

## **DYNAMIC ATTITUDES FOR WHOLENESS**

### **Luke 17:1–19**

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Luke 17:1–19 (NIV)

“Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, “I repent,” forgive him.’ The apostles said to the LORD, ‘Increase our faith!’ He replied, ‘If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, “Be uprooted and planted in the sea,” and it will obey you. Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, “Come along now and sit down to eat”? Would he not rather say, “Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink”? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” Now on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’ When he saw them, he said, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, ‘Were not

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all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’ Then he said to him, ‘Rise and go; your faith has made you well’”

Here are verses which give us “Dynamic Attitudes for Wholeness.” The Scripture addresses themes of mental and spiritual health. I always find when I get into a passage of Scripture that it becomes a resource for insight into what God wants me to be like. What He wants me to become. Sometimes, we don’t see that on our own. We need extra help from the outside.

I made my semi-annual visit to my skin doctor this week. He wants to look at me twice a year because he tells me that since I’m redheaded and have photosensitive skin, my skin is already three times older than I am. He wants to check it for caratosis, which could lead to melanoma, and he wants to burn out or ice out the caratosis so I won’t get melanoma. I’m quite happy to go along with that plan. He looks me over and explains, “I can see things and I can feel things that you can’t.” And sure enough, when he’s done with an inspection, he’s taken care of me in a few places. He’s seen things and corrected problems.

I have that feeling when I approach the Bible. There are things that God’s Word sees about me in areas which I may have blinders on and not see myself. I need the extra-sensitive guidance of the Holy Spirit to insure that those proper attitudes which build a successful life for God are working in me, for others and for my own wellbeing.

Out of this passage of Scripture today I find six great attitudes that lead to wholeness.

**I. The first attitude is an attitude that simply says: “I will influence others for God and for good.”**

In the first three verses of chapter 17, the Lord is referring to the Pharisees and to the hypocrites who look good outwardly but whose religiosity is hypocrisy and it’s actually driving people away from God. In Luke 15, He has said of these people that they are not out looking for the lost.

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They're smug in their self-righteousness. And in Luke 16, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus—which is a parable against the Pharisees who loved money—He is again saying to them, “Your outward trapping of being religious actually brings, not a thirst in the common man for God; but it causes the common person to say, “If this is what it's like to be spiritual, you can forget it.” Unfortunately, there are people who have used the name of Christ who've had the same negative impact on others because they have been one thing in their outward expression of piety but quite another thing in the way they conduct their lifestyle and the way they do business. It's interesting how things don't change much over the years. I was reading the Jerusalem Post this week, which I get every week. I like to keep abreast of what's happening in Israel. There was an article entitled “Secular Israelis Take Dim View of Orthodox.” The orthodox are a minority population in Israel. Most Israelis are secular Jews. They do not have a religious faith. Most of them are atheistic. They are cultural Jews, but not religious Jews. Something that someone outside of Israel doesn't often see. Many of the secular Israelis cannot stand the orthodox, especially the ultra-orthodox, because they have a very distinctive look with their garb and the way they wear their hair. Many of the orthodox will not fight in the wars and the secular Jews will go out and put their life on the line and then make sneering comments about the orthodox—who love to run the country and force through religious laws which will not allow them to play soccer on the Sabbath in the stadium, and then won't fight when it's time to fight. So there's a lot of dissension between these groups. Secular Israelis were given a poll and were asked the question, “What comes to mind when you think of an orthodox person?” Twenty-five percent of the secular Jews who answered this question said, “Opportunists, liars and charlatans.” I wonder how the Christian community would do in a poll here in Orange County. What do you think of when you hear the words “charismatic Christian...evangelical Christian...born-again

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Christian.” Do we conduct ourselves in such a way where 25 percent of the respondents would say, “opportunists, liars, charlatans”? That’s an awful thing to say.

Another 22 percent thought of them in terms of religious coercion and extremism. And only 19 percent thought of them as moral, well-educated and proper. So you see, things haven’t changed since Jesus’ day. Jesus took the attitude toward the orthodox of His day, much like the secular Jew takes of the orthodox of his day; that just because you look religious, it doesn’t mean you’re spiritual. In fact, your religiosity may be leading someone astray. Jesus says to us, “Everybody has influence. But woe to you if through your influence you cause one of these little ones to fall.” The word in verse 17, “things that cause people to sin” is essentially one word in the Greek. It’s “scandal.” It comes straight into the English language. Scandal in the Greek was a bait stick, something put over a trap to entice an animal to come. When he reached for it, he fell into the trap. A scandal is that which brings somebody else down.

Jesus is telling His followers, “Don’t you have a negative influence like that. There are little ones watching you. There are children watching you,” is what He is saying. There are new believers who are watching you. So you have an opportunity to influence them for the good. But woe to you, if through your example, through your pursuit of self, you bring someone else down.

We live in a society that is affected by adultery, immorality, financial embezzlement and hypocrisy. The Lord is saying, “When you seek self, and when you sin and your children are looking at you and knowing what has happened and lose their faith because of you, woe to you! It would be better for a millstone to be tied around your neck.

I ran across a story this week, not in the Christian faith but in the Jewish faith, of a parent who set an insincere example and we’ve all paid the price for it. It happened last century. It was Germany. There was, in this town in Germany, a man with his family who practiced his Judaism

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devoutly. He shared prayers with his family, went to the synagogue. There came a day when the boy was a teenager. The dad came home and announced that they were moving to another town. They moved, and in this German town there was no synagogue. There was only the Lutheran church. One day, the father came home and announced that he and the whole family were converting to Lutheranism. The family was astounded. The teenage boy was absolutely perplexed. He said to his dad, “How could you, after all these years in which you’ve led us in our faith, become Lutheran?” He said, “Well son, I’m not doing it because I believe. I’m doing it because, in this town, to get ahead financially you have to be a Lutheran.” This young teenage boy from that moment became bitter toward his father and bitter toward religion. He moved away as a young man to England. He spent a great deal of time studying in the British museum and writing. The work which he wrote while sitting as a young man in the British Museum came to be *Das Kapital*. The teenager was Karl Marx. And his bitterness toward religion stemmed from the hypocrisy of his father, who betrayed his own ideals.

That’s what Jesus is talking about here, he’s saying to us, “Woe to you if you cause one of these little ones to sin.” I do influence others and God is holding me accountable for how I influence them. So influence for the good. Let my example be for good. Let my personal piety square with my public piety. Let me be real and genuine.

### **II. The second dynamic attitude for wholeness is: “I care enough to confront.”**

“If a brother sins,” Jesus says, “rebuke him.” By the way, that word “brother” is generic. It means, not only a physical relationship, but it means “anyone who’s close to you,” and it can also mean “sister.” It’s the day of equal rights, so we need to recognize generic terms.

“Rebuke” is a rather strong word. It’s used twelve times in Luke. Jesus rebuked demons, rebuked fever, rebuked the wind, rebuked arguing disciples. It is a word of censor. It is a solemn,

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emphatic charge. It is not telling someone off. It's not dumping a load of anger on them. It's caring enough to confront. I'm a non-confrontational person by nature. So Jesus has to drag me by what little hair I have left on my head to be a confrontational person. I hate it with all my heart, but there are times in the family, there are times in the body of Christ in which we need to look a brother or sister or a family member in the eye and say to them, "This is not right. And this does not please God." It takes a special kind of courage, and it takes a special kind of love that is willing to be honest.

There are teenagers in this service. Teenagers, maybe you have a parent that you feel nags you. But thank God that they're confronting you. That they care about the clothes you wear. They care about the records you listen to. They care about the movies you see. They care about the concerts you go to. They care about the reading material you're putting through your head. They care about your grades. They're confronting you because they love you. (I appreciate all the parents that gave me that note to put into today's service.)

We all need people that confront us. I came across a picture this week in the newspaper. I'm a clipper. I'm always clipping stuff and most of it winds up in a drawer—never used. But this one is used. It's a picture of a bald eagle. This bald eagle is just getting started. It looks like he had been going down a runway and finally got up in the air. He's about six feet up in the air. He's a gorgeous, full-grown, mature bald eagle. All around him is a group of cheering people. They have smiles on their face. There is a girl in the center who is in a running posture and it's evident that she had held the eagle and had lunched him into the air. Her hands are still up in the air. I thought, "This is a marvelous picture of joy." It was infectious when I saw it. It communicates such joy. Then I read the inscription under the photo. It said, "A bald eagle is released to the wild

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near Grafton, Illinois. The eagle was nursed back to health at a wildlife center after surgery to remove bones lodged in its throat.”

I said, “That’s what the church is all about. Helping people get bones out of their throat. And launching them again and helping them fly.” That’s what confronting is. The eagle is never going to be helped if people look and say, “That poor eagle has a bone in its throat.” Somebody’s got to get involved and help the eagle get the bone out of its throat and fly and soar. Oh, what joy when there’s been healing confrontation.

### **III. A third great attitude in this passage is: “I will go on forgiving.”**

If we just rebuke people, we’re going to be harsh, critical, taciturn, mean and nobody’s going to enjoy living with us. So Jesus says, for all the “rebukers,” for all of those who follow Me in confronting—Jesus, by the way, could confront His disciples on occasion and let them know He was displeased—He says, “Remember also it’s important to forgive. So if when you confront someone and they repent, forgive them. And if they sin against you seven times a day, forgive them seven times.”

A common teaching of the rabbis in Jesus’ day was that the maximum number of times you needed to forgive a person was three. And that wasn’t three times a day; it was just three in all. So Jesus says, “Forgive seven times in a day.” No wonder the disciples are astounded when He says this, and they cry out, “Increase our faith!” You say, well surely if a person does that many things wrong in a day, why should we go on forgiving them? The only people you forgive that many times is somebody who’s really close to you, somebody who lives in your family, most likely. The person who never hangs their things up, who never keeps the room straight, who always does the thing that just causes you to grit your teeth. The successful glue of human relationships, as well as our relationship with God, is forgiveness. Because if there’s not

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forgiveness, what's going to happen is we're going to get harsh and critical and we're going to move toward divorce and alienation. When a family heads for breakup, it is because they have stopped forgiving.

That's not to colorcast everybody and say that all breakups are because both people refuse to forgive. Sometimes a person refuses to repent. You can forgive, but if a person continues, for example, to live in adultery, you cannot make a relationship work where there is such betrayal on a continued basis. But Jesus is saying, "Go on forgiving. Nobody's perfect and you're not going to have any perfect relationships in life. So it's going to be necessary for you to keep forgiving and forgiving and forgiving, as many as seven times in a day.

A little boy was asked what forgiveness was and he gave this beautiful answer, "Forgiveness is the odor that flowers breathe when they're trampled on."

Clarence McCartney tells the story of the painting of Leonardo Da Vinci's "Last Supper." I have no idea if this story is apocryphal or true. I've heard a number of stories about the "Last Supper" but the illustration is true whether the story is true. We'll demythologize the story and get to the kernel of truth and throw away the husk. Da Vinci evidently, just before he began painting that painting, had had an argument with a fellow artist. They were really bitter toward one another. So when Da Vinci got ready to paint his "Last Supper" with everybody sitting at the table, he painted, first, the face of Judas, and he painted into the face of Judas the face of the guy he had the argument with and he couldn't stand. He said, "I will let him live for posterity. I will make his face famous. My enemy will always be the face of Judas." He went on to paint the rest of the painting. Until he came to the face of Christ. That was the last that he did and he couldn't get the face of Christ right. He finally came to realize he would never get the face of Christ right as long

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as he had the face of his enemy in Judas' face. So he took a brush and painted out Judas' face, and when he did that, he was able to get the face of Christ right.

All of us have a vocation in life of painting the face of Christ in our words and in our actions.

We'll never get the face of Christ right unless we paint out, through forgiveness, the face of our enemy. I will live with forgiveness.

#### **IV. The fourth great dynamic attitude is: "I will live with faith."**

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" We often take that Scripture out of context and think that the disciples are talking about "faith" because the word "faith" is used. But as you already know, the word "forgiveness" has been used. And Jesus has said, "Seven times in a day," the disciples are saying, "This is the way it is. Increase our faith!" It's almost humorous. Like, "Increase our faith to forgive." Who could be expected to have that much faith to forgive that many times? But the reason why Jesus tells us to forgive that much is that God forgives that much. Have you ever taken that as kind of a solace in your life?—forgive seventy times seven—if Jesus expects us to do that toward one another, doesn't He do that and more toward us? "Lord," the disciples said. "Increase our faith." Help us to be people of faith who can reach out to forgive. The disciples we see here want more faith. Jesus says, "It isn't more faith that you need. It's not greater faith. It's faith in a great God that's important. It's just little faith. You don't need big faith; you just need faith as a grain of mustard seed. Faith that small is able to uproot the sycamore or the mulberry and cast it into the sea."

The rabbis of Jesus' day said that the roots of the mulberry were so intertwined with one another in the ground that they could last in the ground for six hundred years. They were so permanent in the ground once they were there, because of the network of the root system. (There are weeds in

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our Bermuda grass at home that are like that! They're going to be there for six hundred years.

I've pulled them and pulled them!)

Jesus is saying, "If you have faith." What's He talking about? He's talking about sticky situations in life, messy issues; intertwined, complicated matters for which there appears to be no resolution at all. He is not speaking here, by the way, about vegetative telepathists. They are ones who use telepathy like these guys do with forks and make them move, make plants move. Jesus is using it metaphorically, symbolically. He's saying that when you look at the intertwined, complicated issues of life and you say, "There's no reason to that," go on having faith, because it's your faith that's going to move that problem. You've got to live with faith. If you don't live with faith, you're going to live with despair and you're going to be defeated by your problems rather than be victorious in them.

Chuck Swindoll, in a letter to his congregation, told this fascinating story. I think it illustrates the power of having faith in negative circumstances. That's the kind of mulberry root issues of life where we don't see a quick resolution to our problems. He tells the story about the northeastern part of the United States, where there are eastern cod fishermen. Evidently, fish connoisseurs love eastern cod. I don't know one fish from another. Cod or halibut—they all equally taste like rubber to me...soft, squishy rubber. I've never liked fish. My wife is trying to get me—for my health sake—to eat more fish. I said God created red meat, and fish has all those carcinogens, PCP or whatever. All that cancer stuff is in those fish. I don't know what eastern cod tastes like. I'm just taking Chuck Swindoll's word for it. Here on the West Coast, they like eastern cod. So the people who merchandise fish are trying to figure out a way to get cod here fresh from the Northeast, from Maine. They've tried freezing them and sending them, but the fish lost something in the process. Then they tried sending them here alive in tanks, and it cost a lot more

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doing it that way, but they got here. They had been passive in the tank and their taste was off. So they weren't as good. Finally one of the guys, a specialist in marketing, had this brainstorm: "Put them in fish tanks, let them stay alive on the flight there from the East Coast to the West Coast, but drop their natural enemy, the catfish, in the tank." That's what they did. They dropped the catfish in the tank, and the whole trip out here, the catfish chased the cod around the tank and kept them active. They found that the cod tasted more delicious that way than ever before. They had stayed active.

I think sometimes God has put some catfish in our life. They're chasing us around the tank. And rather than just getting all bent out of shape by that, it's keeping us alive and keeping us on the cutting edge. And rather than resent it and wanting to be passive or wanting to escape, we take our faith and say, "Lord, if this situation which seems so negative to me is going to be positive in my life, help me make it a positive. Let my faith be strong. I've got to have faith. I don't need faith when everything is going well. I need faith when it's not going well. So, Lord, help me to have faith when I would likely to give up." It's not very tasty to be a dead fish that's passive and floating.

### **V. The fifth great attitude is: "I am a servant."**

Verse 7–10. People with powerful faith may be tempted to have powerful pride, because if you can cast the mulberry tree into the sea, then you can say, "Look at me!" But Jesus says, "No. You've got to be a servant. Whatever you do, you've got to be a servant."

It's an earlier teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, He's giving the same story, only putting a different color on it. "When you come in at the end of the day, the master is going to gird himself with a towel and he's going to tell you to sit down and he's going to feed you and care for you." And that's the attitude the Lord has for us. He's the ultimate servant. But here He leaves that

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detail off and says, “It is your natural vocation as a servant—or as a slave, the real idea here is a slave—to go on serving.” So don’t live life just for the pats you get on the back. No one says, “Thanks for doing the ironing this week. Thanks for cooking all those good, healthy, well-balanced meals.” We all need thanks, but Jesus says that sometimes we’re not going to get thanked. Sometimes, we’re not going to get thanked in the church. Sometimes, we’re not going to get thanked by anybody for how we’ve extended ourselves on behalf of the kingdom of God. In fact, Jesus tells us to do our good deeds in secret, that God may reward us in that day.

Our attitude must be one of a servant. If no one notices what you do or pays you compliments for it, don’t let that distract you from being Christ’s servant. I am a servant.

### **VI. The sixth attitude is: “I am grateful.”**

Gratitude. Nine of the ten lepers did not come back. They got what they wanted—physical healing—and they kept on going to the priest, who could give them the medical certificate which was their bill of health. But the tenth comes back and thanks Jesus. And Jesus tells Him, “Rise and go. Your faith has made you well.” This doesn’t mean that the other nine had their wellness go away and they became lepers again. That would be misreading the story. No, every one of them, all ten of them, were healed. But only one is made well.

What’s the sense here? Jesus is the Great Physician and—I’ll put this in language I think is contemporary—He is into holistic medicine. And wellness is more than a matter of the physical frame of the body. Wellness is being well spiritually as well as mentally. It’s being well with God.

Jesus says, “These are the nine that only wanted to be physically well. They went away and got what they wanted. But they left without any further connection with Me. You’ve come back and

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you've made a connection with Me. Now you rise. You go. And you be well. You be whole. All of you are healed, but you—out of the ten—will be whole.”

The others had faith but only superficial faith. It was faith for a miracle. The tenth person had saving faith. God met him at every level of need in his life. Gratitude.

I mentioned, young people, earlier about being thankful for parents who confronted you. Have you thanked your mom and dad lately? Do you realize, if you're a teenager or a child here, there was a time in your life when if your parents had let you go without their help for seven days you would not have stayed alive? But they fed you and changed you and kept you. Thank them for that. Now that you have the keys to the car and can come in at whatever time you want, don't let that change the thanksgiving in your life. “How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child,” says King Lear. It's easy to gripe against one another in your family. How about giving thanks? It's important that we give thanks to God. “Thank You for creating me! Thank You for this day You've made! Thank You for saving me! Thank You for Jesus! Thank You for family. Thank You for opportunity.” We can, again, live life with criticism and correction or we can live it with gratitude in our hearts.

We can even be grateful in reverses. That's sometimes the most difficult area in which to give thanks. The leper could give thanks because the Lord had done a marvelous thing for him. Maybe the more difficult lesson is to continue to give thanks when things aren't breaking the way we ask.

Paul tells us in the epistles, “Give thanks in all things.” Dr. Alexander White was a great Scottish preacher, pastor of a church in Edinburgh. He was noted for his pulpit prayers and, especially, his thanksgivings that were a part of his morning prayer. One stormy morning, when the wind was driving the rain in sheets and it was awfully cold and foreboding, his parishioners were

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coming to church that day and one of them was heard to say that he doubted that Dr. White could find something that morning to thank God for. When Dr. White came to the pulpit to give his pastoral prayer, he said in his thanksgiving these words “We thank Thee, O God, that it is not always like this.” That’s a prayer we can pray in thanksgiving when we don’t know what to say to God. “Thanks God, that it’s not always like this.”

Matthew Henry, the great commentator of the seventeenth century who wrote volume after volume of study on the Scripture, was once accosted by thieves and robbed. He wrote in his diary, “Let me be thankful, first, because I’ve never been robbed before. Second, although they took my purse, they did not take my life. Third, because although they took my all, it was not much. And fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.” Think about that the next time somebody lifts your purse or wallet.

You see how dynamic these attitudes are. They just exude mental and spiritual health. So we need to say “I will influence others for God and for good. I care enough to confront. I will go on forgiving. I will live with faith. I am a servant. I am grateful.”

### **Closing Prayer**

Thank You, Lord, for Your words, which are always words of life. “Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life!” Let these words today rest like gentle rain upon our heart, and where we have become brittle towards you or towards someone else, let these gentle words of rain soften our soul so we will remain tender and open to You. For nothing can grow in a dry and parched ground. It is when the soil is moist that the seed can bring forth. Let our hearts be receptive. Lord, it’s a serious matter when we’re in the fishbowl and are being chased by the catfish. It’s no fun racing around, not knowing what to do next. But help us, Lord, to keep a cheerful frame of mind when we’re in that situation. And say, “I serve a God who makes all

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things work together for good. God will even have this work for my good.” Help us, Lord, in our example. Help us when we’re making decisions, to consider more than ourselves and our own unhappiness. We live in a society, Lord, in which it’s easy to be caught up with self. Help us to remember that little eyes are watching us. New disciples are watching us. We do have an influence. And keep us from that grown-up mentality which finds a way to justify sin. Help us to have the heart and attitude of a child, which You so admonish us to do. Such a clear understanding of what’s right and what’s wrong. It is always right to obey You. It is never right to disobey You. Give us, Lord, a heart that is obedient to You. And that proves to be a good example to others. Fill our lives continually with Your joy and with Your presence. We ask in Christ’s name. Amen.