

**Luke 5:12-16**  
**October 14, 2018**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: What do you know about leprosy? How would you describe it to someone? [Let people engage]

If you're like me, my only understanding of leprosy and what it might look like is based on the Bible stories I've read, but I can't say I really know that much about it – other than you avoided someone with leprosy like the plague. According to the American Leprosy Missions website ([www.leprosy.org](http://www.leprosy.org)):

- Every two minutes, someone around the world is diagnosed with leprosy.
- Leprosy is caused by a bacterium called “Mycobacterium leprae” that causes an infection.
- Leprosy attacks the nerves. Hands can become numb and small muscles are paralyzed.
- Leprosy can lead to curling of the fingers and thumb.
- When leprosy attacks nerves in the legs, the feet can be damaged by untended wounds and infection.
- Repeated injury and infection of numb areas in the fingers or toes can cause the bones to shorten.
- Serious, untreated wounds lead to amputations.
- If the facial nerve is affected, a person loses the blinking reflex of the eye, which can eventually lead to blindness.
- Untreated, leprosy can cause deformity, crippling and blindness.

**Transition:** Throughout the Bible, leprosy has been viewed with horror and the word *leper* has come to mean outcast. Why? Because a leper was considered “unclean.” There was such a strong stigma against leprosy that the priests of the OT had rules for lepers to follow before they could worship again. They were isolated and cut off completely from the community because the leprosy was associated with sin.

Q: After learning more descriptions about leprosy, how do you think leprosy is like sin? [Let people engage]

- Sin infects our soul. We have an incurable disease that can only be healed by divine intervention?
- Sin left untreated leads to death.
- Sin left unchecked can cause numbness and a hardened heart.

Let's read the story of the leper who seeks out Jesus. And as we process it, I invite you to be in tune to how you view people who are considered outcasts. What can we learn from Jesus and how He interacted with the leper? As we remain sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit, I

propose that all of us can embrace any outcasts (or the disenfranchised, or the marginalized) in our society by mirroring the ways Jesus dealt with this leper. Let's begin.

**BOOK (NIV 1984):**

V.12:

- While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

V.13:

- Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.

V.14:

- Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."

V.15:

- Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

V.16:

- But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q V.12: Luke doesn't just say, "a man came along with leprosy." He gives a strong adjective. What do you see? [The man was "covered" with leprosy]

Q: Based on the adjective "covered," what do you envision? [Let people describe – a disease that is far ADVANCED]

Q: How do you think lepers were treated in general? [with disgust, as outcasts, ostracized, shunned]

Q: If you had been among the crowd and a leper started to come near you as he pushed his way through the crowd to get to Jesus, what do you think you would have done? [Moved AWAY out of fear that you might catch leprosy]

Q: Once the leper saw Jesus, what did he do? [Fell on his face and begged Him to "make him clean."]

Q: Let's think about this. When someone is declared to have leprosy, what religious regulation was he supposed to follow? [He was to remain in isolation.]

Q: What can we conclude about this leper who broke the law to find Jesus? [1. He had heard about Jesus's healing power and had the faith that He could heal him – if He was willing. 2. The leper *wanted to be changed.*]

Q: What was the one doubt the leper had of Jesus? [He wasn't sure if Jesus would be "willing" to heal him. He didn't know if Jesus cared for him, loved him, or had compassion for him. He didn't know if Jesus would rebuke him for breaking the law.]

Q V.13: How did Jesus respond? [He **touch**ed him and said, "I am willing. Be clean!"]

Q: How soon was the leper healed? [Immediately]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus? [He is filled with compassion for the outcasts and those in need of healing]

Observation: By touching the leper, He became unclean Himself. This is a beautiful picture of what Jesus has done for lost sinners: He became sin for us that we might be made clean (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24)

Q V.14: Jesus gives the healed leper an order. What was the first part of the order? ["Don't tell anyone"]

Q: Why do you think Jesus said, "Don't tell anyone?" [Perhaps for two reasons: (a) The man was to go immediately to the priest to be a testimony. (b) When **the news** of Jesus' healing power **spread**, He would be constantly besieged by people. (c) The news might create needless opposition to Christ.]

Q: What was the rest of Jesus's instruction to the healed leper? ["Go, show yourself to the priest and offer sacrifices in keeping with Moses's command for cleansing as a testimony to them."]

Q: Why was it necessary to go to the priests? [The reason for this instruction is found in Lev 14:2–32. Priests alone could legally readmit into the community those who had contracted leprosy. The healed leper would actually receive a certificate showing his cleansing.]

Q V.15: (**X-Ref**: Mark 1:45) What did the leper do? [He disobeyed. Instead of "not telling anyone," he went out and began to talk freely about his healing, spreading the news!]

Q: What did Jesus experience because of it? [He was inundated with more crowds who came to hear him and be healed of their sicknesses.]

Q V.16: What is the one thing Jesus consistently did? [He withdrew to lonely places and prayed.]

**Observation**: Jesus was not impressed by these great crowds, for He knew that most of the people wanted only His healing power and not His salvation. He often left the crowds and slipped away into a quiet place to pray and seek the Father's help. That's a good example for all of God's servants to follow.

**LOOK:**

Q: Who are the “lepers,” the outcasts, in your circle of influence? [Let people engage]

- Is there one person among your children that no one likes?
- Who is the one parent that’s so obnoxious that no one wants to be around him/her?
- Who is the one relative that everyone avoids when they walk into a room?
- Who is the one person in your workplace that is ignored or talked badly about behind their back?

Q: What are the WAYS that Jesus embraced the leper? [Let people engage]

- Jesus chose compassion toward the leper
- Jesus was willing to touch the “untouchable”
- Jesus unconditionally loved the leper and willingly showed mercy

Q: What do YOU need Jesus to touch today? [Let people engage]

- Does He need to touch your heart that you might learn to love a leper this week?
- Does He need to touch any spiritual leprosy? If yes, hear Jesus say, “I am willing. Be cleansed!” He yearns to touch us today where ever we need spiritual cleansing.

**Close in Prayer**

**Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 186–187). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

**From Sickness to Health (Luke 5:12–16)**

Here was a man who *needed to be changed*, for he was a leper. Among the Jews, several skin diseases were classified as leprosy, including our modern Hansen's disease. In spite of modern medical advances, an estimated 10 million people around the world have leprosy. One form of leprosy attacks the nerves so that the victim cannot feel pain. Infection easily sets in, and this leads to degeneration of the tissues. The limb becomes deformed and eventually falls off.

It was the task of the Jewish priest to examine people to determine whether they were lepers (Lev. 13). Infected people were isolated and could not return to normal society until declared "cleansed." Leprosy was used by Isaiah as a picture of sin (Isa. 1:4–6), and the detailed instructions in Leviticus 13–14 would suggest that more was involved in the procedure than maintaining public health.

Like sin, leprosy is deeper than the skin (Lev. 13:3) and cannot be helped by mere "surface" measures (see Jer. 6:14). Like sin, leprosy spreads (Lev. 13:7–8); and as it spreads, it defiles (Lev. 13:44–45). Because of his defilement, a leprous person had to be isolated outside the camp (Lev. 13:46), and lost sinners one day will be isolated in hell. People with leprosy were looked on as "dead" (Num. 12:12), and garments infected with leprosy were fit only for the fire (Lev. 13:52). How important it is for lost sinners to trust Jesus Christ and get rid of their "leprosy"!

This man not only needed to be changed, but *he wanted to be changed*. Lepers were required to keep their distance, but he was so determined that he broke the Law and approached the Lord Jesus personally. Throughout his Gospel, Luke makes it clear that Jesus was the Friend of the outcast, and they could come to Him for help. The man humbled himself before the Lord and asked for mercy.

By the grace and power of God, this man *was changed!* In fact, Jesus even touched the man, which meant that He became unclean Himself. This is a beautiful picture of what Jesus has done for lost sinners: He became sin for us that we might be made clean (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). Jesus is not only willing to save (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9), but He is also able to save (Heb. 7:25); and He can do it now (2 Cor. 6:2).

Jesus encouraged the man to see the priest and to obey the rules for restoration given in Leviticus 14. The ceremony is a picture of the work of Jesus Christ in His incarnation, His death, and His resurrection. All of this was done over running water, a symbol of the Holy Spirit of God. This sacrifice reminds us that Jesus had to die for us in order to deliver us from our sins.

Jesus instructed the man not to reveal who had healed him, but the cleansed leper became an enthusiastic witness for the Lord. (Jesus commands us to tell everybody, and we keep quiet!) Because of this witness, great multitudes came to Jesus for help, and He graciously ministered to them. But Jesus was not impressed by these great crowds, for He knew that most of the people wanted only His healing power and not His salvation. He often left the crowds and slipped away into a quiet place to pray and seek the Father's help. That's a good example for all of God's servants to follow.

**Martin, J. A. (1985). *Isaiah*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 216-217)**

### 3. JESUS'S DEMONSTRATION OF HIS AUTHORITY BY FURTHER HEALING (5:12–16)

The next two healings brought about a confrontation with the religious establishment—the first such conflict recorded in Luke. Both healings authenticated Jesus' claim to be the Messiah (cf. 4:18–21).

a. *Jesus' healing of a leper (5:12–16) (Matt. 8:1–4; Mark 1:40–45).*

5:12–16. **Jesus** encountered a **man ... covered with leprosy** (lit., “full of leprosy”). Perhaps he was in the final stages of leprosy—a fact which would have been easily discernible in the man's home community. The Law (Lev. 13) commanded strict segregation of a person who had leprosy, for it was a graphic picture of uncleanness. A leprous person could not worship at the central sanctuary; he was ceremonially unclean and therefore cut off completely from the community.

This leper addressed **Jesus** as **Lord** (*kyrie*) as Simon had also done (Luke 5:8). Though the term was often used as one would today use “sir,” it seems to have stronger import here. The leper did not doubt the ability of Jesus to heal him, for he said, **If You are willing You can make me clean**. His only reservation seemed to be Jesus' willingness. According to the Mosaic Law, one who was leprous was not to be touched by anyone who was ceremonially clean. When someone clean touched something unclean, the clean became unclean. Luke, in describing Jesus' actions, showed that Jesus was the Source of ceremonial cleansing. If He was the Source of cleansing for that leper, He would also be the Source of ceremonial cleansing for the nation. This theme is carried on into the next healing (vv. 17–26) and into the call of Levi (vv. 27–39). At the touch of Jesus, **immediately the leprosy left him**. The immediacy of the healing brings to mind 4:35 and 4:39. Healing from leprosy was rare. The Scriptures record only Miriam (Num. 12) and Naaman (2 Kings 5) as having been healed of leprosy (cf. Moses; Ex. 4:6–7). Thus, it would have been extremely unusual for a person to present himself before **the priest and offer the sacrifices ... for ... cleansing**. Instructions for an offering for cleansing from leprosy are given in Leviticus 14:1–32. Luke 5:14 emphasized the phrase **as a testimony to them**. The fact that a man would go to the priest claiming healing from leprosy would alert the religious leaders that something new was afoot in Israel. Why did **Jesus** command **him** not to **tell anyone**? Perhaps for two reasons: (a) The man was to go immediately to the priest to be a testimony. (b) When **the news** of Jesus' healing power **spread**, He was constantly besieged by people, which caused Him to have to withdraw (vv. 15–16).

**Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 171–173). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

#### **Context**

With this account Luke returned to the sequence of Markan stories he had been following in 4:31–44 (Mark 1:21–39). He continued this sequence from Luke 5:12 to 6:19 (Mark 1:40–3:12). Thus, the Lukan theological emphasis is seen primarily in the content of these accounts rather than in their order.

The present account may have been placed next to Luke 5:1–11 due to the similarity between Peter's response in 5:8 and the leper's in 5:12. In his abbreviation of the Markan account Luke produced a more rounded miracle story. This and 17:11–19 are the only accounts in his Gospel involving the healing of lepers.

**5:12 While Jesus was in one of the towns.** This picks up 4:43. “One of” is a common Lukan expression and ties this account with the following (5:17; cf. also 8:22; 13:10; 20:1).

**A man came along who was covered with leprosy.** This almost certainly does not refer to Hansen’s disease or what most people today understand as leprosy. It most probably was some sort of skin disease, such as psoriasis, which caused inflammation and scaly, splotchy skin. The OT background for understanding the incident comes from Lev 13–14 (cf. Num 5:2–3; 12:9–15; 2 Kgs 7:3–9; 15:5). Victims of leprosy in biblical times were ostracized from cities and towns and from interaction with others. This continued into NT times as Luke 17:12 reveals. It is uncertain whether Luke intended to heighten the miracle by his description of the man as “covered with leprosy” (cf. 4:38).

**He fell with his face to the ground and begged him.** The posture of the man is an expression of reverence or respect. It is also found in 17:16 (cf. also 8:41; Acts 5:10; 9:4; 10:25). Luke apparently changed the Markan expression in order to better fit the LXX terminology.

**Lord.** This is an interesting Matthew-Luke agreement against Mark that is fairly natural since it makes Mark’s statement, which can be either indirect or direct discourse, into a clear direct discourse. In the original setting this title probably was one of respect such as “Sir,” but for Luke and his readers the more pregnant meaning and significance of the term “Lord” would have been understood. See comments on 6:46.

**If you are willing, you can make me clean.** As in the previous account, there is a recognition here of Jesus’ divine ability. In the previous account his omniscience was highlighted; here his omnipotence was the emphasis.

**5:13** Luke omitted “filled with compassion” (Mark 1:41) in his abbreviation of the account. This corresponds well with his tendency to eliminate references to Jesus’ emotions. He also eliminated Mark’s “strong warning” in Luke 5:14 (cf. Mark 1:43). In so doing he focused the reader’s attention more on the power and will of Jesus than on his emotions.

**Be clean!** Jesus uttered only one word (the Greek consists of only one word), and the leprosy left.

**And immediately the leprosy left him.** All three parallel accounts contain the term “immediately” and thus heighten the miracle and emphasize Jesus’ power.

**5:14 Don’t tell anyone.** Luke in his abbreviation of the account did not describe the young man’s disobedience of the command (cf. Mark 1:45). The command is understandable in its historical setting if Jesus wanted to avoid the crowds coming to him simply to seek healing without regard to the message that this healing symbolized.

**But go, show yourself to the priest.** Compare Luke 17:14. The reason for this instruction is found in Lev 14:2–32. Priests alone could legally readmit into the community those who had contracted leprosy.

**That Moses commanded.** This fits well the Lukan emphasis that the OT law continues to function as a guide for the believer (see comments on 1:6).

**As a testimony to them.** This can be understood in several ways. The “to them” can refer to the “priest(s)” or to the “people.” If it refers to the former, it is for a testimony to show that he was healed. If it refers to the latter, it is for a testimony to Jesus’ power. In the original setting Jesus probably meant the former due to what had been said earlier in the verse, but in Luke’s setting the latter aspect clearly played a role. For Luke the healing was a testimony to Jesus’ authority and power (4:36), but in light of his concern for keeping the law, the former meaning was also important to the Evangelist. The expression can also be understood positively as a testimony “for” them or negatively as “against” them. We have an example of the latter in 9:5, but the Greek

wording there is different. “For” them probably is best understood both in the original situation and in Luke.

**5:15 Yet the news spread all the more.** See comments on 4:15.

**Crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.** Luke placed Jesus’ preaching ministry before his healing ministry.

**5:16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places.** The tense of this verb and the next (both imperfect periphrastics) emphasizes that this was a regular practice of Jesus. Since Luke continued to speak of Jesus’ ministry in the cities (7:11–17, 36–50; 8:1), he omitted Mark 1:45b.

**And pray.** Luke omitted the Markan reference to Jesus’ prayer in Luke 4:42 (Mark 1:35). Instead he introduced this strong Lukan emphasis here.