

Oh, come on, isn't God good? He's so good, and He's worthy of our praise. So, I wonder if we could just tell Him how good He is by just speaking out this Scripture together. You see, in the Scriptures, to give thanks is not just a suggestion. It's a command, and it's an encouragement to us. And so, what if we spoke this out together, all as one voice, all as the people of God? Ready? Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever. Let's say it again. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever. One more time. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever. Come on. What if you just said, "Thank you, God. Thank you, God." In fact, what if you began to pray out, "Thank you, Jesus, for – " what could you say thank you, Jesus, for right now? Maybe raise your voice. Thank You, Jesus, for. Thank You, Jesus, for my family. Thank You, Jesus, for my health. What if you just raised your voice and said, "Thank You, Jesus, for, because I'm thanking You for all Your goodness." Come on. Thank You, Jesus, for this church. Thank You, Jesus, for this beautiful season of life. Thank You, Jesus, for my future and for the dreams You're placing my family. What do you have to be thankful for? Thank You, Jesus, for. Every good blessing comes from You. Every good thing in my life comes from You. Thank You for Your goodness, for Your grace. Thank You, Jesus for You, Jesus. We have so much to be thankful for. We have you with the life You've given us. We have a church full of people who love us and are praying for us. We have Your goodness and Your grace pouring all over us. Thank You, Jesus, for everything that You've given us. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

Alright, let me invite you to go ahead and find your seats. Once again, welcome to Valley Creek Church. My name is Jason. If I've not gotten a chance to meet you yet, I get to serve as the campus pastor here. I'm so glad you're with us today. I would love to meet you and your family at some point and say "Hello" to you. But welcome to Valley Creek, and happy Thanksgiving. I hope you had an amazing Thanksgiving week. Thanksgiving is both my favorite holiday, and let's just be honest, it's kind of a quirky holiday. Here's why. It's got food and people that you only get to see once a year. The food side of it, nobody in the month of May is asking for sweet potatoes and marshmallows as a regular part of their dinner. Nobody in the month of May is saying, "Hey, can I get some green beans with a whole bunch of soup on top and maybe French's onions." And unlikely, in the middle of May, are you spending time with the people that you just spent time with this week. So, for all of you that had to deal with the close-talkers, the over-huggers and the political commentators, I want to bless you in the name of Jesus. I bless you in the name of Jesus. I give you blessings because sometimes Thanksgiving is a lot to get through. And I think when we think about a Thanksgiving week, we often correlate it to the words "food" and "football." Okay. Now, if you're anything like me and your team won this week, you had a great week. If they didn't, I bless you in the name of Jesus. I bless you. Okay, food and football. Those are the words we usually correlate Thanksgiving to. But I would contend to you there are two words that are far more critical to Thanksgiving, and they are the words "grace" and "gratitude."

Grace and gratitude. You see, the grace of God is simply the undeserved favor and the supernatural empowerment for my life. That's the grace of Jesus pouring all over me, His

undeserved favor. I totally got something from Him I did not deserve. And now, He supernaturally empowers me by himself, by His grace. And gratitude, the normal response to receiving that grace. Grace and gratitude. You see, Thanksgiving is so much more than a holiday. It is a lifestyle. And you have to understand that grace and gratitude are the two critical words, because grace is what God freely gives, gratitude is what we freely return. Grace is God's movement towards us. Gratitude is our movement back towards Him. Grace is God's heart for us, and gratitude is our heart in return, in response to that grace. So, I can't think of any better story of grace and gratitude in the Scriptures than the story in Luke Chapter 17. It's called the Story of the 10 Lepers. And Jesus one day is walking through the countryside. And He says He's walking in the border towns between Galilee and Samaria, literally right on the border. And that's important because Galilee would represent the Jewish people, and that's part of where they live, and Samaria would be the outsiders. That is, Galilee would be on the side of people that thought they knew God, had everything, kind of figured out with God and were working to follow God. And the others, the Samaritans, they were the ones that were on the outside. Enemies of God, far away. And right off the bat in the story, we learn that Jesus came for both the religious and the rebellious. Those that feel like they have it all together and those that feel like they're on the outside. He wants to make himself accessible to each of those people. And so, as I walk you through this story, my ask of you is to use your divine imagination. Imagine what it would be like in this story when Jesus is passing by and what it would be like to be one of those men that cries out to Him. You see, Jesus walks by, and men with leprosy, which, by the way, was a horrible disease. It would mess with your skin. It was a nerve problem where you couldn't feel, and because you couldn't feel, you'd hurt yourself. Your skin would lose circulation. Instead of being colored and look like it was healthy, it would turn white. And so, it was functionally a death sentence. And it was a death sentence both physically and communally and socially, and it would ultimately kill your hope. And so, as Jesus walks by, 10 men cry out to Him, and, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us." You see, they didn't think they could gain close access to Him. They didn't get a chance to walk up and say, "Hey, we got a prayer request. Can we give this to you?" Or, "Nice to meet you." No, no. They had to stay at a distance. And what we learned early on in the story is their physical leprosy was a little bit like our spiritual leprosy. Their physical reality was a little bit like our spiritual reality. Distant from God, without any hope in this world, until we cry out for Jesus and He comes near. You see, Jesus didn't stay at a distance. He moved towards them. Grace is when Jesus moves towards the people that everyone else moves away from. Grace is when Jesus steps into the places that we think disqualify us from access to God. Grace is when Jesus hears the prayers that we barely have the courage to whisper. That's grace. And the normal response to God's grace is gratitude. So, Jesus responds by telling them, "Go, show yourself to the priests." Now, that's a strange thing to say because the priests would be the people you'd go and see on the backside of getting healthy, not when you're still trying to get healthy. You see, in those days, priests acted as kind of both the medical and political and religious leaders for the Jewish people. And so, He says, "Go, show yourself to the priests." And they head out on their way, and something amazing happens. Because of their steps of obedience, because of their steps of faith, it says, as they went, they were healed. You see, Jesus is always healing in motion. In

fact, He wants to heal your life in motion. As you move forward by faith, as you follow Him, your healing will appear quickly. Light will break through in your life like the dawn and your healing will appear quickly. I felt, really strongly, I'm supposed to tell you this today. This is kind of stepping out of the story for a second. Some of you have been waiting for years on a breakthrough, on the move of God in your life, on the thing that you've been hoping for. As you go, you will be healed. As you move forward by faith, you will be healed. As you follow Jesus, you will be healed. So, I declare over you today, just keep moving. Just keep following by faith. As you go, He wants to heal you. So, the men start to walk towards the priests. They are starting to realize, "Wait, something's different. I feel different. My hands, my open sores, my wounds, they look different. What is happening?" And as they went, they were being healed. And I can almost imagine the joy that they felt, the feeling of exuberance, of gratitude, of thankfulness that they felt. They must have been so excited to go back and talk to their families, and maybe go back and try to get their job. And of course, they have to clear it with the priest first. He's the one that has to be like, "Okay, thumbs up. You're good." "But then, after that, I can get back to my life." And so, that's what they began to do and something interesting happens. Only one of the 10 men actually comes back to Jesus. What's interesting is it seems as though the other nine felt thankful, but they didn't express it in the form of gratitude. You see, the holiday we just experienced is not just called Thanks, it's called Thanksgiving. And there's a difference. There's a difference between feeling thanks and thanksgiving. Gratitude, it demands a response. That I respond to what Jesus has done. And so, one man comes back to Jesus, and it says, praising God in a loud voice. He gave thanks. Can you even imagine what that moment was like? "Jesus, Jesus, look, look, look what happened. Look what you've done. This is amazing. Thank you so much. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Worthy are you, my Lord and my God, to receive honor and glory and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and they had their being. And you've recreated me. And by your will, I now have my being. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus." And as the man began to probably calm down just a little bit, Jesus just looks at him and He has an interesting question. He says, "Were not all 10 cleansed? Where are the other nine?" And I don't think when He asked that question that He was angry. I don't think He was frustrated. I think He's revealing something about the human condition. He's revealing that we love grace, but we often forget gratitude. He's revealing that we desperately cry out when we need help, but we quietly slip away once we receive it. He's revealing that we often sprint to God in pain, but we slink away in comfort. We have to respond and return with gratitude.

See, this is where it gets really real. The story is not just about 10 men way back when, the story is about us right now. How many times we forget, we forget the grace of God all over our life, and we don't respond with gratitude? See, the story is a picture of us. We're not a leper like way back when, just once upon a time. Many of us still have this brokenness in our life, this healing, this freedom, this transformation. I still need healing and transformation and freedom in areas of my life. And just think of all that Jesus has done for you and I. He's healed us from our shame. He's broken our addictions. He's restored our relationships. He's forgiven our

failures. He's steadied our anxious minds. He's lifted heaviness from our souls. He's removed old labels that were placed upon us by the world. He's delivered us from worldly thinking. He's rescued us from bitterness. He's called us sons and daughters. He's met us in the places that we didn't even know we needed saving. That's what Jesus has done. That's who He is, who He is to us. But if we're honest, nine times out of 10 we forget about His grace in our lives, and we don't return and respond with gratitude. And I don't think it's because we don't love Him, I think it's because we get blessed and then we get busy. And we get healed and then we get hurried. And we have a desperation in that moment, but when things go back to normal, we kind of just forget about what God has done for us. I don't think it's because we don't love Him, I just think it's because we lose sight of gratitude. One more time. It's not called thanks, it's called Thanksgiving. Responding to the goodness of God. Jesus didn't heal us so we can get back to life as usual. He heals us so we can walk in Him and live with Him and create the future with Him and grow in Him and learn from Him and live life following Him. See, grace is what brought you to Jesus, gratitude is what brings you back to Jesus. Grace is what changes your condition, gratitude changes the direction of your life. And the leper's healing happened on the road, but his wholeness happened at the feet of Jesus. See, the story ends with Jesus saying, "Go, your faith has made you well." The word for well in the Scripture is the word "sozo." That is, your faith has saved you, healed you, made you whole and delivered you. It's a different kind of healing than what happened to the men as they walked along the road. His wholeness came at the feet of Jesus. His healing came as he walked by faith. His wholeness came at the feet of Jesus, when he returned with gratitude. And so, today, right now, we're going to take a moment and we're going to get a chance to decide who we are in the story. Are we the ones that are healed and gone, or are we the ones that are healed and returned? So, when you came in, you were given two cards. Go ahead and take out one of those. Take out one of those cards and grab a pen. We're going to spend some time in a very intentional way giving thanks. Returning gratitude. So grateful, and we have so much to be grateful for. But not just a feeling, a response. So, here's what I want you to do. Take out a pen and we're going to write a note of gratitude to Jesus. We're going to tell Him everything we want to say to Him. I want to encourage you to even think about it like this, write literally, Jesus, comma, and then write a note of gratitude. I'll give you just a few minutes to think about it, to process it. You'll have about three minutes to write it down. And there's not a ton of space here, so you want to be really, really thoughtful of what you would want to say. You want to respond with gratitude to all that He has done and all that He is. He's the only one worthy of our praise. He's the only one really worthy of our thanks, and we're so grateful to Him. So, for about the next three minutes, write a note of gratitude to Jesus. Tell Him everything that you are thankful for. As you continue to write and think about your gratitude towards Jesus, I forgot to mention this part of it. If you do not have your cards, I'm going to have the team stand up. Anybody that does not have the cards, we have people right here, ushers that are ready to give that to you. So, you can wave your hand and they'll be able to give that to you for the next card that we're going to write.

So, continue to think about what you're writing to Jesus, and then you can pull out the second card. Pull out the second card of the two, because this is the response of gratitude to someone else in our life. So, I'm going to give you a few minutes to think of someone that you would want to say thank you to, that you would want to express your gratitude to. And I would encourage you, don't just let it be the person that's like the automatic person that comes to your mind. Let the Lord speak to you. Is there somebody different? Is there somebody that maybe you didn't see coming, that you wouldn't normally write the card to. Maybe that's the one that God wants you to write it to. So, who is that person in your life that you want to express gratitude to? It's not just enough to have a nice thought, we have to actually put it in motion to express gratitude. So, who is that? Begin to think of them. Write their name at the top of that second card and tell them the things that you would want to speak to them, the gratitude that you share for them. This is what faith looks like. This is wholehearted living, and this is gratitude in action. And I love it, I'm proud of you guys. I see so many people just diving into this right now. I believe that that is a release of faith in your life, which will absolutely impact both the person that you're going to give this card to and will really transform your heart. So, that one that was going to be written to someone else in your life, the challenge is to give that to them this week. As an expression of the gratitude that is inside of you, to hand that to them and be like, "I'm so thankful for you." And to give that to them. And as an opportunity to kind of finish out our time together today, we want to take communion. So, all of our teams will begin to come forward. And there's probably no better way to experience grace and gratitude than to take communion.

Communion is for everybody who's put their faith into Jesus. If that's you, you're welcome to take communion here at Valley Creek. But communion really is this, it's this living example of the grace and the gratitude that we have for Jesus. It comes around on these intervals in our life and reminds us of who Jesus is and what He's done. I think it's interesting that on the night that Jesus had communion with His disciples, it says that He gave thanks and then broke the bread. See, it was an important part of their time together to have an atmosphere of gratitude, to cultivate that, to live in that together. He gave thanks and then broke the bread. Today, we have given a lot of thanks, and today we are going to experience the bread of life. Jesus himself, even in this moment as we take communion, you see, if grace and gratitude are our two words for today, communion actually contains both of those words, and it contains really the definition of both those words. Here's what I mean. The word "grace" is the undeserved favor and the supernatural empowerment of God. Undeserved favor, supernatural empowerment of God. Undeserved favor. Jesus got what I deserved, brokenness, disconnect from the Father, death, so that I could get what He deserved. A name, a life, access to the Father, the love of God in my life, that's undeserved favor. I didn't deserve it. Jesus got what I deserved so that I could get what He deserved, and that is a lot like the bread. You see, the undeserved favor of God is literally the body and the life of Jesus. And every time that we have that and we take that, we were reminded of the favor of God pouring all over our life. It's all around us. It's accessible to us. His literal broken body is the undeserved favor of God. That's the bread. And the cup is like the supernatural empowerment, the blood of Jesus, His spirit,

the flow of God pouring all over me. It supernaturally empowers me to be something completely different than what I once was. To live a completely different life. Empowered by the Spirit. Following Jesus. The bread, the undeserved favor. The cup, the supernatural empowerment for all parts of my life. I'm fueled by Jesus. I'm fueled by His body and His blood. I'm fueled by what He has done for me. And so, when we hold communion in our hands, we are literally holding grace, tangible grace in our lives. And our only response is gratitude. Our only response is just like it was with Jesus. He gave thanks, and then they took communion. You see, on the night He was betrayed, Jesus had given thanks and He took that bread, and He looked at His disciples and He broke it, and He said, "This is like my body, it's going to be broken for you. And you can't earn it, and you can't pay for it, and you can't do anything to deserve it. It is grace. It's the essence of grace in your life." So, He took that bread and He said, "Every time you eat of it, do it in remembrance of me." Let's take it together. In the same way He took a hold of the cup, so this cup is a new agreement between God and man. No longer will be based on what you have to do, it'll be based on what I have done. And you will be supernaturally empowered by my blood and my life and the resurrection reality of my life inside of you. And you, you will live a completely different existence because of who I am and what I have done.

Thank You, Jesus, for your life. Let's take it together. So, Jesus, grace and gratitude, that's what we have experienced today and that's what we freely give back to You today. May we never forget who You are, what you've done. May we never forget that there was a version of us that said, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us." And we stood alone and separated and isolated on the side of the road, and You came. And You didn't leave us; You didn't forsake us. You told us to come and follow and to move, and that You would heal us along the way. And that is exactly what You are doing. Thank You, Jesus, for Your life. Thank You, Jesus, for Your life. Thank You, Jesus, for Your favor, pouring all over our life. Thank You, Jesus, for Your empowerment that's in our life. Thank You, Jesus, for everything You are, everything You've done and everything. We have so much to be grateful for. In Jesus' name.