

Great *Question*



Great leaders ask great questions. During His ministry on earth, Jesus asked about three times more questions than He answered. His questions still have the power to pull us out of our comfort, out of our overconfidence, out of our settledness in our world and into greater knowledge of His Kingdom. Jesus' questions can shake us up and help to reset our lives.

GREAT QUESTION • Luke 17:11–19 • Tim McConnell • August 4, 2019

Written a “Thank You” note lately? I don’t know what momma taught you, but momma taught me to write a “Thank You” note. If someone does something nice for you, say “Thank You.” If you hope they’ll do it again, write them a “Thank You” note. These days a written note is like relational gold. When someone actually takes a pen and rubs it across actual paper and actually folds it up and writes an address on it (which takes longer than writing the note sometimes) and stamps it and mails it—wow! This passage is about gratitude, saying “Thank you.” We are meant to be thankful people, not just receiving all the time but returning thanks for what we receive. In fact, I can think of at least two “Thank You” notes I owe right now! But it’s about something else, too. It’s about reaching out; it’s about what we call evangelism—asking others to take a step toward Jesus. We are in a series called *Great Question*, looking at questions Jesus asked to reset our lives, and today we get this one: “Where are the other nine?” Jesus heals 10. Nine go their own way. One comes back to say “Thank You.” Where are the other nine?

The 10 men suffered leprosy, a long-term bacterial infection causing lesions on the skin and nerve damage so severe you could injure yourself without knowing it. It is curable now, but still suffered among the poor worldwide. But I’m not sure what was worse for these men, the illness or the way it forced them to live their lives. In the ancient world, with no cure, the only thing to do was to keep the sick isolated. They had to live under certain rules: never touch, never speak to someone downwind, wear special clothes to identify, walk on the far side of the road or in the drainage ditches, even call out “Leper!” or “Unclean!” to announce your presence. They were sick, and they were contagious, but imagine the loneliness. It must have ached. They couldn’t work, they couldn’t trade, they couldn’t go to church, they couldn’t see their own families. Probably what these 10 men wanted more than anything else was just to be restored, just to get back to where they could be a part of everything again. We look back and cringe at ancient society isolating their sick, but have you thought about how we handle it? Studies say people lose their identity becoming “patients”—putting on the backless gown and the plastic bracelet means exiting society. “Woop! Five minutes ago I was a person; now I’m a patient.” We still keep the sick at bay. Who are we walking past as though less than human? Jesus stopped.

“Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and

called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’” (Luke 17:11–13). They did as they were supposed to do, but they sensed possibility in Jesus that they did not sense in all who walked by. Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me. “When he saw them, He said, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed” (Luke 17:14). Cleansed. Underline that. It’s the first step on a little walk we are going to take. Cleansed. Jesus healed 10 men with leprosy by His word.

Jesus longs to be with people; He loves all people. He doesn’t stick to the highway and burn past these places of hurt and brokenness. He takes the low road to Jerusalem, finding places of great pain and stopping to do just a bit to help. He doesn’t fix the whole system, or heal every sick person in the world, but one by one, bit by bit, He contributes where He is, and in this He is teaching us a lesson. Jesus is a healer, and we are to be healers, too. Leprosy is still healed, sight is still restored, people are still brought back from the dead (or close to it!), the lame are still made to walk. Jesus inspires us to care for one another, to find healing for our fellow human beings. In two weeks we begin a new series, *Humanize Me*. Jesus is on a mission to make us human, as God made us to be, and humanized people can humanize others. We’ll talk about it. Far from the worldly systems of just deserts, or Karma where your punishment fits your crime, or a view of God as a cosmic judge smiting those who misbehave, Jesus demonstrates love and compassion for the sick. No sickness is a burden that must be carried alone. Jesus is a healer.

Jesus’ healing words were: “Go and see the priests.” Why? The priests were the gatekeepers. If the priest says you are clean, you can re-join society. If you were suddenly healed of your sickness, you would wait a certain period of time (seven days, I think), and go see the priest, then wait a while longer, and see the priest again, and jump through the hoops until finally you get the golden pass, the golden ticket: “Clean!” Jesus says, in effect, go get the process started. “You are clean, so go get certified.” All 10 of them turn and run. Everybody runs to the priests in excitement! Right? And as they go, the miracle happens. They can see it on their skin and feel it in their bodies. They are clean, and they are running now!

Friends, we all get running. We all get stuck in our track of personal progress, moving toward the next step, the next goal, the next meeting, the next pay raise, the next promotion, the next move, the next degree ... the next, the next, the next, and we move so fast we hardly look around us, let

alone look back to thank those who have helped us along the way. The drive for upward mobility can make us neglect those around us, even our own families. So it's jarring in this world—it is remarkable, it stands out—when someone has the presence of mind to stop, when someone is able to step off the "Achievatron" treadmill (as David Brooks calls it) and stop. Then you can listen, and pray if someone says, "My mother called yesterday and she's sick," or "My brother came home from the doctor last week, and he has cancer," or "My son is having trouble." Are we running so fast we have forgotten how to stop along the way? Jesus stopped. So did our hero today.

Watch what happens: "One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan" (Luke 17:15-16). What does that have to do with anything? Well, Samaritans were outsiders. They were the least likely to honor God in the traditional ways. This guy was not only an outsider by illness, he was an outsider by birth, by citizenship, by religious belief, by accent and address and language and culture. But this is the man who returns to Jesus. Okay, I said "clean" was the first step. This is the next step: the man realizes he is "healed." Healed is a little richer than clean. He gets "clean" right away. "My skin is back! I'm back, baby! Clean! I am back on track; back to business!" But "healed" happens when he gains a certain presence of mind to come to himself and realize what has happened to him. "When he saw that he was healed." His reaction to this realization is to hit his knees before Jesus.

And then something else happens. "Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well'" (Luke 17:19). This is the third step: "well." This is a rich word in our Scriptures. It comes from a verb that means "to save." Other ways to translate it would be, "Your faith has saved you" or "made you whole." See, something further, richer, has happened because this man returned thanks and praise to God. He didn't just get clean and get on his way. He didn't just realize he was healed and say, "Great! Hey, that's real good," and head out. He returned to Jesus and he hit his knees, and he shouted out with joy and praise, and he gave back to God the only thing he could give for God's gracious gifts to him, and then, then, he is saved—the definition of the state of this man's soul then is "saved." You see, we are meant to return thanks and praise to God. This is the proper response. And when we don't, we are left short. We are left short. God doesn't need our thanks. He doesn't need his ego stroked. Jesus doesn't do what He does to get a "Thank You" note or a gift card. We need to give thanks and praise to God.

We need it. And we are not whole until we do. When we return thanks and praise to God, we set our hearts right with God. God is God again, and we are His people, His children under His care, the sheep of His pasture—we are who we were made to be. When we give thanks to God, we begin to be whole again. We live life with hearts turned upward in thanksgiving. Our lives give glory to God and we catch a whiff of eternal life, of our eternal purpose, in that.

But we skipped the great question, didn't we? "Jesus asked, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?'" (Luke 17:17-18). Where are all the others? Is Jesus put out? Maybe, a little. I mean it's a lot to do to come out of heaven and put on flesh and walk around these dusty towns, and muster up the power of God to heal 10 guys of leprosy, and no "Thank You" note? What's up with that? But more than that, I believe, is Jesus' continuing concern for the nine. You see of the three things that happened to the hero, the Samaritan, only one of them happened to the other nine. "Were not all ten cleansed?" They were made clean, but they didn't stop to realize they were healed. They were made clean, but they didn't return thanks and praise to God, and they were never made whole, and they were never made saved. And this is Jesus' continuing invitation to them. "Come back, give thanks to God. This wasn't meant to be a one-time thing. This was meant to be the beginning of your wholeness, your salvation. This was meant to be the beginning of your eternal relationship with God. Come back." Where are the nine? When Jesus asks this question, he is sending the Samaritan to find his friends.

Blessings happen in groups. You've been part of one. The family gathers; dad needs an operation, it's all happening very quickly. Some cry, some make phone calls, some drink, some pray. Then the operation is a success—dad is okay! He is healed! The blessing is not just for him, the healing is for the whole group. Now, how many return thanks and praise to God? One out of 10? Where are the other nine? You see, they've been blessed, but they haven't been made well. They are like the other nine. Now, if only there was some place to invite them. How many of the people around you are among the nine? They've been blessed, but they haven't given thanks. They've seen God's blessing, but they never closed the circle and learned how to come back and give thanks and start a relationship. If only there was some place, some regular event where we could invite the other nine, maybe they wouldn't get stuck on "cleansed" or "blessed" but move on to "healed" and "whole" and "saved" with Jesus. If only there

were some building, or gathering or congregation ... Church, we have an invitation to offer. You see, we have this church.

A lot of things happen at church, and sometimes we get confused or forget because it's so obvious what church is for. Church is a simple thing, really. It's a place to come and give thanks and praise to God. The first purpose of a Church is worship. When we do that, all these other great things start to happen. We are united and we feel a family-type bond, we love one another, encourage one another, challenge one another, and make a difference in the world together, and break into one another's lonely isolation, but all of this is secondary: we have come to worship God! Like the Samaritan man, we have come to sing and shout and throw ourselves down before Jesus, to praise God in loud voice, with all our passion. We've come to worship, because it is right. Where are the other nine? The other nine are in a desperate situation. They are healed, but are they whole? They are blessed, but are they saved? They need to come and give thanks and praise to God for the gifts He has given them. We are about to share communion. We go into communion saying, almost every time, these same words that Christians have said since too early for anybody to remember: "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God! It is right to give Him thanks and praise!" It is right. How many things do you get to do in the course of your week that you know are right? When we gather for worship, we have the opportunity to do one thing that is absolutely right: to give thanks and praise to God. It is right to give God thanks and praise.

You know, the secret of sharing the gospel with those around us is to remember that God is already at work in their lives, trying to bring them home. God has already poured out His blessing on them in some way. "Hey, do you remember that time? God was really good to you. Did you ever thank God for that? We have a simple house of God downtown. We get together Sunday mornings and there are no pressures or expectations. It's just a place you can come, if you'd like, and give God thanks and praise and begin the relationship with God that is salvation—the relationship with God that lasts for all eternity." Share that invitation. Where are the nine? Share in Jesus' heart for the lost. Where are the nine? He has reached out to them, but they have wandered off. Give them the invitation one more time. "Come back, and give God thanks and praise."

STUDY GUIDE

GREAT QUESTION • "Where Are the Nine?"

Luke 17:11–19

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Luke 17:11–19.

- 1) Reread verses 12–13. Leprosy describes a family of skin diseases that were often highly contagious. In the ancient world, people with these conditions were quarantined in an effort to protect the health of the village. Does this still happen today in other ways? Who are the social "lepers" in our society?
- 2) Reread verses 15–16. Why do you think that only one returned to Jesus to thank him for this miracle?
- 3) Reread verses 17–18. None of the "right" people returned to Jesus. It was only the Samaritan, the outsider. Why do you think Luke would write about an outsider doing the right thing rather than the Jews? In what ways is it significant that the Samaritan comes back rather than the Jews who were healed?
- 4) Jesus miraculously heals all 10 of these lepers. What sort of healing by God have you experienced in your life? (spiritual, emotional, physical, etc.)
- 5) In what ways are you like the man who returned? How do you typically express gratitude to God for the ways in which He has worked in your life?
- 6) When have you been like the other nine?
- 7) How does this passage challenge you to grow in your knowledge of Christ's Kingdom?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Who in your life needs to recognize the work of the Lord in their life?

IN: Connect with Each Other

Who in your life has experienced the work of the Lord in their midst recently? Close this time by thanking God for this work.