reflection: The final lesson I want to look at from the story of Jesus healing the 10 lepers is that gratitude saves us. I know that may sound like a strange thing to say and so let me start off pointing out emphatically what I am not saying- I am not saying that gratitude is what brings us salvation (at least not in the sense that we generally think of it). The only thing that saves us is the Grace of Jesus through our faith in Him. We are saved by

Grace plus nothing and I just wanted to make sure and get that out of the way before I explain what I mean by gratitude saves us.

Ok so what do I mean? Well let's start with this- the Bible is HUGE on gratitude. We are encouraged over and over to live lives of gratitude. And as is so often the case over the last few decades scientists have been recognizing the benefits to us humans when we do what God asks us to do. Did you know that psychiatrists will tell you that the only thing that can short-circuit anxiety in our lives is gratitude? It's kind of mind boggling- God's been telling us to cultivate lives of gratitude for 3,500 years and science has just figured out why that's important. Look at what the apostle Paul says here:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and don't forget to thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

I love how Paul says it- "don't forget to thank him for all he has done." It's almost like Paul is talking to the other 9 lepers who didn't come back to express their gratitude for the cleansing that Jesus provided for them:

One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, "Praise God!" He fell to the ground at Jesus' feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Didn't I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And Jesus said to the man, "Stand up and go. Your faith has healed you." Luke 17:15-19 (NLT)

You can see why Paul would tell us, "don't forget!" We humans are such forgetful creatures. It's so easy to get caught up in the amazement of God's provision and blessing in our lives that we forget to express gratitude to the One who makes it all possible. That's surely what happened to the 9 lepers that didn't come back to say thanks. But as it turns out how we choose to demonstrate gratitude to God has a profound impact on us. To understand what I'm talking about we need to look closely at the words "cleansed" and "healed".

All 10 of the lepers were "cleansed" by Jesus but it appears that only the 1 leper who returned to express his gratitude was actually "healed". But wait a minute- wouldn't healing and cleansing be the same thing in this case? Turns out, not so much. The word in Greek that is translated here as "healed" is the same word that is translated as "saved" in other contexts. In both Greek and Hebrew the concept of being healed and being saved are so closely related that either usage would be correct. 10 lepers were cleansed by Jesus but only one was saved by Jesus. And what is it that brought that salvation? Gratitude. That's the only difference between the 1 leper who came back and the 9 who didn't.

Now that doesn't mean the other 9 are out of luck when they stand before the judgment seat of God just because they didn't return and say thank you. It simply means that without returning to express gratitude to God the other 9 were only cleansed on the outside. But the 1 who returned was cleansed inside and out. It wasn't just his body that was cleansed- it was also his soul. It's kind of like when people say a prayer and ask Jesus to forgive them but as they continue their lives they rarely give Jesus a second thought as they go through their

lives. We are content with the surface level cleansing we suspect our prayer provided but we aren't interested in an ongoing relationship with our creator where we live in partnership with Him responding to His direction and continually expressing gratitude for the work He is doing in our lives. So many of us- like the 9 lepers who didn't return- seemingly only care about what God can do for us. But Jesus invites us to come closer to Him and to enter into a life changing relationship where we are made whole through an ongoing relationship with Him.

So don't be like the 9 lepers who didn't return- be the one that comes back. Spend some time thinking about all of the blessings God has showered into your life and make a list of all of them that you can think of. Keep this list handy and on a fairly regular basis break that bad boy out and once again be amazed at the faithfulness of God in your life.

I'll make a list of God's gracious dealings, all the things God has done that need praising.
Isaiah 63:7 (MES)