**Thesis:** We were created to be in community. It’s wired in our hearts to desire connection with others. As people, we’ve been created in God’s image who, by nature, lives in community as the Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit. But what happens when we’re disconnected from community, and even worse, from God? Jesus came into this creation to seek and save the lost. As Jesus recounts in the parable of the lost son, God rejoices when we’re reunited with him and celebrates our salvation by welcoming us into community.

**Introduction:** You’re listening to the Jesus Podcast, a year of stories showcasing the depth of Christ’s love and the glory of God’s truth. I’m \_\_\_\_ your host from Pray.com. It’s awesome having you with us today. Before we jump into the story, take a moment to follow the podcast as we all follow Jesus!

**Context:** All sin separates us from God and is deserving of death, and there were few things that were more symbolic of this in Jesus’ time than leprosy. The physical decay of the body was a stark reminder of the decay of the soul apart from God. The spread of the disease that would eventually consume the body was a shadow of the spread of sin that would eventually consume one’s heart. The physical uncleanness caused by leprosy forced those with it to be driven out of community to prevent its spread to others.

**Message:** The story of the cleansing of the leper is a beautiful picture of the love of God. Though we may not be able to identify with the leper in his physical condition, it’s likely that we can relate to him in its consequences. Having been driven out from the community, Joachim had begun to forget what it was like to feel loved, welcomed, and accepted by others. What was even worse is that Joachim couldn’t have changed his situation. He knew that he was removed for good reason to protect others from having to endure the same pain and agony he had due to his disease. But in hearing the testimony of the healer they called Jesus, he was willing to break the rules for a chance to be made well. It’s easy to imagine that this decision wasn’t one to take lightly. If Jesus was a man just like every other Jew, surely he wouldn’t want to be exposed to leprosy and its deadly blow. But luckily for him, Jesus wasn’t a man just like every other Jew. Jesus was a man like no other before or since. He was the Messiah and he could perform a miracle. A miracle that could only happen if Joachim was willing to approach Jesus.

Perhaps we’ve had moments where we’ve questioned whether or not we should approach Jesus with our needs. Maybe we’ve felt like we can’t approach Jesus because of a sense of unworthiness or busyness to cause other matters to be more pressing. Or maybe we’re afraid to approach God, fearful that he might reject us or it won’t bring about the results we’re hoping for. Part of our problem is we live in a world and culture that’s primarily a merit-based system. As children, we have to do our chores to earn our allowance. In school we have to study to earn good grades. As adults, we have to interview well to prove we deserve the jobs we want to have. We have to earn money to buy food, clothes, shelter, and care for any other needs that we have. And if we’re not careful, we can unknowingly, or sometimes even knowingly, transfer that system onto Jesus. We think we have to earn his favor and be deserving of his hand of blessing. And if we think of Jesus as the ultimate prize in life, we might consider ourselves unworthy of him because we haven’t earned him. But Jesus isn’t a prize to be won, he is a gift to be received.

Paul says in *Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

What we deserve based on our merit is death. But that’s not what we find with the gospel message. Again, Paul shares this with the Ephesians in *Ephesians 2:3 “Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”*

By definition, grace is receiving what we don’t deserve. Contrary to the striving that this world calls us to in order to get anywhere, the gospel tells us that if we simply humble ourselves in faith to Jesus, we receive the greatest gift of all: His love and eternal life saved from our sins!

Jesus doesn’t expect us to clean ourselves up and live blameless lives before him. If that were the case, no one would be able to draw near to him. Jesus makes it abundantly clear that it was he who comes and finds us in our sins and gives us the gift of a relationship with him.

Jesus wants us to have fellowship with him and his Father through the Spirit that dwells in us. But beyond that, Jesus wants us to have fellowship with others. The removal of sin doesn’t just allow us to approach God without shame, it also allows us to approach others without the fear of judgment or rejection knowing our identity is found in Christ and he has accepted us. This is what we see as Jesus cleanses the leper. After he’s healed, Jesus tells Joachim to go to the temple to make the offering required by Moses and show himself to the priests to prove he has been made well. The result of this would have been reintegration back into society. Jesus wanted this man to be back where he belonged - with others.

The Body of Christ is made up of the same type of people: Sinners saved by grace. Jesus embraces all of us individually and collectively and wants us to be in a community that accepts one another, knowing we have only been made clean because of the healing power of Jesus. And the cleansing that Jesus provides is unlike any other provided under the old covenant. Jewish customs and ceremonies were a constant reminder of sin, from cleansing with water daily to the blood of the sacrifices made continually at the temple. The cleansing Jesus offers us is more than symbolic or surface level. He cleanses us spiritually from our sin, and its effects are eternal.

The author of Hebrews writes this in *Hebrews 10:11 “Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.”*

What couldn’t be accomplished through the sacrifices of the priests was secured through the sacrificial blood of Jesus. And to prove that his work was complete and eternal, he sits down at the right hand of God. No longer were priests required to work day after day to atone for the people’s sin. Jesus atoned for all sins once and for all. This means that even on the days we feel unclean, all we have to do is remember that in Jesus, we are already clean, now and forever.

All of Jesus’ miracles are wonderful reminders of his goodness, but his cleansing of the leper should hold a significant place in our hearts in the clear representation of what Jesus wants to do with our sins. As he takes away the decay of Joachim’s disease, we can take heart in knowing that Jesus takes away the decay of sin. As Joachim is able to enter back into society, we should be comforted in knowing that Jesus wants us to know the joy of true fellowship with others. And as Jesus stares in the face of death and reverses its power, we can rejoice knowing that Jesus faced death on the cross to undo the hold it had over us. Jesus’ greatest miracle ever performed was the miracle of rising from the grave and leaving death behind. If we would just lay down our lives at the feet of Jesus, we can have hope that he gives us new life. Eternal life. Life more abundant.