

I think we've all got a few friends like this. I'm not sure if there's a name for them, I guess they're kind of the opposite of "fair-weather friends". The kind of people you know only come to you when they've got a problem. For me they're people I used to know pretty well, but sort of lost touch with. You know, those situational kind of friends you make at school or work basically because you've got no one else to talk to at the time? You chat and get to know each other but a deeper friendship never really comes out of it. And yet they know you well enough that when, say a pipe starts leaking, they know you're good at plumbing or when the computer gets slow you know your way around a keyboard or when they need some wiring done- you get the idea. They're the people you don't hear from very often, so when they do go out of their way to contact you, even though it starts off with some general pleasantries, you know they want something and you're just waiting for them to ask.

Now, I'm not saying there's anything necessarily wrong with that kind of setup. We can't possibly be best friends with everyone we know, and there's nothing wrong with using the connections we have to help each other out and get things done so long as we're all willing to do that for each other and no one person takes advantage of the system. That's okay. Where that is a problem though, is in our relationship to our God. Take a look again at what happens in our gospel for today: <Read text: Luke 17:11-19>.

As Jesus is continuing that final journey to Jerusalem he comes along these ten people with skin disease. More out of tradition than anything, this is translated as "leprosy", but as you'll see in the footnotes of your Bible any time this comes up, we are not necessarily talking about the medical condition we call leprosy, but what could be any number of diseases that afflict the skin. Also as usual, since there was no cure and the disease was rather communicable, those who had it had to live completely separate from the rest of society. They were the unclean outcasts, and as you can imagine, this would only make the misery of their condition even worse.

"Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" they call out from the distance they were required to keep. Clearly, Jesus did have pity on them. He instructs them to go and show themselves to the priests. At the time, the priests were responsible for enforcing many of the aspects of God's law given to Moses, and so it was up to the priest to declare someone "clean" or "unclean". The point is that if these people were cleansed of their disease, it was still up to the priest to verify that and officially state that they were fit to reenter normal society. Along their way to the priest, all ten are cleansed. But only one of them, seeing himself cleansed, returns to Jesus. The man drops to Jesus' feet and thanks him – and now Luke drops the bombshell – this one man was a Samaritan.

As we well know, it was the Samaritans who were considered the lowest-class people you could get by the Jews. They weren't just looked down on as a class below, they were the worst. You've heard of crossing to the other side of the street just to avoid passing by someone on the sidewalk? Well the Jews would go a day's journey out of their way just to avoid passing through a village of these people. In fact, the only thing worse than a Samaritan was a leper, which explains why this Samaritan was allowed to be part of the collection of lepers from the start. But now, having been cleansed, it was only this repulsive outcast of a man who bothered to come back and thank Jesus for what had been done for him. Where were the others to show their thanks? Were they just too excited about what they got to care about thanking the giver? Or now that they had what they wanted did they even care about Jesus at all anymore?

But, of course, before we start villainizing these people too much, let's take some time for some good old-fashioned self-examination. Which are you? The one or the nine? Okay, that's an unfair black and white question, but which one do you resemble more often? Certainly, we are all willing to call out to God in our distress (though I will say we may not take advantage of that as often as we might either, but that's an entirely different discussion). It's good to know that our Lord Jesus is near, that he hears us, and because he has lived as one of us, he knows us and is sympathetic to our distress. It's a comfort to know this and to take advantage of it.

But all that does is make us part of the ten. The question is what about the rest of the time? For example...what was the content of your last...say, five prayers? Were they all requests? Was there any praise for God? Was there any thanksgiving in there? Now, I'm not accusing anyone of being outright ungrateful for what God has given to and done for you, but when was the last time you actually took the time to thank him personally with words for answering your prayers and getting you out of troubles? How often do you acknowledge his effort and his work in your life?

It's pretty easy to do, isn't it? Once the dust settles and the status quo is restored, we are tempted to just sort of brush ourselves off and go on our own way, thinking that God can go his and we'll touch base with him again if we ever have any more real problems. We're happy to call him up when we need something big fixed and sure when our time

grows short we'll really need him then 'cause he's got to be there to carry us to heaven, but until then we'll just live our lives and God can do whatever it is he does and that'll be that.

But like I said, that kind of attitude doesn't work when it comes to God. Because when you stop to think about it, when you really take the time to dig in and understand...God's effort on your behalf goes way further than most of us tend to acknowledge on any given day. How much has he done for you...just today? I'm assuming all of you here got out of bed this morning. God granted you the strength to be able to stand on two feet. There was probably a bed under you and a roof over you when that happened. Water to wash yourself with, probably some soaps to clean up with. Food was in the fridge and the cupboard. You were given means to be here today, whether through driving yourself or providing someone to bring you. As you sit there, your eyes are able to see what's in front of you, your brain can process the words I'm speaking to you and your lungs and heart continue to do their thing that keep you sitting upright for now.

Now let's do a little calculating. How much of that only happens because God *wills* it to happen? How much of that is there because God chooses to allow it to continue. How much of that do you have because God granted it to you? I'll give you a hint, it's all of it. Now throw into that the infinite possibilities of terrible things that *didn't* happen to you along the way this morning either. All the terrors and tragedies that the devil would love to see you afflicted with but God did not allow. Alright, now balance that whole thing against what you have done for God to earn or deserve any of it. That is not an equation that comes out in our favor. None of us deserve any of it. Like the child who just expects that card from grandma to have money in it and is actually *upset* when it doesn't...we've become so used to everything our God has chosen to bless us with, that we've forgotten how much he does for us, and how little we deserve any of it.

We have been rude and callous and hurtful not just to each other, but to our God. For that he ought to strip us of every one of our blessings, but he does not. He continues to provide all that we need every day. But instead of recognizing this and throwing ourselves at his feet in thanks for nothing more than just our daily lives, we just constantly expect it to all be there as though we've earned it and we deserve it because we're just that great.

But we're not that great. In fact we're pretty awful. We're selfish and prideful and arrogant and filled with a sense of entitlement. We forget that too. It seems harsh to say, but if we don't understand just how terrible we are on our own, we don't understand just how amazing it is that God chooses to bless us anyway. It's no surprise that the life-long Christian, born and raised in the church has a better chance of being the lukewarm believer...where the life-long sinner who finally sees Jesus after hitting the bottom is the one filled with passion and zeal for the Lord. The latter has a much better handle on just how far they have to fall without God. We need to look in God's law, the mirror that shows us for who we are, and really, fully understand just who we really are. We are not good people. We have no reason to have any pride in ourselves. We have no reason to merit any favor from God.

To know and be fully convinced of this is we are able to truly appreciate what a wonder it is that God has come to us each, of his own accord and taught us about his love. About the Son who lived a life as one of us but never disappointed him. About the Savior who then was raised up on the cross and put to death so that your crimes could be punished without you having to die for them. He taught us about his love so that we could be made to trust him for forgiveness and life eternal. And that, that is the real thing we have to thank God for every day. Some daily blessings come and go. We're grateful when we have them, we can live without them when we don't. But this one, this one tops them all. Whether in good times or bad, we do not deserve to have a risen Savior who died for us. We do not deserve to have the promise of eternal life given to us. We do not deserve to have been adopted into the family of our God.

But we have been. Every day that you live with the knowledge of and trust in your Savior is a day you did not deserve it. But you have it. Every day lived in faith is a day worth giving thanks for. That faith gives us the strength to meet any pain or difficulty head on, knowing that our eternity is secure. It's a trust we did not deserve, it's a trust we did not give ourselves, but it's something we would be utterly lost without. It's something God has chosen to give you. Don't let yourself forget just how blessed you are to simply know and believe in your God. Remember that every day, and through that, give thanks to him in every circumstance. Cling tightly to your God in good and bad. You have the best our God has to offer. Never stop returning to him to give thanks.