



Opening Prayer for Ordinary Time

God of adventure and growth,
open our hearts, ready our minds
and fire our imaginations,
so that as we gather together before you,
and ponder the life-giving stories of Jesus,
we might discover more of your goodness,
and be swept up by the Holy Spirit
as she nurtures, disturbs and inspires us
on our journey into fullness of life.

Amen

'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

What does it mean to have an 'attitude of gratitude' in everyday life?
How are you living gratefully at the moment?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise – Psalm 111 (StF 111)

Alleluia. I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart,
in the company of the faithful and in the congregation.
The works of the Lord are great,
sought out by all who delight in them.
His work is full of majesty and honour
and his righteousness endures for ever.

He appointed a memorial for his marvellous deeds;
the Lord is gracious and full of compassion.

He gave food to those who feared him;
he is ever mindful of his covenant.

He showed his people the power of his works
in giving them the heritage of the nations.

The works of his hands are truth and justice;
all his commandments are sure.

They stand fast for ever and ever;
they are done in truth and equity.

He sent redemption to his people; he commanded
his covenant for ever; holy and awesome is his name.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
a good understanding have those who live by it;
his praise endures for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.
Amen

Prayers of Renewal

God of judgement and mercy,
thank you that you help us to see ourselves honestly,
forgive us our mistakes and faults,
heal our wounds and comfort us in trouble.
In Jesus's name, and in the power of the Holy Spirit,
we pray. Amen

Reading Luke 17:11 – 19

Exploring the Story – The Perspective of a Jewish Women

We'd heard the rumours that Jesus would be coming our way as he
and his friends went up to Jerusalem. People often spoke about him

as they walked by. It got us thinking that, perhaps, he could help us. After all, we'd heard lots of tales about him healing others, including plenty about folks in a far worse state than we were. So, we hatched a plan. We found a quiet spot to watch and wait, where passers-by wouldn't see us. There's no shortage of those kinds of places in the Jordan Valley. It's a sort of 'no-man's land' running between Galilee, which is a Jewish region, and Samaria. To say that Samaritans and Jews don't get on is a bit of an understatement! Travellers who want to avoid passing through the other lot's 'territory' take this road. We were experts at gleaning information from them while staying out of sight. So, when Jesus's disciples came into view, we were ready.

We were a funny lot, when you think about it. Lots of people who do not normally 'mix'. Men and women, Jews and Samaritans. The ten of us had one thing in common. We all had skin diseases that meant we were basically outcasts – ritually unclean, dangerous to the rest, best kept out of the way. Me, I'm from Jerusalem, originally. Married with two sons, when I started getting strange blotches, and we knew something was not right. It is not easy being a woman at the best of times, when you spend half the month being viewed as unclean, but the look that priest gave me when he said I was infected, and would be banished from the city, made me feel that I was worthless. Worse than the dirt on the bottom of his sandals. After I'd said 'goodbye' to my family, I walked with tears streaming down my face for miles and miles along the Jordan Valley. Truth is, I'd have probably died if the other nine hadn't taken me in...

We waited for Jesus to enter one of the villages along the road, then approached him – from a distance, obviously. We didn't know if this guy would freak out – like everybody else did, if they saw us coming. We called out to him for mercy, and he told us to go to the priest, to be declared clean. You can imagine how reluctant I was, but we all decided to go along with it. We had nothing to lose. But the amazing thing was that it worked! As we wandered along the path toward the

city, one by one, we were cured! I couldn't believe it! Not only would I have no more physical pain to deal with, but I could finally go home to my family. To my husband, my boys, my parents. It felt wonderful; I could've jumped for joy. I was normal again! I belonged again!

We decided to journey onwards together for a while, before we went our separate ways – most to Galilee, three of us towards Jerusalem, and Matthias to Samaria. We'd not been going for all that long when he turned back, and started running toward where we had just come from. To this day, I have no idea what that was actually about! None of us ever saw him again. Mind you, if I am being honest, I have no intention of seeing *any of them* ever again. Don't get me wrong here; they were good people, and they became my family when this disease took everything over, but thinking about them now reminds me of a time I really want to forget. I did not even give Jesus another thought – not until I heard weeks later that he'd got himself crucified. Some seem to think that's kind of odd, but I don't. After all, you don't sit there and think 'I wonder what happened to that doctor', do you?

The day I could go with my family to the Temple, and bring the ritual sacrifice to God for my healing, was a joyous one. I'd been restored not just to my immediate family, but to wider society, too. From time to time, people ask me what it was like to meet Jesus – I never quite know what to say to them. Of course, I'm grateful for what he did for me that day, but all I want now is to get on with picking up the pieces of my life. Is that *really* so wrong?

Exploring the Story – The Perspective of a Samaritan Man

Living in the shadows wasn't new to me. The rivalry between people from Samaria and folk from Israel was intense. As a trader, my work took me all over the place, and the prejudice I experienced from the customers, and other market stallholders, in Galilee and Judea was frankly terrible at times. I learnt very quickly to 'keep my head down'. You worship in the wrong place. You're impure, unclean, foreigners.

All of that was standard fayre, and I had much worse than that, too. So, when I picked up my skin problem, from somebody I met on the road, and I found myself unwelcome in the cities and towns of either Israel or Samaria, I was pretty well-equipped for life on the margins, and indeed already quite used to it.

I know it sounds grim, but actually, it wasn't all bad. I met this bunch of people in the same position as me. I was the only Samaritan in a group of Jews, but that didn't matter. Our status as outcasts brought us together, and because people didn't usually look past the 'illness stuff', they didn't notice that we were a melting pot of folk who would not normally associate. There was something quite liberating about that, if I'm honest. Nine became ten when Esther came along. While it was tough, scrapping out a life in the Jordan Valley, it was actually the first time I had honestly felt I belonged somewhere. It was rather different for some of the others, though. Esther had been forced out of her home. She wanted to go back to her family, and she was not the only one. The hard bit about being on the road was the reactions of other people if they stumbled across us. It wasn't too different to the sort of rubbish I'd had before – it was just about something else. However, it was painful seeing the impact it had on my friends.

When someone suggested approaching Jesus for help, the idea did appeal to me. This was someone else who didn't fit in, like me. What I'd heard about him excited me; he didn't act like the priests and the others. *They* seemed more bothered about looking down their nose at anyone who didn't fit in with their idea about what being a part of God's people meant. There was something about Jesus. He wasn't like that; he was different. We came up with a plan, and when Jesus and his disciples came our way, we 'seized the moment', and called out to him. He told us to go back to the priests, and reveal ourselves to them as clean. I wasn't sure at first, but something about the way he said it had a kind of authority that it's hard to put my finger on. In any case, as the others said, we had nothing to lose...

I noticed my arm wasn't hurting when we'd got about a quarter of a mile down the road. The further we walked, the easier it got, and as I looked down, the scars were all gone – it was amazing! The others had the same thing happen – we were all cured! After we'd hugged, and cried, and taken a few moments to let it sink in, the conversation became about what to do next. We decided to walk on together then peel off, and go on our separate routes home. But, as we wandered along and the others chatted about seeing family and what the looks on their faces would be like, my heart sank. It hit me. Sure, I'd found my freedom from the illness, but I was about to lose my community. Back to wandering alone on the road, hated for being an outsider – for a different reason to the last few years, but with the same results. Then a thought struck me. Jesus hadn't been bothered about where I was from. *He* didn't single me out, or turn me away. I thought back to everything we'd heard from passers-by upon the road, about how he was turning Israel's thinking about God upside down. Could it be that God actually accepted *me*, a Samaritan?

Turning around, I started sprinting back to find Jesus. I am not much of a runner, so it was tough going, but when I saw him, my heart felt like it was about to explode. I didn't stop to think about it; I just threw myself down on the floor in front of him and thanked him. I could not go to Jerusalem to thank God, but I could run to him. When I looked up, Jesus told me to stand up, and be on my way, because my faith had saved me. That is when I realised – I now belonged to a greater community, where the things that made me 'stand out' didn't matter. I was a part of God's family, and nobody could 'take that away' from me. At last, I had found where I truly belonged.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord's Prayer

Blessing