The Roman philosopher Cicero once said that gratitude is the parent of all virtues. It’s not difficult to see how this would be true. Gratitude is a virtue that contains many other virtues. For example, to be genuinely grateful to someone or for something, one must also be humble, generous, and kind.

This is why, as parents, we spend so much time teaching gratitude to our kids. After you take your child out for ice cream, or to the zoo, or put dinner on the table, there is that familiar refrain: “What do you say?” The child, prompted, shouts: “Thank you!” One day, hopefully, they will not need to be prompted anymore. In the meantime, you solicit the “thank you” not merely to teach good manners — though that is part of it — but on a deeper level, to inculcate a sense of gratitude in a child who, left to his own devices, will naturally take most things for granted. We teach gratitude not for our sake but for theirs so they can be happy, content, and fulfilled.

Are we grateful people? Do we exhibit virtues such as humbleness, kindness, and generosity? Maybe you have seen those videos when a stranger is being kind to another person by helping them and they go viral because is such a rare sight—sadly. Nowadays, this is becoming less of normal behavior and more of a curiosity. This is a huge problem that affects all of us because being grateful, kind, and generous is the foundation for a fulfilling life. If we are missing these virtues, we are left with greed and envy, leading us to resentment, contentiousness, and bitterness.

How do we know if we are grateful? What do we do when we are blessed? A story in the New Testament presents a powerful case of gratitude. This is the story of the ten lepers that Jesus healed, and it is found in 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.”

This story is not only about miraculous healing but also about the surprising healing of people that had been sent away due to their illness of leprosy. It is a two-fold miracle: Jesus first coming to the forsaken and then healing them.

To understand this further, we need to know what leprosy is and what it meant to those that contracted it.

What is the illness of leprosy? Leprosy is a chronic, progressive bacterial disease that primarily affects the nerves of the extremities, the skin, the lining of the nose, and the upper respiratory tract. Leprosy produces skin ulcers, nerve damage, and muscle weakness. If it isn’t treated, it can cause severe disfigurement and significant disability. Leprosy is one of the oldest diseases in recorded history. The first known written reference to leprosy is from around 600 B.C.

Today, this is a curable disease, but that was not the case in the time of Jesus. So, what did it mean for someone to be ill with leprosy back then?

According to the Law of Moses, a leper was an impure person. Therefore, they were not permitted in the Temple or around other people—except other lepers. Being a leper meant to be cast away from your family and friends, and gathered and kept in a place designed for other lepers too.

In many ways, these people were thrown away and kept out of society. The rules about them were so strict that if any leper got close to other people, these people would yell out loud, “unclean, unclean,” which was understood by others as a warning against the proximity of a leper.

This was a deeply broken and sad condition, as you can see. People with this disease were rejected, and they had lived away in camps for all other lepers for the rest of their lives. But, in my opinion, even as horrible as the disease was, the worst part was not the illness itself but being away from the people they loved. They lost their lives alongside their spouses, children, and friends. They lost their jobs and any dreams of a future.

Now, here is the part where the good news come and provides us with such amazing and everlasting hope. Noticed that when the lepers were cast away and excluded and excommunicated by society, Jesus went to the village where they were. They did not go to Jesus, but Jesus came to them, making himself available and accessible.

The text says that “As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

We must notice that Jesus did not avoid this place even as it was a designated place for lepers. On the contrary, he brought himself there. He “entered” and came close to them, so close that they could engage in a conversation.

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” they cried out. These people recognized in Jesus their hope, their only hope, so they called out to him. And Jesus responded to them, saying, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean.”

These people that had abandoned their hope for a healthy life recognized in Jesus their salvation and healing. They knew well what they had, and they asked for help. So, Jesus helped them. He gave them instructions, they followed them, and they were made clean. This right here is a story of salvation, healing, and redemption. This is what Jesus does for all people that recognize in him their hope and then call out on him, listen to him, and obey him.

Now, there is something else that the writer wants us to know. Of all the lepers that were healed, only one came back to thank Jesus,

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?”

This makes me uncomfortable and even a little upset. After such miraculous healing, not even a “thank you?” Of course, Jesus was not asking to be thanked, so this is not about what Jesus wanted but making the observation of how those who are healed and saved respond to the grace that God extends over their lives. Jesus wants us to know that physical healing is not everything, but the transformation of the inner being is what ultimately makes us whole.

Why do we have only one person coming back to Jesus to thank him? The ten lepers had the same need and received the same answer: healing. All of them, I assumed, called out to Jesus for help, and they were listened to. All of them followed Jesus’ instructions and were healed. But only one came back. This one person showed his heart in this action. His spirit was moved to worship God when he received his blessing. This person saw the difference Jesus made in his life and came back to prostrate before Jesus. In other words, using the same energy, intensity, and passion with which he asked for help, he also worshiped and thanked God.

How many times are we like the nine? I see this often when people get their blessing but then go off to live without regard for Jesus. If all the people who have been blessed would come back grateful to Jesus and follow him, our churches would be full. But the reality is that only a tiny percentage of those blessed continue to follow Jesus and stay committed to him.

Leprosy may not be a disease that we need to be concern about anymore, but there are other kinds of conditions of the mind and soul that destroy us from within. Think of anything that is the opposite of gratitude, kindness, and generosity and you will know what I am talking about. Physical healing is an amazing thing, but the healing of the inner being is a beautiful and forever gift.

The bottom line is that being grateful makes us good and happy, content and fulfilled no matter the situations we may be facing. Gratitude seals the deal of our salvation and healing, not because grace did not accomplish it already in our lives but because we get it and respond to God accordingly. Our lives are no longer about what we need or want but about finding our place in God’s kingdom.

This is what the one leper did, and this is what we experience too when we understand grace and become grateful for everything, “He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.” The ten got their healing of the body, but one found his place in God’s presence.

My friends, true gratitude can’t be faked, and when it is expressed through devotion, we are transformed beyond having our prayers answered. So, let’s not forget how blessed we are and how much we have been transformed and healed by God in our hearts, minds, and souls. We all have things to be grateful for to God.

The invitation for us today is to recognize our blessings and become grateful—not just as a one-time response but as a life-long journey of commitment to God.

Think about what you have, the people in your lives and everything else, and, what do you say? “Thank you.”