

Hi everybody, welcome back and Happy Thanksgiving a few days early, right? Hey, I hope you all have an opportunity to celebrate with friends and family this week. For several years, a friend of mine and I would get up really, really early on Thanksgiving morning and participate in the Atlanta Half Marathon. I know a lot of you have probably participated in that. Notice I didn't say we ran the Atlanta Half Marathon. Some years we ran, but sometimes we just participated. But the great thing about starting off Thanksgiving with a really long run is guiltless eating all day long.

Now honestly, that was several years ago. These days it's just guiltless eating all day long. Now, if you know anything about the history of Thanksgiving, you know that it began as a really small community's response, then a colonial response, and ultimately, eventually our nation's response to divine provision and divine protection, because gratitude, or feeling thankful, is actually a universal experience. I mean, when good things happen, or when we're on the backside of a rough stretch, there's something just intuitive, instinctive in all of us. There's just this automatic

feeling of gratitude. For some folks it's thank goodness, for others of us it's literally thank God, but thank somebody or thank something, right? We're just all instinctively thankful, though we may express it in different ways. It's almost like we can't help it.

Now, I say it's almost like we can't help it because when it comes to expressing our gratitude to each other, it's not always so intuitive, right, it's not always so fluid, it's not always so instinctive. Not only can we help it, oftentimes we do help it. We withhold our gratitude, and when you withhold gratitude, when I withhold gratitude, we actually create a gap in the relationship, an unfilled space. There's unfinished business which creates a glitch in the relationship, and if it goes on for too long, it actually undermines the integrity of the relationship, or to put it bluntly, few things sting, isn't this true, few things sting more than ingratitude, and here's why. Because ingratitude communicates I don't see you, I don't even see you. I don't recognize you. I don't recognize what you've done. I don't recognize your effort, I don't recognize your sacrifice.

Ingratitude communicates, you know what, you owed me that, so why would I thank you for that? Ingratitude stings because it isn't neutral. It's the opposite of what was expected or earned or perhaps even deserved, so it hurts. Which is odd because the other person really didn't do anything to us, they just didn't do anything. Now, you thought they would hit the tennis ball back, but they just stood there and let it bounce against the fence behind 'em. So there are few things more hurtful than ingratitude. But at the same time, but at the same time, isn't this true, there are few things more uncomfortable than pointing out someone's ingratitude, right?

I mean, it feels kind of childish, like, "Hey, what about a thank you every once in a while," or, "Hey, you didn't say thank you," Or, "You never show me any appreciation". I mean, who wants to say that? To say that makes us feel small and insecure not to mention, you know, when you say that the other person says, "Wait a minute. Oh, I'm so sorry". But what we hear is, "I'm so sorry little baby who needs constant reassurance and affirmation," right?

So even asking about or bringing up the subject of ingratitude is so uncomfortable, and ingratitude is a strange thing because, well, it's not even a thing. It's more a lack of a thing. But it doesn't always come packaged in silence or a lack of response.

Sometimes ingratitude is actually express verbally. You've been in this situation. You do something for somebody else and instead of saying thank you, they explain that, well, you didn't do it right, or you chose the wrong color. But mostly, in most cases, ingratitude is an absence of words, an absence of recognition of something that we've done that come on, that deserves recognition. The other odd thing about ingratitude is this. It looms large when we're the victim. I mean, it's all we can see when somebody has been ungrateful, we can't possibly miss it, but it's completely invaded to the perpetrator. I mean, think about it. When we create a gap through our ingratitude, it's all the other person can see, but we can't see it at all. We're clueless, which is obvious to the other party, which in the moment makes the pain that much worse, or to put it simply, the recipient, the recipient

is always aware, right, but the culprit is rarely aware. It's so odd.

Now for me, I have to be really careful, because outside my family, it's easy for me to just write off ungrateful people, and I hate to say that, but it's true. I mean, I'm kind of, I can be a one and done person. Gratitude goes a long way with me, and ingratitude, it goes a long way with me as well. There are people, honestly, that I would have a difficult time extending generosity with my time or my influence or my resources because of how they didn't respond last time I was generous to them with my time, influence, or my resources, and that's something I've gotta monitor because as a Jesus follower, I'm required to be generous regardless of how people respond. But come on, it's a whole lot easier to extend generosity to grateful people, and my reason for bringing this up and my reason for bringing me up is this.

Your ingratitude, you're ingratitude, which you might not even be aware of, your accidental ingratitude is leaving a mark. It's undermining your respectability, and you don't know it. I

mean, the ungrateful people I struggle not to write off have no idea, the people who've written you off because of you're ingratitude, you have no idea, and if you're not family, they're not gonna tell you. They just move on, and the uncomfortable thing about me even talking about this is I'm sure there are people watching or listening who have experienced a lack of gratitude from me, and you know, here's the point. I don't know who they are. I'm clueless, and I'm kind of glad no one's here to say amen.

Now, many years ago when I was starting off on my quest to become a good organizational leader, I had the opportunity to meet with a pretty high profile business person for lunch in the Atlanta area. It was a friend of my dad's, that's how I got the lunch. I was in my late 20s, and I only remember one thing about our conversation, and it was not what this gentlemen intended for me to remember, in fact, I bet he doesn't even remember saying this. But as you know, negatives are generally stickier than positives. I knew he had a meeting at, in his office right after our lunch, and we were going a little long, so I interrupted him and I

said, "Hey, I know you've got a meeting to get to," and then he interrupted me and here's what he said and I'll never forget it. He said, "No problem, no problem. They all work for me. No problem, I don't need to rush back. They all work for me".

This is my only takeaway from that lunch. This was so offensive to me, and I didn't even know any of the other people, but when he said it, I made a decision. I will never take the people who work with me or for me for granted. In fact, I refuse to use the phrase my people or our people when referring to people that I work with. I don't have any people. No one deserves to be talked about or treated like there's somebody's people, and I'm sure he didn't mean it that way, perhaps, but it made an impression. It struck me as extremely ungrateful, because he was what? He was taking them for granted. "They'll wait, they've got nothing better to do. They owe me, I don't owe them".

Have you ever felt taken for granted? It's terrible, isn't it? It's dehumanizing, it's one of the worst things you can experience on

planet earth. Now, moving on. If you've ever been accused, think about this, if you've ever been accused, and we all have, if you've ever been accused of being ungrateful, if you're like most people, you probably got defensive. The reason you got defensive is because you felt like somebody was accusing you of not feeling something. Isn't that true? Somebody says, "I don't feel like you're grateful. I think you take me for granted". We immediately get defensive, and we're like, oh no, and we feel like they're judging us, and we get defensive because we think, hey, how could you possibly know how I feel? Which of course is the point.

They don't know how we feel. They know how they feel. They feel unappreciated. They feel taken for granted, but we feel otherwise so we pushed back and we get defensive and we say things like this. "But I am grateful," translated, I am grateful on the inside. I have grateful thoughts and feelings towards you, which while it's true, it's meaningless, isn't it, because, and this is the point of today's discussion, unexpressed gratitude, think about it, unexpressed gratitude is actually experienced

by the other person as ingratitude. Unexpressed gratitude is experienced by the other person as the opposite of what we convince ourselves we really feel and we really think.

Through the years I've met with lots of men in particular who are super busy and find themselves a little bit alienated from their families and their children, and here's the advice I always give them. I say, look, you love your kids in your heart, but you don't love your kids on your calendar, and the calendar is what counts. The calendar is what connects, the calendar's what communicates what you feel. The same goes for gratitude. It's the expression of gratitude, it's the expression of gratitude, not the emotion that completes the circle, that closes the gap, that maintains the connection. Or to put it another way, gratitude and ingratitude are relationally determinative.

This is so important. Gratitude and ingratitude actually determine how much of you you're willing to entrust to someone else, and it determines how much he or she is willing to entrust to you. Because when you feel taken for granted, when we feel taken for granted, we

instinctively, it's not a decision, we instinctively withhold part of ourselves in order not to be hurt. Again, gratitude and ingratitude are relationally determinative. They determine something about the relationship, or think about it this way. Our hearts, and you've experienced this, our hearts actually gravitate toward recognition and gratitude. It's not a decision, it's a response. If you're married or if you're in what you hope to become a permanent relationship, here's a tip, here's a tip. This is so important. Don't let anyone, don't let anyone out-grateful you. What I mean by that is be the most grateful person in your loved one's life, because our hearts, their hearts, gravitate toward recognition and gratitude.

Now, if you're a middle schooler or a high schooler still livin' at home, I wanna tell you somethin', but I don't want you to tell your parents that I told you this. If you would like to get your mom and dad to be more yes than no when you ask for things, I mean, when you want more freedom, if you want more yes than no, be grateful for everything out loud, and here's why. Your parents, and parents in

general, are so accustomed to being taken for granted, if you're the typical middle schooler or high school student, and I know you don't think you're typical, but if you are, here's how you might think. Well, of course I have a room and of course I have cool clothes, and of course I have more food than I should eat, and of course I get a ride to school. That's what they're supposed to do, they're my parents.

But middle schoolers and high schoolers, don't be typical. I'm telling you, turn up the gratitude, and here's why. First of all, your parents deserve it, but second, it will melt their hearts. It will melt their hearts because gratitude is the language of the heart. Besides, they don't actually owe you anything. Here's a life lesson for ya. At the end of the day, everybody, everybody is a volunteer, even your parents, so be ridiculously grateful. Now, there's a famous narrative from the life of Jesus, and we talked about this about five years ago if you were around then, and every time I read this narrative, honestly, it kind of feels like the gratitude bar gets raised a little bit. I immediately think about the

people I'm grateful for in my heart that haven't heard it from my lips or my pen.

Now Luke, who thoroughly investigated everything in the life of Jesus, begins this narrative like this. He says, "Now Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, and he traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee," and if we had a map, I would show you this area. This is a very remote area, sparsely populated. It's kind of in the middle of nowhere. "And as he was going," the text says, "And as he was going into a village, 10 men who had leprosy met him," people with leprosy, they basically hovered between life and death. They weren't dead, but they couldn't really live, and worse than that, imagine, they stood at a distance and they watched everybody else live their lives.

As you know, in ancient times, leprosy was considered highly contagious. People afflicted with leprosy don't experience pain the way the rest of us do, and in a culture, this is the part we can't really understand sometimes, in a culture that required physical labor just to survive, this often resulted in injuries that

either went unnoticed or unattended to. So their bodies would visibly deteriorate over time, and the law, the law actually required somebody who had leprosy to live on the outskirts of town in a designated area, and any time they came toward town or came towards civilization, they had to warn people that they were approaching. Consequently lepers often created their own communities. They grew their own crops and they survived the best that they could. And it would come as no surprise to Luke's first century readers that a community of lepers were kind of eking out a living in this remote borderland between the predominantly Jewish territory of Galilee and the area inhabited mostly by Samaritans.

Now, this has nothing to do with the story, but I think it's worth pointing out. At the end of this account, we discover that this particular community of lepers was comprised of both Jews and Samaritans, two groups who normally would have nothing to do with each other for both political and religious reasons, but here's the thing. Pain, suffering, and alienation, pain, suffering, and alienation have a way of minimizing differences and maximizing what

people have in common. When people need each other, politics and religion, they are just not front burner issues, just a thought.

Anyway, Luke continues. He goes on and he says this. "These lepers," the 10 lepers, "they stood at a distance," with their faces covered because they had to cover their faces, which sounds familiar, right? "They stood at a distance" with their faces covered "and they called out in a loud voice," from a distance, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us". I mean, they're basically out in the middle of nowhere, he's in this little tiny village, they have apparently come into the edge of the village to get supplies. They recognize it's Jesus, they knew him by his reputation, and they call out "Master," which was really unusual, because this was a term pretty much reserved for those who were continuous followers of Jesus, his disciples, and clearly they were not. But desperate times call for desperate measures and if he could do what people said he could do, he was their only hope.

The text says, Luke says that when Jesus saw them, "When Jesus saw them, he shouted out," he

shouted back to them, "Go, go," which was not really what they were expecting. I mean, that's what they'd heard for years, go as in go away. But here's what Jesus said. Jesus said, "Go and show yourselves to the priests," which they must've thought, go and show them what? There's nothing to show, and besides, the priests aren't all that anxious to see us. In fact, nobody is. But Jesus had a triple intent here. According to the law, anyone with any kind of skin disease after being quarantined had to go to a local priest to be given the all clear before they could go back into society. The implication was, by the time you get there, when Jesus said go, the implication was Jesus was saying, by the time you get there when you go, when you see the priest, you're gonna get the all clear. But there was even more to it than that.

Imagine this. When 10 healed lepers, when 10 healed lepers show up, the priest would certainly ask how all 10 of them were healed, and that would be an unprecedented event, and it would clearly be a miracle, which again, would add to Jesus' reputation. It would be impossible to argue that something

extraordinary hadn't happened. And here's the third thing. Their willingness to go before anything had changed would certainly be an expression of extraordinary faith in Jesus, and if nothing changed on the way, it would make fools of the lepers. So there was a lot at stake, and there was a lot behind this request to go.

So if you're in their situation, what do you do in a situation like that? It reminds me of the advice that my great grandfather gave my father when my father was a teenager. He said this, He said, "Grandson, if God tells you to run your head through a brick wall, start running and trust God to make a hole". So Jesus said, "Go," and they went, and not because it made any sense, but because Jesus told them to go. And you probably remember what happened next. "And as they went," as they obeyed, "as they went, they were cleansed". They literally walked by faith. This is a phrase we throw around a lot in the church and in Christianity, to walk by faith. This is literally what it means to walk by faith. They responded to the promise and the prompting of Jesus before they knew the outcome. That's what it means to walk by faith.

But then the twist in the story, and the reason we're even talking about this. "One of them," one of these lepers, "when he saw he was healed, he turned around and he came back". He turned around, he returned, he completed the loop, he filled the gap. He came back, the text says, "praising God in a loud voice," and he literally "threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him". No more social distancing. He walked right up to Jesus and fell at his feet. He was not content, he was not content to feel grateful. He demonstrated it, he expressed it. And think about it. As much as he was ready to get back to living among the living, as much as he wanted to put all of this behind him, he knew he had to close the gratitude loop. After all, Jesus had just given him his life back.

So he did what we all need to do. He went back, he went back to thank the one who had enabled him to move forward. He went back to thank the one who enabled him to move forward with his life, and Luke, Luke looking back over the story arc of Jesus' life, I think he must've smiled when he pinned these next four words in Greek, five words in English. "And he," talking

about the leper, "and he was a Samaritan". The implication being the other nine probably weren't. This man, this man had experienced alienation and discrimination on multiple levels. He was extra grateful, and I think the reason for this added seemingly unimportant detail comes to light when you read all the entirety of Luke's gospel. Because over and over in his gospel, Luke highlights Jesus' encounters with outsiders, people that his first century audience would never expect Jesus to have anything to do with, and over and over, it was the outsiders who expressed the most gratitude.

They were not confused about how undeserving they were, their pride and their busyness did not get in way of their effort to close the gratitude loop, especially with Jesus. But this incident doesn't end there. Jesus asked a question. He said, "Were not all 10 cleansed? Where are the other nine"? Now in the Greek text, it's interesting because the interrogative "where" is actually at the end of the sentence for emphasis. Here's how it reads in the Greek. Literally, "The nine, where? The nine, where are they"? And of course, Jesus

isn't really expecting an answer, he's just making a stinging observation. Something is missing, someone is missing, some ones are missing. The other nine have missed the moment. The other nine have missed their opportunity. Something was missing, incomplete, unfinished, open-ended. The circle isn't closed. But now the window to close it has closed.

Now, if you're a parent, you understand what Jesus is getting at here, and for those of us who can remember how our parents raised us, we understand what Jesus is getting at, too. When you were a kid and somebody gave you a gift and one of your parents was standing there, they would immediately say what? They would say, "Say thank you". As in, right now, say thank you. There was urgency, like quick, say thank you right now, time is running out. Close the circle, connect the dots. And this is Jesus' point. The other nine missed the moment, and the moment had passed. How ungrateful. Their entire destiny had been changed. Apart from Jesus, apart from his intervention, they're gonna spend the rest of their lives eking out a living in the middle of nowhere. They've been restored to their families and their children.

They could work again, they could worship again, and where are they?

When we read this story, isn't it true we respond the same way Jesus did. Yeah, yeah, where are those guys? But before we judge too harshly, I imagine, I imagine if someone had confronted the other nine about their apparent lack of ingratitude, their apparent lack of gratitude I should say, I imagine that they would have been quick to respond with like, "What? We're not ungrateful. We are so grateful. Our hearts are filled with gratitude". I mean, the other nine had to have felt it, right? But the problem is, like us sometimes, they didn't express it, and Jesus, like us, was baffled, and he asked, "Has no one returned? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner? Only one returner"?

Again, question is a rebuke, and it also implies that the other lepers may have been Galileans like Jesus rather than Samaritans. Then he turns back to the one who returned and he says once again, "Rise and go," and of course this is the second time he's told him to go, but this time there would be no reason for

him to return. The circle was complete. And then this final statement. "Your faith has made you well".

So as we wrap up, I wanna make three quick observations to carry with us throughout this next week. The first one we've already touched on, that unexpressed gratitude, unexpressed gratitude communicates ingratitude. There is no neutral ground, and our feelings don't count, because our feelings don't connect. Our feelings of gratitude don't close the loop. Worse, worse, the gratitude we feel, think about this, the gratitude we feel but don't express is felt by the other person as the opposite of what we're feeling. We feel grateful, they feel unappreciated, taken for granted, and this is important.

Telling other people how grateful we are for someone else doesn't count either. Even if that person overhears us, and here's why I say that, and if you're married, you know, there's a tendency to do this sometimes, right? Bragging on your spouse to other people in front of your spouse but never bragging on your spouse to him or to her privately, never expressing gratitude

directly to them, does not close the loop. In fact, in some cases, in some instances, expressing gratitude to other people about something rather than to that person, can actually be insulting.

Second thing is this. Ingratitude feels like rejection. Ingratitude feels like rejection. Over time, unexpressed gratitude has the same effect on people in a relationship as rejection. It creates a gap. Again, our hearts gravitate toward acceptance, real or imagined. Appreciation feels like acceptance. So if you want the heart of your child or your spouse or an employee or associates, if you want their heart, express gratitude. You wanna be surrounded by people who just do what they have to do to get by, withhold it, take 'em for granted. Ah, they get a paycheck. It's my husband, no, she's my wife. I mean, this is what they signed up for. This is what they're supposed to do. You may keep their hands, but you will never have their hearts. They may stick around, but the relationship will eventually be void of intimacy. Last observation is this. Unexpressed gratitude,

unexpressed gratitude may indicate an inflated view of self.

Now here's why I say that. The message of ingratitude is this: I could have done this without you, so I don't really owe you anything. Isn't it true that arrogance and ingratitude are generally found under the same rock? I mean, arrogant people are generally ungrateful people, and ungrateful people usually come across as arrogant. So I want you to be really honest for just a moment. Is expressing your gratitude difficult for you? Is expressing gratitude difficult for you? Are you more comfortable pointing out how something could have been better rather than recognizing how good it actually is? If so, have you ever done any work digging around trying to figure out why you're kind of wired that way? If not, I'll give you a starting point.

Here's a hint. Gratitude, gratitude feels like an admission of weakness. I mean, it makes you feel like you may not have been able to accomplish what you've accomplished without help. Guess what? You couldn't. In the wake of your progress, in the wake of your success, in

your rear view mirror professionally, academically, financially, relationally, athletically, are dozens of people who facilitated your progress, who facilitated your success, and acknowledging their role is not weakness. It's maturity. It's evidence you've let go of an inflated, unhealthy sense of independence. Gratitude is evidence that you have life in proper perspective. You would not be where you are without the support and the help of other people. You do actually owe them a debt of gratitude, and that's okay.

So back to Luke's account for just a moment. Let's be the one, let's be the one rather than the nine. Let's decide, let's make up our mind to be like the one who went back, to thank the one who enabled him to move forward. Why not make it a habit of our lives to go back to the people who've allowed us to move forward? So here's a question. Who helped you move forward? Who helps you move forward? Have you thanked them recently? I mean, sure, you pay them, sure they married you. Sure, it's your mom, right? But have you expressed your gratitude lately?

You may feel it when you think about it, but have you expressed it, and if not, why not? Could it be you are in fact more like the nine than the one, that you took what was given, you got distracted by the new opportunity, the new freedom, the new recognition, and then you just went on your merry way without circling back to say thank you? I mean, if somebody told your story, or when somebody tells your story, will you be the story of the one or the story of the nine? And here's some good news. You get to decide. But you decide that story one expression of gratitude at a time. Gratitude that we feel but don't express is simply ingratitude by another name. So let's close the loop, right? Let's get in the habit of circling back. Let's be returners, let's decide today to be the one.

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