

How do I respond to God's love?

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[0 : 00] There's an article entitled 25 matters every child should know by the time they're nine. And number one on the list is when asking for something, say...

Sorry? Let me do it again. When asking for something, say... Please. Please. Thank you. Fantastic. Which is number two on the list. When receiving something, say...

Thank you. Fantastic. That's the sort of thing that my mother taught me. Maybe some of you are still learning that. You don't know what it's most. But something that my... It's fair to say that my parents taught me.

But because it's Mother's Day, let's just grab it over with it. Something that my mother taught me. Good manners that I'd be reminded of often if I didn't use them. And this story that Deb just read out is one of those stories that my mum would love.

Ten people are sick. They get healed. But only one returns to say thank you. The lesson, thank yous are really important. Are you one of the... Are you the one or are you one of the nine?

[1 : 07] End of story. Except not quite. There is a little bit more to it here. There is a big difference between saying thank you and in fact being thankful.

Dad would quickly remind me if I'd forgotten my manners and particularly if mum wasn't the recipient of my manners. And he would say something like, get over there and say thank you to your mother.

And of course I would oblige because he requested it of me. And I'd go over there and I'd go, thank you. Oh please. It's the sort of things my kids do at the moment to me.

And so they're just as simple as I was. And that is, the words come out of the mouth but the heart's not in it. And my dad would say things to me like, if you're really thankful then you should tell your face because it doesn't seem to know it.

And it's amazing how those... I just say that to my kids as well. It's scary how much I say it to them now.

[2 : 19] It's, I think, one of the rarest virtues of the human race is gratitude. Alexander White, the most eminent Scottish preacher of the 19th century, once visited an elderly parishioner.

And this elderly parishioner complained and whinged at length about everything and everyone. Nothing was right. Family and church and everything like that.

And finally, with his hand in his hand, White stood up, bid her goodbye and walked out to go out the door. And the only thing he said to her was to quote from Psalm 103 verse 2.

Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. He got tired of grumbling. Now, fearlessness is not new to our time, but it's also true to say that never have people had so much and been so ungrateful.

I saw a microcosm on it the other day. Had a packet of chips. This is before she had a benefit. Had a packet of chips.

[3 : 32] Opened a packet of chips and got three bowls, three little bowls out. And put chips in three little bowls. My girls were watching TV. Walked in the lounge and we gave them the chips. And they went, oh, chips. Fantastic. And they all had the bowls.

And quick smart. One of them looked at the other two bowls and went, hey, she's got more than me. And I think it was a spirit-empowered moment on my behalf.

As I turned the walk out and said, ten seconds ago, you had none. Now, in that moment of trying to bring a little bit of reality in this scenario, something you got, received, you didn't ask for it, you just received it.

And you're complaining that someone's got one more chip in you. A bit of reality. But as I walked from the lounge and the kitchen, I'd use that interaction just to pierce my heart a little bit and say,

Steve, that's you.

That's you. That's your heart. It might not be about chips. Because I had a rest of that. It might not be about chips, but about something else.

[4 : 36] There's a bunch of other stuff where that is just your heart. Ungratefulness, though flourishing in our culture, has always been endemic into the human soul.

Christian community is not immune. The contemporary diseases that afflict others attaches themselves to Christians as well.

And in some cases, apart from hasty prayers of thanks at meals, no one would ever know that Christians have every reason to be grateful people as the recipients of God's grace.

So the account of the ten lepers in Luke 17 addresses this issue in a really powerful way. Ten leprous men stood before Jesus in various stages of decay.

They had what is a highly infectious disease. Their clothing is torn from never-ending mourning. Their skeletal heads are uncovered.

[5 : 43] They look as if they had just climbed out of the grave. But they were alive and they were sensitive human beings, feeling souls living in the netherworld of society's fringe while they literally, and I mean quite literally, rotted away.

Immediately, upon leprosy being discovered, what would happen is that the priests, who were the health workers in those days, would remove them from society.

Immediately remove them from society. No going home. No kissing the kids goodbye. No saying goodbye to the wife. No packing a bag. Immediately, no longer able to hold and to kiss your spouse or to pick up the children or the grandchildren and to give them a hug.

No more shopping down at Westfield. No eating with your friends. No holidays. Your working life is over. You watch as your extremities drop away and become deformed in splendid isolation.

Leviticus 13.45 gives it the instruction of the community of God's people. It says, anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, unclean, unclean.

[7 : 03] As long as they have the disease, they remain unclean and they must live alone. They must live outside the camp. It is quite literally the life of the living dead.

Who would want the life of a leper? In verse 11, we are told where Jesus is, but also where he is heading to when he confronts the ten men from the living dead.

It says, now on his way to Jerusalem. The second half of Luke's gospel reveals that Jesus is determined to go to Jerusalem. Luke 9.51 says that he resolutely set his face to Jerusalem.

He's determined to get to Jerusalem. And he's heading there to the place of his death by execution. It's the place of mercy and rescue and healing.

It's the place of mercy and rescue and healing from a disease that is the spiritual equivalent of leprosy. And it's for our sake. It's the sin that alienates and leaves me among the living dead.

[8 : 15] And Luke tells us that this mercy and this rescue and this healing is the reason why Jesus came. He tells us that again. Now, as if this story that we're about to see is about that mercy and that rescue and that healing and not just about good manners.

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus is confronted by ten lepers. It's on the outskirts of an unnamed village. In no man's land between Samaria and Galilee.

Just the place for the living dead, the land of limbo. And from a safe distance, they shout out their plea to Jesus in verse 13. Jesus, Master, have pity on us.

They will lay out and they will persist and literally have mercy on us. Master, have mercy. Mercy, please, Jesus. Once Jesus saw them, he immediately responded.

However, at this time, it was not the touch that he had previously did with the leper. And neither was there the pronouncement of be clean from a distance, like in Luke 5, verse 13.

[9 : 31] He simply told them, go and show yourselves to the priests. Now, the command there was to do what a cured leper would do.

The regulation of Leviticus 14 required examination by the priests. And if they were cured, the priest says, yep, thumbs up, no more leprosy. They would joyfully, from that moment, undergo an eight-day ceremony.

And at the end of that eight days, they would be reunited with family, friends, and back into normal life. And so Jesus' command here required faith. After all, it was a long way to the temple.

And Jesus, can't you see I've got leprosy? My toes are falling off. I'm going to have to go through Jerusalem to get to the temple.

And they would be fools to turn up and to realize that in actual fact, the leprosy is still there.

[10:38] But on the other hand, they had everything to gain and nothing to lose. And so they set off at their stumbling leprosy pace. The second half of verse 14 says that as they went, they were cleansed.

It's a mass healing. Now, there were no mirrors in those days. But they saw it in each other instantly. Hey, Bob, you've got a nose. Sort of thing. From death-like faces re-emerged ears and noses and eyebrows and eyelashes and hairlines and feet, which were toadless and ulcerated studs were suddenly whole and knobby hands grew fingers and bunched skin was soft and subtle. It was like ten new births. A wild celebration would have quickly begun. Among the ten lepers was the Samaritan.

And according to John 4, verse 9, Jews did not associate with Samaritans. Samaritans did not associate with Jews.

They were bitter enemies of one another. But these men had been united by their common misery.

[11:58] Nine Jews and one Samaritan in a suffering community. And when the healing occurred, the Samaritan was seized with an irresistible emotion of gratitude.

Captive to his spontaneous gratitude, he put off going to the temple. He didn't go there. Put off going to the temple to rush back to see Jesus.

The ceremonial clean bill of health could wait. His family, his friends, his business can wait. The shopping can wait. The thankful Samaritan knew he had to thank for his healing.

He had to thank God and he had to thank Jesus. He did not know that the two were in fact one.

First, he said thank you to God.

Verse 15, one of them, when he saw he was healed, came back praising God in a loud voice.

Earlier, he had loudly cried out for mercy.

[13:08] And now he was loudly crying out in praise. The original language here for loud voice, the meaning of it is recognisable to the English ear.

The original language is phonase megaleus, which we flip around and join together as megaphones.

Megaphone. It was a megaphone praise of God. Loud praise to God. And then he thanked Jesus in verse 16.

He threw himself at Jesus' feet and he thanked him. And it says, he was a Samaritan. He fell at Jesus' feet.

At the very least, he recognised Jesus was an agent of God. More likely, he realised that Jesus was king. He returned to Jesus with a heart, giving glory to God and thanks to Jesus.

[14:14] And he recognised God's powers working through Jesus. And Jesus, at this point, asked three closely coordinated questions in verses 17 and 18.

He said, Were not all ten cleansed? Where the other nine? Has no one found to return and give praise to God except for this foreigner?

The questions were not rhetorical. I think Jesus was expecting all to return. And then in returning for them to receive the ultimate blessing that he had prepared for them.

And so Jesus is disappointed that nine walked away without receiving the ultimate blessing.

Evidently, the other nine here were so caught up in their new wholeness that it did not occur to them to return to Jesus.

The one to whom they had asked for mercy. This is understandable at one level after all. Jesus did tell them to go to the press. Of course, they were thankful. How could they not be otherwise?

[15:28] I mean, things were working out pretty well for them. They were deeply happy. And they were eager to get back into normal life. And yet there was a deadly problem here.

A deadly problem with this nine. God was not the centre of their gratitude. Note Jesus' final question in verse 18.

It's a very telling question. Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? Give praise to God.

Only the foreigner. Only the Samaritan. Gave praise to God. The rest of the temple. The place of worship. Only the Samaritan gave praise to God.

The vague gratitude to divinity of the other nine was not an adequate response to what had just happened. Christ wanted their hearts. And by failing to glorify God and to return to thank Jesus, they missed the greatest possible moment of their life.

[16:43] Christ wanted their hearts. It's in verse 19. They did not hear these words. They did not hear these words. Rise and go. Your faith has made you well.

They didn't hear those words. Or more literally, rise and go. Your faith has saved you. That is the studied opinion of the most prominent scholars in the world on this gospel.

I don't know why any translation hasn't translated like that. Your faith has saved you. And we must allow those words to have its deepest meaning.

The Samaritan received forgiveness, reconciliation, eternal life, and the removal of all alienation and distance between God and himself in place of his sin and his moral sickness.

Jesus' words are clear. Only the Samaritan, who returned the praise of God and offered thanksgiving to Christ, has in fact saved in faith.

[17:50] His gratitude and his praise to God were signs of his saving faith. Now, no one is saved by virtue of having a pleasant, optimistic, and thankful spirit.

Jesus is not teaching here salvation by disposition or salvation by gratitude. But Jesus is teaching here that where there is true faith, there are profoundly thankful hearts.

Thanksgiving is a normal result of a vital union with the Lord Jesus and a direct measure. It's a direct measure of the extent to which we are experiencing the reality of that relationship in our daily lives.

It's not how many times you pray or thanksgiving. Gratitude to God is a direct measure of whether or not the growing in your relationship with Jesus.

So that the thankfulness to God is the heart of authentic faith. And conversely, the heart of those who do not know Christ and are ungrateful. That's the opposite side of the book.

[19:06] Romans 1.21 says that sin is an attitude that not only ignores God, but refuses to give thanks to God. A number of years ago, there was a shuttle mission that was in a bit of trouble.

And NASA put out this media thing to pray for the astronauts and the shuttle mission that they return home safely. Right across the U.S. people are praying for that to happen.

They return safely, landed. And at that moment, NASA took credit for their skill, the skill of the astronauts, our technology. No one gave thanks to God, even though NASA called the nation to do that.

That's what Romans 1.21 is talking about. For they knew God, they knew that glorified Him as God, who gave thanks to Him. But it's not just those outside the church or outside of Christ who don't give thanks to God.

The religious people inside the church do exactly the same thing. 2 Timothy 3 says that some have a form of godliness but don't recognize the daily work of God in their lives.

[20:19] Instead, it says they are lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, and ungrateful. Being grateful or thankful is a core attribute of those who love God.

And I think we as Christians need to hear this. Many, many years ago, decades ago, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who was a classical scholar and a self-confessed critic of Christianity, he said that he would believe in the Redeemer if the redeemed looked a little bit more redeemed.

What he's saying there is that when you look at Christians' lives, you would never get the impression that Jesus was God, that He died on the cross for their sin, that He'd risen again from the dead as He promises resurrection for all of His people, that He's going to come back and take us to eternal joy in everything that He does between now and then.

He's going to sovereignly rule over our lives for our joy and for His glory. You never get that impression. He says, when I look at the lives of Christians, I go, it appears you don't have much of a Redeemer.

You've got nothing off me. Taking for granted all the temple provisions and the spiritual blessings that God has so richly lavished on us and therefore failing to give Him thanks is one of the sins that we just seem to accept.

[21:46] But I want to call it for what it is. Too many of us might not even regard it as a sin. We don't even bathe right when someone walks in the church complaining or on the way out, you know, over supper, you know, grumbling about stuff.

How many of us in that moment just go silent in the presence of an habitual grumbler and fail to point them to the blessings of Jesus? How many of us are, you know, it's Steve Jobs? How many of us don't take that opportunity to remind each other of the blessings we have in Christ?

Biblical, thankless, ungrateful Christians sorry, biblically, thankless, ungrateful Christians are a contradiction in terms. Gratitude is the light blood of the Christian.

In the midst of the immediate crisis that I'm going through I've got a more immediate God who saved us from the wrath to come and made us His children. Beyond our big worries is an even dear God who did not withhold His one and only Son from us.

And we're to train ourselves as they used to say in the old days count your blessings. We don't say it much but I think it's the right thing to do even when you've been wounded by a friend even when things aren't the way you want them to be in society or in your family or in church even when you didn't get the mark you wanted or the pay rise or the promotion you worked hard for even when sickness and disease hit you even when the finances don't reach to still be able to say God is good as we have just said.

[23 : 22] He is still good to me. In Jesus, on the cross He's done everything that I need to get up every single morning with gratitude in my heart.

You see, thankfulness is not linked to whether our circumstances are good or not. That's how everyone lives. You know, thankful when things are going well not so thankful when things are going well what's a Christian about that?

Everyone does that. The Christian has a reason and a hope to be thankful in all things. In the Old Testament there's a book called Lamentations. I describe it as probably the blackest book in the Bible.

It's so, so depressing. It is set in the context of God having sent the Babylonians to judge and condemn Israel Jerusalem. Yeah, Jerusalem. And the scene in Lamentations is the city of Jerusalem is surrounded.

It's under siege. It's been under siege for some time. In fact, it's been under siege for so long that the writer says that he has witnessed mothers eating their babies.

[24 : 31] That is, food has long run out. Cannibalism has set in. Starvation is so, so bad. But right in the middle of the book of Lamentations and for those who do this stuff structurally, it's the very centre verse of Lamentations.

It's right in the middle. That is, everything hinges on this verse. And the verse is this. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies are new every morning.

Great is your faithfulness. You see, like the writer of Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah, and like you, when you have God's big story, the big picture of God's love for me and Jesus, our little stories seem much more manageable.

You can always look at the problem that you're facing, the big issue you're facing from another window, and the other window is this. In Jesus, with Jesus, because of Jesus, I have everything. Because of Jesus, I can say, with Habakkuk, in Habakkuk 3, the stall's empty, there's total drought, there's no food in the fridge, Westfield's burnt down, I've got no clothing, it's drought, I mean, I didn't exactly say this, but it's drought, it's carnage, it's chaos, it's crisis, everywhere, everything's taken away, and yet, I've rejoiced in God, my Saviour.

[26 : 14] You see, when you've got Jesus, you've got everything. When you've got a Saviour, you've got everything. I am loved, and I'm secure, in the God of the universe, there is a future of eternal joy that waits for me, and so, Christian people, those who embrace that, you ought to be metaphorically, in your praise to God.

I don't think there's any room to say, well, Steve, you've got to stand on me. The 19th century English pastor, Charles Spurgeon, was sharing the good news of salvation, in Jesus, with a woman one day, and she was beginning to understand the good news.

It started to dawn on her, what Christ had done for her, and Spurgeon said, and in that moment, she just burst out and said, oh, Mr. Spurgeon, if Christ saves me, he will never hear the end of it. Isn't that beautiful? Megaphone. The response of the Samaritan reveals what true faith looks like. Normal faith is thankfulness to Jesus.

Does that characterize us here? Does it characterize you? The good news of the free gift of life in Jesus still grips you and still moves you into tears?

[27 : 44] Joy in Christ. A friend of mine was sitting in a group of other Bible college students. He was in Bible college at the time, a prominent Bible college in Sydney, and the late evangelist, John

Chapman, was leading the small group, it was a preaching group, and their text that they were working through, was the text that Sam preached on us last week.

Philippians 2, 1 in 11, about God's love for us in Christ. And as John, leading the group, he was in his 70s, been a Christian for over 50 years, he started to read the text, Philippians 2, started to read it to them.

He got to the point where it talked about Christ going to the cross and dying for us. And he said, my friend said, at that point, John just started to weep.

And then he started to sob. And he said, the rest of us in the group are like, it's a bit awkward. What do we do here? Do we give the guy a hug? Do we finish the Bible reading?

Do we close in prayer? What do we do? And he said, we just all sat there awkwardly for a moment, waiting. And a couple of minutes later, he said, John composed himself, and read the rest of the text and blew his nose and wiped his eyes and went on to the thing.

[29 : 10] But before he went on, he said, sorry gentlemen, as I was reading, I was just reminding of the gospel again. Megathrone comes to mind.

Did you have that moment last week when Sam was preaching from Philippians 2 and reminding you of the gospel again? Gratitude is the heart of the Christian motivation for mission.

That's the connection here. Gratitude and mission are so connected. Duty, just doing mission out of duty, just doing, share the benefit out of duty. What duty wants to do is just establish the limits.

It wants to be like the expert in the law with the Good Samaritan. So, do I really need to love that guy? It wants to put limits boundaries. Gratitude overflows.

It's desire and impulse that Sam said last week. How incredibly beneficial grateful people are to themselves and those around them in their families and their church and in their society where gratitude is so scarce.

[30 : 25] They are light in darkness. When their gratitude rings out to God through Jesus and poor Jesus, the Lord Jesus is powerfully proclaimed and some that are wallowing in that darkness, depressed, alone, thankless, in no man's land, see the right light.

They get a glimpse of glory. Hearts that are overflowing with thankfulness despite the circumstances of their lives. display the worth and the value and the magnificence of Jesus to a world that needs a reason for hope and a reason for gratitude.

Amen.