



## **15: PSYCHEDELIC LEPROSY AND ABANDONMENT ISSUES (Luke 5:12-16)**

I'll never forget the season in my life when I finally quit using drugs.

I had started on nicotine and alcohol at twelve, marijuana at fourteen, LSD, mushrooms, ecstasy and speed at sixteen, coke and designer drugs by seventeen.

I tapered off of much of the hard stuff by the time I was eighteen, thank God.

But by the age of nineteen, I was simply done with the party scene. I had had enough of being burned out, confused, brain dead, crazy, and surrounded by liars, cheaters and criminals who constantly took advantage of one another in a blurred state of numbness. I had had enough of being one of those people who did the same thing. I wanted purpose. I wanted to feel alive, driven, motivated, healthy, and sane. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I didn't want to end up dead or in prison either.

So I quit everything. I quit being stoned, getting drunk, speeding, tripping, nic fitting, and rolling. I got into vitamins, exercise, and healthy eating. I was interested in spirituality but not fully understanding of who Jesus was yet.

And all of a sudden, a massive amount of people who had once liked “Benny”- the high and goofed out hippie kid, decided that they didn’t really like “Ben”- the intense, driven, passionate, creative dude trying to get in shape and live his life right.

I felt completely and totally isolated. I spent so much time on my own. My weekends, once blurrily filled with parties, social scenes, and many people, became solitary, quiet and often lonely. I would watch movies by myself on Friday nights. I would go out to dinner with my parents. I would lock myself in my basement, play guitar, bass and drums, write lyrics, and record original songs. I would read. I would take walks on my own. I would exercise and work out on my own.

Have you ever felt isolated?

Jesus encountered someone in deep isolation in Luke 5:12-16.

*12 While he was in one of the towns, a man was there who had leprosy all over him. He saw Jesus, fell facedown, and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” (Luke 5:12)*

Luke introduced the first healing by mentioning that Jesus was “in one of the towns.” He was venturing to other parts of Galilee, as He said earlier that He must do (4:43 - 44).<sup>1</sup>

A man full of leprosy approached Him. The term lepra referred to a wide array of diseases. It produced lesions or other swollen areas on the skin. Sometimes it attacked the nervous system. It included not only Hansen’s disease, but psoriasis, lupus, ringworm, and favus. The Old Testament gave specific instructions about identifying its presence and how to declare someone clean who had recovered from the condition (Lev. 13 - 14). To have the disease meant ostracism (Lev. 13:45 - 46; 2 Kings 7:3), for anyone with this condition had to announce it to others by shouting, “Unclean! Unclean!” Having this disease led to social isolation, not unlike what some AIDS victims experienced in the 80’s and 90’s.<sup>2</sup> Not unlike what many who contracted all the different forms of COVID temporarily experienced between 2020 and 2022. A leprosy person could not worship at the central sanctuary; he was ceremonially unclean and therefore cut off completely from the community.<sup>3</sup> A leprosy person was to live in total isolation and loneliness.

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<sup>3</sup>Martin, J. A. (1985). Luke. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 216). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Again, have you ever felt isolated? Do you feel isolated right now? That's exactly how this man felt. Now, think about your isolation and compare it to his. Imagine everywhere you walked, people were totally afraid of you and wouldn't go near you. Imagine that no one would dare even touch you. Imagine the despair and hopelessness you'd feel. On top of that, you'd be in pain, losing your faculties, and all that you once looked like would be covered in severe ugliness and sores. You'd probably simply just want to die.

So from this place of total isolation and despair, the man approached Jesus with humility, bowing before him. His request raised the question of Jesus' willingness to heal, not his capability. In fact, the leper assumed Jesus could do it. Perhaps he felt beyond the reach of God's mercy, so he expressed himself timidly. The very fact that he approached and addressed Jesus at all took great courage.<sup>4</sup>

When we feel isolated it's hard to come to Jesus. It's hard to come to the community of Jesus followers called the Body of Christ or Church and bring that junk out into the open.

It's hard to bring our church hurt to Jesus. It's hard to bring our addiction to Jesus. It's hard to bring our physical health to Jesus. It's hard to bring our mental health to Jesus. It's hard to bring our emotional health to Jesus. It's hard to bring our psychological health to Jesus. It's hard to bring our childhood trauma to Jesus. It's hard to bring our relational trouble to Jesus. It's hard to bring our financial trouble to Jesus. It's hard to bring our broken dreams to Jesus.

But this leprous man is brave enough to bring his isolation, physical ailment, pain, and brokenness right into Jesus's face. He says, *"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean!"*

And you can tell Jesus right now, "Lord, you can take away my addiction, heal me or help me through this pain, bring sanity to me, bring calm to me, bring peace to me, help to figure out what makes me keep struggling, makes me keep failing, makes me keep hurting. Get to the root of everything I am and clean me out Lord! Help me to love that person whether they love me back or not in the way I want them to love me! Help me to be content with what I've got! Help me to do what I need to do to meet my needs! Help me not to get hooked on all that I get to have! Help me enjoy the little things and the beautiful moments You've put right in front of me!

And how will Jesus respond to you if you lay everything before Him? Well, here's how he responded to this leprous man:

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*13 Reaching out his hand, Jesus touched him, saying, "I am willing; be made clean," and immediately the leprosy left him. (Luke 5:13)*

When Jesus touched the man, contamination didn't flow in; cleansing flowed out.<sup>5</sup> Jesus responded to the leper's request by declaring his willingness and announcing that he was cleansed. Jesus also touched him, showing the tender touch of compassion and acceptance to a man who could not be touched by others (cf. Lev. 14:46; cf. Mishnah, Nega'im 3:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:6 - 12), and he was restored whole immediately. The picture of redemption should not be missed. Those who turn to Jesus for cleansing receive it from him because he willingly gives it.<sup>6</sup>

If you give it all to Him, Jesus will transform your addiction. He'll take away your desire to be bonkered out on meth, heroin, coke, crack or fenty. He'll take away your desire to hallucinate on LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, and DMT. He'll take away your desire to be drunk out of your skull or stoned out of your mind. He'll take away your desire to be barbiturate-addled, speeding, and/or low on downers. He'll take away your desire to roll on molly. He'll replace the desire with a hunger to be bonkered out in the Spirit, receiving sober visions from the Lord, soberly drunk with joy in Christ, filled with God's peace, or empowered by God's zeal!

If you give it all to Him, Jesus will heal you or help you through your pain. He will walk with you in your deepest depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. He will comfort you. He will lift you up. He will speak life into you.

If you give it all to Him, Jesus will bring sanity to you. He will shut up the demonic voices screaming in your head, speaking words of death over you, telling you you're worthless, helpless, hopeless, and a piece of trash that is better off dead!

If you give it all to Him, Jesus will bring calm and peace to you. He will meet you with truth through His word, clarity through prayer, peace through the rest He offers, and joy through the principles and rhythms of Sabbath shalom that can be infused into your day, week, month, year and entire life!

If you give it all to Him, Jesus will help you figure out what makes you keep struggling, makes me keep failing, and makes me keep hurting. He will get to the root of everything you are and clean you out! Bit by bit!

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If you give it all to Him, Jesus will help you to love people. Even the person in your life who once seemed unlovable, unforgivable, and unredeemable, whether they love you back or not in the way you want them to love you! And in addition, Jesus will help you to see how beloved **you** are by the **God of the Universe!**

If you give it all to Him, Jesus will help you to be content with what you've got! He'll change your desires! He'll get you hooked on generosity and meeting tangible, real needs instead of squandering all you've got on temporary pleasures! He will help you not to get hooked on all that you get to have!

If you give it all to Him, Jesus will help you to do what you need to do to meet your needs! He will provide the motivation. He will provide the work ethic. He will remove apathy and replace it with passion, focus and joy.

If you give it all to Him, Jesus will help you to have contentment and joy in all the beautiful moments of life. The sunsets, the conversations, the music, the adventures, the tasty food, the hot coffee, the sloppy kisses, the hugs, the naps, the amazing films, and all the other moments of beautiful life and love that He's put right in front of you. He'll help you to enjoy the enjoyable in a way that you've never enjoyed it before, without putting anything at the center of your life in a way that is abusive, compulsive, codependent, unhealthy or toxic!

This leprous man brought all that he was to Jesus. Jesus touched him and healed him. Then, because Jesus came not to fulfill the law but to abolish it in his contextual, Israelite religious scenario;

*14 Then (Jesus) ordered him to tell no one: "But go and show yourself to the priest, and offer what Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them." (Luke 5:14)*

Jesus told the man to go to the priest and not say anything to anyone. Understandably, the man needed to follow the legal requirements of Leviticus 14, but why the command to silence was given is not clear. Perhaps Jesus didn't want anything said until the requirements before the priest were met, and he wanted to discourage undue attention to his miraculous work (Luke 4:35, 41; 8:56; see also Matt. 9:30; 12:16; Mark 1:34; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). According to the law, this testimony before the priest would've taken a week. The ritual pictured the cleansing and removal of sin, so even the follow-up program for the leper reinforced the message of what Jesus had done. The fact that the testimony was for the priests was not surprising, given their need to understand what Jesus represented.<sup>7</sup>

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On top of all that, healing from leprosy was rare. The Scriptures recorded 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 of this disease.<sup>8</sup>

On top of all that, the religious folks of the time who were legalistically bound up in the law needed to see that God was doing something that they couldn't get their head around. They needed to know that sometimes their theology could get blown out of the water by the almighty God of the Universe Himself, through His Son, the true Messiah.

All of us who are Christ followers better not be limiting God to our little boxes of theology, doctrine, and religious tradition! When God moves, God moves. And God can move however He wants to! Of course, we need to know that it's truly Him who is moving, but we better not shut Him out when He does!

And to conclude the passage, contrary to Jesus trying to put a lid on things getting out of hand by telling the redeemed and healed leprous man to keep things quiet;

*15 the news about (Jesus) spread even more, and large crowds would come together to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 Yet he often withdrew to deserted places and prayed. (Luke 5:15-16)*

Despite Jesus' efforts to control the news, reports go out anyway, spreading throughout the land. Though Jesus was in Galilee, news spread as far south as Judea and Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup>

Crowds continued to flock to Jesus, wanting things from Him. They wanted healing, they wanted wisdom, they wanted hope. But the greater the demand on Him, the more Jesus in his humanity depended on God the Father.<sup>10</sup> In the quietness that came privately after a rapid rush of events came the solace and gaining of perspective that kept Jesus close to God. Luke regularly noted such commitments to prayer (3:21; 6:12; 9:18, 28 - 29; 11:1; 23:46).<sup>11</sup>

The big point is this: Antithetical to everything we sometimes feel- when things are going crazy around us, we need to get alone with the Father. We often want to just blitz

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<sup>8</sup>Martin, J. A. (1985). Luke. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 217). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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ourselves with Netflix, Instagram scrolling, Prime Video, Peacock, and Disney Plus. There's nothing wrong with that sometimes. There's nothing wrong with fun! Sometimes I really want a good beer (just one or two!) and a cigar, but never to excess. Sometimes I want to sit and watch a good music documentary. Sometimes I want a nap. Sometimes I want a greasy burger and fries.

But, right in line with the example of Jesus, I need that time in scripture daily or as much as feasibly possible in the rhythms of my day, week, month and year. I need my time of walking in the woods without earphones to listen to, pray to, and commune with the triune God. I need long drives sometimes to think and process. I need "Up" time with God as much as I need His people to pour into me during worship gatherings and intimate discipleship groups. I need "Up" time with God as much as I need to proclaim the gospel to people who don't know it, serve those in need, and build His Kingdom where He's not known yet.

Tony Evans has some good words about spending time alone with the Father in solitude, just like Jesus did:

*Solitude allows us an opportunity to meditate on God's Word without distractions. Meditation is rolling something over and over again in your thinking. It's reflecting on who God is, what God can do, and what you need from him. If you are unaccustomed to it, yes, it's possible that your mind could wander and become distracted. So start by meditating for a few minutes a day. Over time, you can increase this to a few more minutes and then a few more. Soon you'll be shocked to find that you can spend a whole hour with God because you've increased the time little by little.*

*Read through the Psalms and let them speak to you. Let God's Word assist you by giving you something specific to meditate on. Also, place yourself in an environment that facilitates meditation. Perhaps play music, such as hymns, to lift your spirit. David played soothing songs with his harp. Such music can help facilitate the process of meditation. Furthermore, you can go for walks and allow nature to support your efforts as you spend time in God's creation. And yes, turn off your cell phone to minimize distractions.<sup>12</sup>*

Time with the Father is so sweet and rejuvenating! It's the thing that will prevent us from burnout!

And Jesus was alienated from God so we wouldn't be! He cleansed the leper, brought sight to the blind, made the lame walk, and rose the dead, but still, though He perfectly

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obeyed God in every way, He was persecuted, hated, arrested, tried, flogged, spit on, mocked, jeered at, and made to carry a cross while bleeding out. His organs, ribs, and muscles were bloodily exposed, then nails were driven into His hands and feet, and He was left to hang in torture until He died of bleeding out and asphyxiation, the most painful death one could imagine.

And in the moment He was dying, at about three in the afternoon on that fateful day, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eí, Eí, lemá sabachtháni?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Matthew 27:46)

In this moment, Jesus experienced profound abandonment from God. The Father and Lord of Creation, who had been with Jesus for all eternity, who had worked with Jesus to create the world, and oversee all the events of history, who had sent Jesus down to live as a human, fully God and fully man, painfully cut Himself off from His Son in this moment. Jesus experienced what eternal hell, punishment, death, torment, abandonment, isolation, and profound, perpetual despair would be like. He lived into it like it could've happened for good. Then He died and was buried.

Then three days later, He conquered death. He rose again. He went through this abandonment so that any abandonment we face would be overcome! Praise His Holy Name!

Jesus rose again, conquered death and ascended to heaven because He wants to conquer your addiction, your pain, your insanity, your tumultuousness, your patterns of systemic sin, your perpetual failures, your seemingly unresolvable perpetual hurts. He rose to get to the root of everything you are and clean you out, step by step! He rose to pour His love into your soul and spirit, replacing your hate, bitterness and unforgiveness. Even for that person in your life that won't love you back in the way you want them to love you! He rose to give you contentment with what you've got! He rose to breathe the passion and drive in you to do what you need to do to meet your needs, and when your efforts don't work He'll provide for you and yours! He won't let you get hooked on all that you get to have! He'll help you enjoy the little things and the beautiful moments He's put right in front of you! You're not alone! You're not abandoned! You don't have to live on in isolation, despair, hopelessness, fear, immorality, failure, pain, unforgiveness, bitterness, selfishness, greed, apathy, and discontentment any longer! Trust in Him, and let the joy He provides come alive in you, and then get ready to suffer for Him!