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Gratitude in the Transitional Stages of Human Life

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I believe blessings that intervene in our lives lead to new beginnings, shifting our perspective each time we start anew. This is especially true when moving from one life phase to another. At these moments, I wonder what it truly means to be grateful to God—whether it's just politeness or a duty to connect before moving on. The Psalmist says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul...” Being grateful is a lifelong virtue. Also, I wonder what follows gratitude: it seems to be the starting point for faith progress and a new spiritual direction. Life brings both good and tough times, and in challenges, it's natural to fear change. Yet, even in hardship, God's blessings remain, calling us to stay faithful and see adversity as growth opportunities. Today's scriptures present two contrasts—gratitude in exile or alienation, like Jeremiah's advice to the Judeans in Babylon, and gratitude as a return to faith and establishing a relationship with God, as in the case of the healed leper. We're encouraged to appreciate life's wholeness, especially as we move from margins into the mainstream. In both cases, gratitude means returning to the Giver, not just accepting a gift.

Jeremiah saw exile not just as punishment but as an opportunity for renewal. Unlike false prophets, he encouraged the Judeans to build homes, plant gardens, marry, and seek the welfare of Babylon, where they were exiled. This was a radical call to live fully and faithfully in exile, viewing it as a chance for a fresh start. Despite trauma from Jerusalem's destruction, Jeremiah urged appreciation, hope, and trusting God's good plans for their future. He advised living faithfully and cultivating life in unfamiliar circumstances, emphasizing hope and a positive outlook. Jeremiah recognized the long exile and discouraged rebellion, seeing goodness in all, and promoting living in the present with a forgiving, cooperative mindset. His outlook encourages embracing life's blessings, even in exile or alienation.

2. Ten Healed, One Made Whole (Luke 17:11–19)

Jesus heals ten lepers, and they all receive cleansing. However, only one returns, praising God loudly, falling at Jesus' feet, and giving thanks. Luke emphasizes: "And he was a Samaritan." A foreigner. An outsider. What's interesting to note is that all ten lepers were living in a liminal zone. None of them initially had a disclosed identity. Not that they lacked identity; even if they had one, their identity was lost because of their disease. They weren't identified as Samaritans or Judeans unless they had ritual purity certification from the priests. But we don't know whether Jesus directed them to meet the Samaritan priests or those in

Jerusalem. Like the ten lepers, Jesus was also walking through a liminal zone—a place of transition and "between," where neither Galilean nor Samaritan feels like "home." When they were all "made clean," only one perceived that he had been "healed" (v. 15). This one turned back and praised God. Only then do we learn that "he was a Samaritan." As we follow Jesus through this liminal zone toward Jerusalem, the narrator elicits our sympathy for the thankful man—and perhaps even our admiration—before we discover (too late to despise him!) that he is a Samaritan. But where are the nine? Presumably, they followed Jesus's directive that they were still bound for the temple and the priests. But the Samaritan sees what others cannot. He perceives what God has done, so he returns to thank Jesus. Healing alone is not enough without relational and spiritual reconciliation. Additionally, Thanksgiving is not optional. It is the moment where healing meets faith. It's revealing that Jesus emphasizes the glory of God, rather than the thanksgiving directed at himself. Jesus' ministry of compassion does not serve his own glory but God's. Physical restoration is extended to all, but wholeness—relational, rooted in faith and gratitude—is given to the one who returns to give thanks. The main point of this parable is doxology—praising God, especially on the lips of "this foreigner," a Samaritan. God's grace reaches the last, the lost, and the least. Divine mercy overlooks social boundaries and elevates the marginalized; it even extends beyond borders to include the excluded and

outsiders—Samaritans and Gentiles. Sinners are saved, while the position of the "righteous" becomes increasingly fragile. It is many of the powerless, sick, and sinful who rush into God's embrace, while many powerful, healthy, and respected turn away and protest.

III. Thankfulness that Transforms

Both the leper and the exiles remind us that thankfulness is not passive politeness but active faith.

1. Thankfulness recognizes God's hand.

The Samaritan leper recognized healing not as luck but as the gift of God in Christ. The exiles were called to see their survival and growth as dependent on God's faithfulness.

2. Thankfulness turns us around.

The leper physically turned back to Jesus. Exiles had to turn their attention from despair to planting, building, and praying. Gratitude changes our direction.

3. Thankfulness blesses others.

The healed leper's testimony glorified God. The exiles' prayers for Babylon would bring peace not just to them but to their neighbors. Thankfulness ripples outward.

4. Thankfulness makes us whole.

Nine lepers were healed, but one was made whole. Exiles could survive in Babylon, but with gratitude, they could flourish. Thankfulness leads not just to healing but to wholeness.

Conclusion:

The exiles' peace is tied to Babylon's peace. The leper's healing is completed in thanksgiving. May God teach us to live as thankful people in all transitions of our lives, that our gratitude may build faith, and to acknowledge God's blessings in our lives. Amen.