



11.9.25 Habits of Gratitude | Luke 17:15–16

What sets our feet on a path of being thankful?

The sign outside read *Trinity*, as Diana Butler Bass entered a church she had never been to before.

I was seventeen, alone, and curious about church and unaware that this church emphasized practices and expressions of faith I had never experienced before. The sanctuary wasn't stained glass and pews—it was a carpeted cafeteria. But it pulsed with joy.

The preacher in a suit shouted, **“Welcome! Thank Jesus for bringing us here!”** Music swelled. People swayed, closing eyes, lifting hands. One woman cried that her mother was healed. Another thanked God for paying her electric bill. **“Thank you, Jesus!”** they replied again and again, waves of praise rising around me.

Everyone's faces glowed with gratitude—except mine. I felt nothing but confusion and maybe envy. My prayers for healing had gone unanswered. I still battled migraines, loneliness, fears of the rapture and the end times. I wasn't rich or popular.

I was a teenager lost in worries, watching others rejoice in ways I didn't know how to enter into. Their joy felt like a secret I wasn't invited to share. The room felt sweaty with gratefulness.

So, when the pastor began pointing toward my section, asking what we were thankful for, I panicked. Slipping out the back and back into my car, I whispered, **“Thank you, Jesus—for getting me out of there.”**

Gratitude is tricky as a feeling—we resist it when others seem to feel what we don't. Sometimes, it only shows up once we've left the moment behind. Which might also be part of what it means to be an introvert.

Emotions like joy or fear move unpredictably through our lives, shifting with sleep, stress, the last thing we ate, or circumstance beyond our control. That's why many place feelings at the end of faith's train—because they're fleeting, they shouldn't be what drives our lives.

Gratitude, however, is more than an emotion. It's a chosen disposition, a practiced outlook, an ethic that shapes how we live. Gratitude grows not only from what we feel, but from what we do. Gratitude can be cultivated and developed as a habit.

Because gratitude is both a noun and a verb. It is both a feeling and a choice. The first often arises unannounced, and the second takes a lifetime of practice.

How does gratitude move from being a feeling to a “disposition of our character”?

Perhaps the first task is to be aware of our blessings.

Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk noted for a lifetime of maintaining a gratitude practice, has observed:

And I quote, **“Ninety-nine percent of the time we have an opportunity to be grateful for something. We just don't notice it. We go through our day in a daze.”** end quote.

Going through our day in a daze, I know how that feels, like being on auto-pilot. But I have never liked auto-pilot. I think fighting against “auto pilot” was part of why I wanted to develop more of a gratitude practice in my own life.

I am trying to slow down the pace of life, and be more present, more aware.

I've shared before, I have been keeping a gratitude journal for nine years now. It is my morning wake up ritual...listing 10 things I am grateful to God for. And now as I reflect on my practice, which is what writing allows you to do – look back over your gratitudes; I have noticed a shift for which I am also grateful.

My gratitude list is becoming more and more populated by names of people I am grateful for. And they are your names, you. Line upon line and page upon page, I see your names and I am thanking God for you.

Even though evidence is mounting that journaling about blessings, instead of challenges and frustrations actually reduces stress and improves our moods. Doctors and therapists suggest that patients keep gratitude diaries. Journaling is just one technique.

And Diana Butler Bass admits that though she didn't start out to specifically keep a gratitude journal, the act of journal writing itself helped her notice good things in her life. As her pages added up, she literally started seeing her life and the world differently.

She shared her habit of journaling about things she was grateful for became a lifeline, helping her grow stronger, develop clarity of purpose, and experience more joy along the way.

John Wesley had a gratitude practice that emphasized thankfulness for the little things in life. We have a picture here, where he is clutching his gratitude journal to his chest...just kidding! It's his Bible.

He often expressed that he had never known more than 15 minutes of anxiety or fear. Because whenever he was struggling with his fears he would pause, close his eyes, and thank God for his control over Wesley's life.

He practiced gratitude in his prayers.

Wesley believed that true worship required a spirit of gratitude, which is seen all over in his writings and sermons. He encouraged believers to cultivate a spirit of thankfulness for their daily blessings, their small joys, their experiences of God's grace in their everyday lives.

However you determine to develop a habit for being grateful, you'll probably experience what Bass did.

She shared she noticed two things in having a sustained practice of gratitude.

“First, when you look for things to be grateful for, you find them. And second, once you start looking, you discover that gratitude begets more gratitude, like all habits, gratitude builds on itself.”

Once you start it has a momentum all its own, it has a snowball effect and pulls you along into more and more gratitude.

Bass shared another technique to help us cultivate gratitude in our lives. It is called having “soft eyes” or “wide angled seeing”.

The term comes from the martial arts and refers to awareness that reaches toward the periphery, the edge of what we usually see in our lives.

The Quaker spiritual writer Palmer Park Parker described it this way.

In the Japanese art of Akido, there is a practice called soft eyes. It means to widen one's periphery to take in more of the world. If a stimulus is introduced to an unprepared person, his eyes narrow and the flight fight response takes over.

If the same unexpected stimulus comes to someone with soft eyes, the natural reflex is transcended. And a more authentic response takes place, such as thinking a new thought.

Soft eyes, it seems to me says Parker, is an evocative image for what happens when we gaze on sacred reality. Now our eyes are open and receptive, able to take in the greatness of the world and the grace of great things.

Bass shared that taking in “the grace of great things” is a very nice alternative definition for gratitude.

Taking in “the grace of great things” might also be a good way of summarizing our text for this morning.

As Jesus traveled toward Jerusalem, ten lepers called out to him for mercy. He told them to show themselves to the priests, and as they went, they were healed. Yet only one came back, verse 16, **“He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him”**.

This story reveals that healing and blessing often come through obedience, but true wholeness is found in gratitude. Jesus said at the end of his interaction with the healed leper, **“Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”**

The Samaritan’s thankfulness set him apart, showing that faith is not just receiving God’s gifts but recognizing and giving thanks to the Giver.

What sets our feet on a path, a lifestyle of giving thanks?

The Samaritan didn’t just receive a miracle; he *noticed* it. Verse 15 says, **“When he saw he was healed, he came back.”** That small phrase—“when he saw”—is the turning point.

His eyes were soft, set to see the bigger picture. Gratitude starts when our eyes are opened to see grace.

The others hurried on, eager to return to their normal lives.

I am sure the Samaritan also wanted to get back to his life. But he paused first. He saw that his healing was more than physical and emotional and communal and economic, it was also personal.

He had been restored by mercy, by love, by Jesus himself. And that realization pulled him back, like gravity, to the feet of the One who had made him whole.

Gratitude is the seeing, the turning back, is being grateful. Gratitude is also the coming home.

In every healing, every answered prayer, every ordinary grace, there is a choice: keep walking or turn to Jesus in gratitude. Gratitude is the pausing, the turning to acknowledge God, and express gratitude.

It is the movement of the soul that says, **“I will not take this for granted. I will return and give thanks to the Giver, the Healer, the Lover of my soul.”**

The Samaritan’s return wasn’t just physical; it was relational. He came back to the center of love, to the heart of God. And what did he find when he arrived?

Not judgment for being late, not disappointment for being a foreigner, but welcome. He found himself face-down at the feet of Jesus, exactly where his gratitude becomes wholeness, where thanksgiving becomes relationship.

Real gratitude always leads us there—back to Jesus.

Sometimes, our lives feel like the road the nine walked—dusty, loud, hurried, focused on proving ourselves clean or worthy. We get distracted by the next thing, the next task, the next worry. We forget to turn back.

But gratitude is what slows us down. Gratitude places our feet on a path that helps us see our blessings and give thanks.

Maybe that’s what Jesus meant when he asked in verse 17, **“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?”** Could it be less about a rebuke and more of an invitation?

Maybe he is saying, **“Come back. Come home. There’s more than healing here—there is a relationship to be explored and cherished.”**

When we turn back in gratitude—when we say, “Thank you, Lord”—we are doing more than expressing good manners. We are stepping into communion. We are finding our way home.

So today, may we be the ones who see and turn back and give thanks. The ones who rest in the Lord’s embrace.

May we, like the Samaritan, be people who see grace in the ordinary, who turn back to give thanks, and who find ourselves—again and again—coming home to Jesus’s love for us. Amen.

Time of Reflection:

1. When was the last time you saw God’s blessings and expressed your gratitude?

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2. Have you taken a moment this week to add to our Gratitude Cornucopia? Simply write down a word of one thing or the name of a person you are grateful for, write it on a paper pumpkin, and tape it in praise to God.