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Recently I've noticed conversations that sound like this: "Give me a coffee with cream," and after delivering the beverage, the server replied, "Have a good one." Listening to the conversation, one might wonder: A good what? Good drink? Or a good day? Or have a good anything you want?

Did you also notice some missing words? No *Please* for the request. No *Thank you* for the item, and no *You're welcome*.

I've also discovered when I say *thank you*, I often hear the phrase "no problem." What does that mean? I'm not a problem? My request wasn't a problem? What if my request had been a problem? Would I then hear, "It was a big problem"? What about just saying "You're welcome"?

Seven years ago, Gregory Smith, a psychiatrist and blogger in Georgia, said, "Simple things that we took for granted as children no longer seem to count." He noticed that manners have changed in the past 25 years and commented, "Saying please and thank you, asking permission, offering unsolicited help, and following up on solutions to problems are no longer as important."<sup>1</sup>

Maybe it's because we're not thankful anymore, so we don't say *thank you*. Maybe we've developed a culture of expectation, so we no longer say *please* because we think we deserve whatever we're asking for. Maybe it's because we want more stuff, and we're never satisfied, so we have forgotten how to say *thank you*.

Even when we have all that we need, we look at what others have and think we need just as much, so rather than focusing on giving thanks, we desire what others have.

It appears that was part of the problem in Jesus' day, for in the parable of the workers in the vineyard, everyone received the same pay. The ones hired at the beginning of the day were promised a certain amount of money, and they discovered that the ones who began at the end of the day received the same amount. Rather than giving thanks for the money received, the early workers went away grumbling, unhappy that everyone reaped the benefits of the generosity of the landowner.

In his book *Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes*, Justo Gonzales notes that this parable elicits surprisingly different reactions

when read to typical, middle-class audiences in America compared to Hispanic audiences.

Most people are perplexed that someone who had worked for only an hour should be paid the same as someone who has worked for eight hours. It seems...unfair. Moreover, most people don't understand the fuss. The logic is so clear, typical Americans cannot understand on what grounds one could argue the fairness of Jesus' approach.

When the story is read or studied by a Hispanic audience, however, the reaction is quite different. These are people, Gonzales says, who identify with the problems of the field workers. They understand the laborer who travels in his pickup truck trying to find work with little success, or, even if he finds work, he is standing around waiting until the job materializes.

At the end of the parable when the landowner pays the wages, the Hispanic congregation applauds when the laborers who worked for only one hour get paid a full day's pay. They are not confused by this, but understand that the people looking for work and who have been waiting for work need a day's pay to survive. They rejoice, then, at the grace that is not contrary to justice, but that flows with justice. They are paid what they need and deserve rather than the wages they might have been paid had society's concept of justice prevailed.<sup>2</sup>

The parable of the workers in the vineyard illustrates God's generous grace, so why do many of us want to be stingy, to place limits on what God can do rather than giving thanks for what God has done? What if you grew up in the church and spent many years serving on committees and followed all the rules to be good, and when you arrive in heaven you discover a scoundrel who didn't go to church, who never talked about God, and who committed lots of sins. What if at the last moment this person recognized God's presence and felt remorse about all the bad choices in life? Is it fair for both of you to end up in the same place? Would you complain you have to sit together in the Kingdom of Heaven, or would you give thanks for God's grace that welcomed you and the other?

To help you think about your response, let's travel again to our imaginary studio to encounter those in Jesus' parable, but this week, we're going on location to a vineyard to watch the scene unfold.

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<sup>1</sup> Linton Weeks, "Please Read This Story, Thank You," March 14, 2012, [www.npr.org/2012/03/09/148295675/please-read-this-story-thank-you](http://www.npr.org/2012/03/09/148295675/please-read-this-story-thank-you)

<sup>2</sup> www.homileticonline.com, 9-22-2002, referring to the book published by Abingdon Press, 1996, 62-63.

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Doug: (*using a handheld mic*) This is Pastor Doug with WPBA, “Parables Brought Alive.” Last week’s guest joined us from our broadcasting studio, but this week we’re traveling back in time on location in a vineyard where workers are finishing up and getting ready to be paid. Excuse me, can you tell me about your work today?

First Worker: Sure. I arrived first thing this morning, for I heard it was time for the grape harvest and the land owner needed workers. When I was hired, the owner told me what I would be paid, and I felt it was a fair amount for a day’s work. I worked hard all day in the hot sun, and now it’s quitting time, and I’m looking forward to being paid.

Doug: It sounds as though the land owner is very generous with payments, for I understand people have been coming all day to work.

First Worker: Yes; I’ve seen people coming in all day long. The landowner hired more workers at 9:00 this morning and again at noon. While talking with them at lunch I heard them all say they were offered a fair wage. I don’t know the exact amount, but I’m sure it would be less than what I’m getting since I’ve been here all day. I didn’t tell

them what I’m getting paid, for I didn’t want to seem rude telling them about my better pay. I guess the landowner was concerned about getting everything harvested in time, for at 3:00 more workers were hired, and again at 5:00.

Doug: That’s a lot of people to track for starting times and payments.

First Worker: Yeah, I can just imagine the bookkeeping nightmare that must be. I hope no one tries to scam the owner by saying they worked all day when they only worked a short time.

Doug: Look. The landowner has arrived and is beginning to pay everyone, starting with those hired last.

First Worker: That makes sense. The owner probably will give the groups who worked longer more pay and doesn’t want the later ones getting upset that they didn’t make as much.

Doug: (*speaking to Last Worker who enters*). Excuse me, but I understand you came in at the end of the day to work. Tell me about your experience.

Last Worker: I heard about this job late in the day, for the landowner saw me at the marketplace and asked me why I wasn’t working. I said that no one

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had hired me for the day, so he let me begin working at 5:00. I only worked an hour, but he gave me a full day's pay. How generous! I'll come back again tomorrow and work the whole day! Thanks be to God! (*Exits*)

First Worker: (*to Doug*) Did I hear that worker received a full day's pay for one hour?

Doug: Yes, that's what I heard.

First Worker: I can't wait to see what I'll get, for the landowner offered me that same amount, but I worked longer and should get more. I imagine I'll get at least four times that amount since I've been here all day! Boy, will my family be surprised when I bring home all that extra money! (*walks away and extends hand as if getting paid.*)

Doug: This is quite a surprise. The last workers got a full day's pay. Just imagine the wages paid for everyone today if the wage increases for each group of people who worked longer. ... It looks like the first person we interviewed is now getting paid. Let's see how much he received.

(*speaking to First Worker*). Excuse me. May I ask how much you received for working all day?

First Worker: It's just not fair. I worked an entire day in the hot sun and received a full day's wage, while that guy worked one hour and got the same amount.

Doug: Did you ask if an error had been made in payments?

First Worker: You bet I did, and when I complained, the landowner replied, "Friend, I didn't cheat you. I paid you exactly what we agreed on. Take your money now and go! What business is it of yours if I want to pay them the same that I paid you? Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Why should you be jealous, if I want to be generous?" (*exits, grumbling*)

Doug: Whether you're first or last or somewhere in the middle, give thanks for what God has provided. Remember the basics we learned as children: say *please* and *thank you* and don't worry about what others have, for God treats us all the same in the Kingdom of Heaven. Join us next week as we discover more about the Kingdom of Heaven, a place all are invited to attend.

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