

## **Be Just. Be Kind. Be Humble.: 4. A Good Neighbor**

**Michah 6:8; Luke 10:25-37**

**October 23, 2022**

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This past Wednesday night, Wayzata High School played Farmington High School in their last regular season football game. While by all accounts it was a good game, Farmington lost 27-14, making this their seventh loss in a row. After the game ended, one of the Farmington players, apparently taking the loss pretty hard, was left alone, kneeling in the center of the field. It didn't take long for one of the Wayzata High School football players to notice and in an act of kindness and compassion, he went and knelt beside the Farmington player, placing his arm around his shoulder. After a couple of minutes, they rose and exited the field together, joining their teammates on the sidelines. This was an act of kindness and compassion that reached beyond high school rivalries to meet a basic human need. This is the kind of stuff that's contagious. This is the kind of stuff that can change the world.

We're in the last week of our message series, *Be just. Be kind. Be humble.* During the month of October, we're joining faith communities across this nation, using the Micah 6:8 lens, to dig into what each of those attributes look like when they are lived out in everyday life. And how, especially during this politically polarized election season - when so much is being done to divide us and draw lines between and around us - we can make it our goal to discover and lean into our commonalities. In the past 3 weeks, we've challenged one another to find ways to demonstrate justice and kindness to all those whom we encounter; our families, our friends, our neighbors and to love one another while valuing our differences. Last week, Pastor Bethany helped us look at what it takes (and why it's important) to remain humble in the ways that we live, serve and move in this world. And if we put things in the right order, Jesus first, then others and then ourselves, we'll center our lives and hearts on right relationships that bring joy and meaning to our lives. And so today in this final message in the series, we will look at how putting all three of those attributes (justice, kindness, and humility) at play in our life we can become better neighbors. Perhaps one of Jesus' most familiar parables is The Parable of the Good Samaritan. It asks the question, who is my neighbor? But today, we're going to approach this parable from another direction and ask ourselves, how do I live as a good neighbor? The parable begins when a lawyer stands up to "test Jesus," revealing himself to be an opponent of Jesus, or at least a skeptic. "Teacher," says the lawyer, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Although there is no indication that the lawyer is a bully or a jerk, he is clearly looking for an opportunity to gain the upper hand. Jesus responds in a very sensible and matter-of-fact way, asking him, "What is written in the law?"

The lawyer quotes Deuteronomy and Leviticus, pointing to the commandments to love the Lord and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus commends him, saying, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But the lawyer senses that he is losing his competitive advantage. Wanting to come out on top, he asks Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" He fully expects Jesus to describe his neighbor as a person of similar race, religion, job, age, political views, or marital status. Instead, what does Jesus do? He tells a story: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead". The lawyer is probably thinking, "Okay, Jesus is saying that this man is my neighbor — he's a good Jewish man, walking from Jerusalem to Jericho."

Then the plot thickens. “Now by chance a priest was going down that road,” says Jesus; “and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.” The lawyer scratches his chin, thinking about the people he knows who never get their hands dirty by helping neighbors in need. He has seen them in action: observant Jews who consistently fail to love their neighbors as themselves.

But next comes the curveball: “But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.” The lawyer didn’t see that pitch coming at all: Jesus is speaking kindly of a stranger, and not just any kind of stranger, but a *Samaritan* — a half-Jew who deserves only slurs and hateful language. Where is Jesus going with this?

Jesus says that the Samaritan went to the Jewish man “and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’” Wow,” thinks the lawyer, which is some impressive kindness.

Then Jesus looks the lawyer square in the eye and asks him, “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The lawyer is shocked into silence. He thought that Jesus was talking about *the Jewish man* as the neighbor, but now he is clearly describing *the Samaritan* as the neighbor. The lawyer can only say, “The one who showed him mercy.”

And then Jesus says to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Go and show kindness to the Samaritan half-Jew who is the victim of slurs and hateful language.

Go and help the refugee family struggling to find their place in American society.

Go and have a cup of coffee with someone with a different political view.

Go and do likewise.

Usually, when discussing this story, we ask the question, like the lawyer asked, “Who is my neighbor?” A better question for us to ask might be: “What is a ‘Good Samaritan?’” We typically have used the term “Good Samaritan” to describe anyone who puts time and effort into helping a person in need. This is not a bad thing, and such efforts certainly deserve recognition. But if we dig below the surface of this parable, a *true* Good Samaritan *might be someone who helps a person outside of their ethnic, racial or political circles*. Mother Teresa believed that “the biggest problem in the world today is that we draw the circle of our family too small.” Then she added, to solve this problem, “Every day we should continue to draw the circle of our family larger and larger.”

When acts of kindness cross ethnic, racial, political, and cultural lines, **Samaritanship** comes into play. We have laws that impose stiff penalties when a hate crime has been committed and so perhaps therefore, we applaud with even more enthusiasm when a “love action” that agape love in action, occurs when we step beyond our comfort zones.

Some of the unlikeliest of friends were Supreme Court justices, travel companions and New Year’s Eve celebrants together, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Antonin Scalia. It is common knowledge that the late Supreme Court Justices were close personal friends. They shared a love of opera, went souvenir shopping together when they traveled, and rode an elephant in India with Scalia up front. Their families spent New Year’s Eve together, and when Chief Justice John Roberts announced the death of Ginsburg’s husband Scalia wept on the bench. In this era of increasingly bitter partisan acrimony, the odd coupling of Ginsburg – petite, serious, seemingly shy, and undoubtedly the most progressive judge on the bench – and Scalia –

formative, long-winded, overtly opinionated – and the stanch conservative on the bench - may be viewed as awkward. But many cited their friendship as a signal of hope and example of Samaritanship. Maybe it was possible because they embraced their commonalities: they were both New Yorkers, close in age, and liked a lot of the same things: the law, teaching, travel, music and a meal with family and friends. Or perhaps it was possible because they both grew up as outsiders – to different degrees – to the elites who had ruled the country: she as a Jew and woman, he as a Catholic and Italian American.

There are several examples of Samaritanship being lived out at Messiah Church.

The ongoing relocation support for 2 refugee families: the Agid family from Kenya in 2018 and the Amini Family from Afghanistan this past January.

Assisting with IPV UMC food distribution in South Minneapolis each month.

Our ongoing relational connection with Native Americans through hosting the NACOS here last month, for many years now we've made Christmas Shoeboxes that are sent to children on reservations in ND and SD, and we've sent mission teams and financial support to Re-Member on the Pine Ridge Reservation in SD. our ongoing relationships with Imara International, a home for unwed mothers and the children in Nanyuki, Kenya.

In addition, in the way we usually read this story, I think we miss the joy that the Samaritan found in his helpfulness. When we hear that the Samaritan paid the innkeeper to provide lodging and nursing, we think, "What a generous guy." But the reality is that the Samaritan wanted to help the wounded man. It is what gave him joy.

There's a study out of the University of Houston that has a name for the boost that we get from being kind: "helper's high." It's the warm glow we feel when we help other people and see them happy. What is interesting is that they call this kind of giving "impure altruism." They see it as impure not because it is bad, but because it benefits the giver as well as the receiver. It's hard to do something truly altruistic and remain truly humble, because we feel good about it ourselves after we've performed an act of kindness.

Call it altruism or impure altruism. If it includes a "helper's high" in the end, it's all good. And best of all, it's contagious. The kindness of other people rubs off on us and makes us kinder.

The helpfulness of the Good Samaritan advanced a movement of helpfulness that continues to the present day.

From a theological perspective, the source of all this goodness is God. Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul says that *"God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work.* In other words, God's generosity rubs off on you, making you more generous. And then, says Paul, *"You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God through us."* (2 Corinthians 9:8, 11). You'll be enriched — you'll experience a "helper's high."

Kindness is contagious. Research shows that people make larger charitable gifts when they believe that others are being generous. And in situations where people cannot afford to donate, one individual's kindness can inspire others to spread positivity in other ways.

So how do we do this? How do I take the first step? In preparing for this message, I came across this book, *Start with Hello* by Shannan Martin. Martin begins with the acknowledgement that "loving your neighbor" is a common thread that runs throughout the Bible. And while that's an easy concept to understand in our heads, it can be challenging to put it into action in our

bodies and lives and with our time and money. So, she wrote this book as a sort of how-to manual when we find ourselves stuck and wondering “how do I live as a good neighbor?”

As simple as it sounds, she recommends that when you encounter someone on the street, in the grocery store or in the pew behind you at church, you look them in the eye and say, “hello.” This practice can help you stay awake and available to the world you are in. If someone asks you, how do I live as a good neighbor in this world, this is the book you hand them. It contains tangible, practical ways to move forward. Each of the chapters in this book outlines how one specific action is greater than another and then gives a simple first step to live as a better neighbor. There are ten chapters that address this but today, I want to share just three of those with you that embrace the attributes of justice, kindness, and humility.

**Practice is greater than preaching.** (Justice) Embodied, intentional action is the glue of healthy communities. And if we long for a reality where we are held and cared for in our scariest moments, then we must be willing to step into the fray for those around us. We must be the neighbors we will inevitably need. Martin suggests one simple way to live as a good neighbor is to spend some time thinking about what bubbles up inside of you and just makes you feel more alive. Take your time. Jot some notes and once you’ve identified what it is that does that for you, look for people who are already doing the work, find them, say hello and join them in their efforts.

**Listening is greater than talking.** (Kindness) Martin writes, “the road towards each other begins by paying attention.” Have you ever asked someone their name only three seconds later to realize that you’ve already forgotten it? Finding our way from passive hearing to active listening is the name of the game. Martin suggests one simple way to live as a good neighbor is to make it your mission to know that names and faces of your eight closest neighbors. If you’ve lived in your place for a long time and worry that it’s too late to expose what you already should know, take a deep breath, walk over with a plate of cookies to soften the blow, and simply begin by saying, “I’m sorry, I should know this by now.” They won’t think you’re weird, they’ll know you care.

A year and a half ago, Jerry and I moved into a brand-new neighborhood. Our house was the 15th house in the development that will soon be home to over 90 families. And from the very beginning, we’ve made it our mission to say hello to everyone we meet on our early morning and after dinner walks. I have to admit, we have a bit of a secret weapon. We take our one-year-old golden retriever with us. Everyone wants to pet Jack. He’s a great icebreaker. Then if they seem receptive, we stop for a brief, more connective conversation. And when we meet a new person, we try to make a connection to someone else we know of the neighborhood who has something in common: things like, children of similar ages, similar employment situations or other folks who have recently moved from the same city.

And we’d found that most people welcome these conversations, but when they don’t, we respect their privacy and, being a good neighbor to them, we move on. We’ve seen this as the opportunity to write that script for our neighborhood as more and more people move it. In September, we sent out an invitation via our neighborhood Facebook page to a BBQ party in our driveway. We wanted to invite folks to share a meal, meeting face to face before the winter comes and we all go inside for the next 5 months. We found that kindness is contagious because as soon as the invitation went out, people started responding with “I’m coming and what can I bring?” And the day of the event, almost everyone showed up with something to share.

**Tenderness is greater than tough.** (Humility) It's not thicker skin that we need but a commitment to tenderness, to greet the world with our hearts exposed and our guards down. As we work towards the safety and needs of others, it's vital that we reexamine our own long-held beliefs, especially those we inherited or absorbed from majority culture without the benefit of personal critical thought. When we discover our beliefs being challenged in some way, rather than being defensive or pushing the thought away, it might be more productive to guide ourselves through the cognitive struggle with these simple questions:

Is it true? And if so, who is it true for?

Is it making me softer, more open, more aware?

Is it building walls between me and others?

Is it making me a truer reflection of the person I want to be?

In the end, it is only our tender attention to one another that will make the world safer, brighter, and truer.

So, this week, I want to encourage you to embrace one or more of these three ways to become a better neighbor.

Practice is greater than preaching.

Listening is better than talking.

Tenderness is greater than tough.

Then, I'd love to hear the stories about how this played out in your life. When we see other people around us acting in generous, kind or empathic ways, we are more inclined to act that same way ourselves. Being a good neighbor is contagious. Started by God, advanced by the Good Samaritan and continuing to enhance our lives still today.

Let's pray: Loving God, we confess that we have not always loved our neighbors as ourselves. You embodied yourself in a human body. You lived your life among those who were sick — physically, mentally, and spiritually. You reached out to touch them, spoke words to comfort them, performed miracles to heal them. Heal us and help us to take a new step to becoming a good neighbor. Amen.

## **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 23, 2022**

### **Weekly Prayer**

Lord, give me the eyes of Jesus to see my neighbors and the strangers I meet. Teach me what it means to love the stranger as I love myself. Forgive me for my selfishness, for my silence, for not caring enough for the strangers who come to my community. Teach me to love and care for the stranger the way you do. Amen.

### **Monday, October 24**

#### **Scripture: Luke 10:25-29**

A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to gain eternal life?" Jesus replied, "What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?" He responded, "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.*" Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live." But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

#### **Observation**

Lawyers or legal experts worked closely with the Pharisees in ancient Judaism. The religious convictions concerning Torah (the law books of the Old Testament) were shaped by the interpretive skills of the scribes. The legal expert, a skilled interpreter of religious traditions,

asked Jesus a rhetorical question. He knew the answer. So did Jesus, and turned it back on him. Then the savvy lawyer, knowing that “neighbor” was a nuanced, complex noun, pushed Jesus for a definitive answer: “Who is my neighbor?” But Jesus answered with a story that turned legal arguments upside down.

### **Application**

In Jesus’ day (and in many circles today), the Talmud was a book that aimed to discuss and answer questions about Jewish history and law. It helped the Jewish culture think about how to apply laws to everyday life. Like our modern laws, people interpreted the law in a variety of ways. The legal expert, knowing different teachers gave different answers, tried to trip up Jesus by asking, “Who is my neighbor?” “Neighbor” can still mean many different things. Who do you consider your neighbor? In our culture, we spend a significant amount of time detached from even our next-door neighbors. Electric garage door openers allow us to stay in our vehicles and enter our homes through an interior door, without having to set foot outside. We can go days without seeing a single neighbor. Who might you see or reconsider as a neighbor if you took less advantage of modern conveniences?

### **Prayer**

Lord God, I want to love you with my whole heart, whole mind, and whole soul. I want to love my neighbor as I love myself. Help me open my eyes to see the neighbors who live, work and breathe all around me. Amen.

### **Tuesday, October 25**

#### **Scripture: Luke 10:30-37**

Jesus replied, “A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took two full days’ worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, ‘Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.’ What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?” Then the legal expert said, “The one who demonstrated mercy toward him.”

### **Observation**

Jesus portrayed two men in elevated religious positions who, for unstated reasons, totally ignored the plight of a man beaten, robbed, and left lying in the road. Then he imagined a character who turned everything upside down. He pictured a Samaritan (a group Israelites in his day regarded in about the same light as many of them regard Palestinians today) who acted with extravagant compassion and caring.

### **Application**

In the story, the Samaritan didn’t just offer casual roadside help. He put the injured man on “his own donkey” (which would have meant he had to walk), brought him to an inn, cared for him, paid two days’ wages for more care, and offered to pay more on his return if needed. How did Jesus’ picture of the Samaritan reflect God’s vast generosity to us? How can knowing God has

been generous to us move us to be generous to other people in ways we'd be unlikely to achieve out of our own goodness?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, I don't mind being generous if it's easy and inexpensive, in time and certainly in money. Help me incorporate your idea of sacrifice into my thinking about what it might mean to be a true neighbor. Amen.

### **Wednesday, October 26**

#### **Scripture: Matthew 5:43-6:4**

"You have heard that it was said, *You must love your neighbor* and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete.

"Be careful that you don't practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. "Whenever you give to the poor, don't blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that you may give to the poor in secret. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

### **Observation**

The Old Testament did not plainly teach "hate your enemy," but some rabbis thought it did. The command to hate enemies, while emphasized by some contemporary Jewish sects, was not explicit in Scripture, but extrapolated from pious examples there (Ps 31: 6; 119: 113; 139: 21). Jesus' teaching was (and is) counter-cultural. Ancient Greek and Roman culture did not urge personal charity; Jewish piety often made it central but limited. Jesus stressed God's mercy to all people through his faithful servants. He taught us to do good not for reward, but with a humble spirit, and promised an eternal, not temporal, reward from the heavenly Father.

### **Application**

Jesus said in Matthew 5:45, "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good." What do you think his point was? When God makes straight our path, and we walk in peace, man can only do so because it is the Lord God who enables us to do so. In what ways do evil and good collide in you? Why is it that without God's help, even your most well-intentioned actions fall short of glorifying the Father?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, it's hard for me, but teach me how to love all the people you love. And help me to do the right things, not because I'm addicted to human approval, but because your love has changed me inwardly. Amen.

**Thursday, October 27**

**Scripture: Matthew 25:14-18**

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was leaving on a trip. He called his servants and handed his possessions over to them. To one he gave five valuable coins, and to another he gave two, and to another he gave one. He gave to each servant according to that servant’s ability. Then he left on his journey. “After the man left, the servant who had five valuable coins took them and went to work doing business with them. He gained five more. In the same way, the one who had two valuable coins gained two more. But the servant who had received the one valuable coin dug a hole in the ground and buried his master’s money.

**Observation**

The “coins” in this story were valuable indeed. “The Greek word is *talanton*, often translated as ‘talent,’ which refers to a monetary unit equal to more than 16 years of earnings for a laborer. But in Jesus’ story, the emphasis was less on the amount of money, and more on how faithful each servant was or wasn’t. Jesus said our faithfulness to God shows in our willingness to use whatever resources of energy, time, skills, money or other assets God gives us to bless others and build God’s kingdom.

**Application**

Jesus’ story wouldn’t have worked if the three servants had all immediately forgotten the source of the large sum of money they had to manage. Our culture tends to teach us to think, “You earned all this money and these possessions, so you can do anything you want with them.” Read Deuteronomy 8:12-18. How easy or hard do you find it to make the inner shift from “I OWN all this” to “I’m a steward to whom God has entrusted these things to use for God’s purposes”? That settled, what resources has God placed in your life? How are you using those resources to serve God’s Kingdom and bless others? Are there any resources or life-giving abilities you have “buried in a hole in the ground,” so to speak? If so, how can you begin to use them actively for God’s purposes?

**Prayer**

Lord Jesus, thank you for the good abilities and resources you’ve placed in my life (even if I sometimes wish there were more of them). Help me to manage them in ways that are faithful to your principles. Amen.

**Friday, October 28**

**Scripture: Matthew 25:19-30**

“Now after a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five valuable coins came forward with five additional coins. He said, ‘Master, you gave me five valuable coins. Look, I’ve gained five more.’ “His master replied, ‘Excellent! You are a good and faithful servant! You’ve been faithful over a little. I’ll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.’ “The second servant also came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two valuable coins. Look, I’ve gained two more.’ “His master replied, ‘Well done! You are a good and faithful servant. You’ve been faithful over a little. I’ll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.’ “Now the one who had received one valuable coin came and said, ‘Master, I knew that you are a hard man. You harvest grain where you haven’t sown. You gather crops where you haven’t spread seed. So I was afraid. And I hid my valuable coin in the ground. Here, you have what’s yours.’ “His master replied, ‘You evil and lazy servant! You knew that I harvest grain where I haven’t sown and that I gather crops where I haven’t spread seed? In that case, you should have turned my money over to the bankers so that when I

returned, you could give me what belonged to me with interest. Therefore, take from him the valuable coin and give it to the one who has ten coins. Those who have much will receive more, and they will have more than they need. But as for those who don't have much, even the little bit they have will be taken away from them. Now take the worthless servant and throw him out into the farthest darkness.' "People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.

### **Observation**

Three servants—two were called “good and faithful,” the third was fired for being “wicked and lazy.” The apostle Paul wrote that “it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). He also followed Jesus’ teaching when he wrote that living selfishly destroys our freedom, and that serving each other in love is the divine antidote for selfishness (cf. Galatians 5:13-14). God’s Spirit guides us to be faithful to our commitments to serve God and bless others.

### **Application**

John Wesley, Methodism’s founder, was a “good and faithful servant.” He made a remarkable entry in his Journal at age 81. He wrote, “On this and the four following days I walked through the town and begged two hundred pounds in order to clothe them that needed it most. But it was hard work as most of the streets were filled with melting snow... so that my feet were steeped in snow water nearly from morning till evening.” What sacrifices do you sense God calling you to make as one of God’s servants?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, “good and faithful servant”—what beautiful words to hear from your lips. But, sometimes, what difficult words to live into in my day-to-day routine. Keep shaping and guiding me into faithfulness. Amen.

### **Saturday, October 29**

#### **Scripture: Luke 17:11-19, Psalm 126:1-6**

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten men with skin diseases approached him. Keeping their distance from him, they raised their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, show us mercy!” When Jesus saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” As they left, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw that he had been healed, returned and praised God with a loud voice. He fell on his face at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. Jesus replied, “Weren’t ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? No one returned to praise God except this foreigner?” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up and go. Your faith has healed you.”

When the LORD changed Zion’s circumstances for the better,  
it was like we had been dreaming.

Our mouths were suddenly filled with laughter;  
our tongues were filled with joyful shouts.

It was even said, at that time, among the nations,  
“The LORD has done great things for them!”

Yes, the LORD has done great things for us,  
and we are overjoyed.

LORD, change our circumstances for the better,  
like dry streams in the desert waste!

Let those who plant with tears  
reap the harvest with joyful shouts.

Let those who go out,  
crying and carrying their seed,  
come home with joyful shouts,  
carrying bales of grain!

### **Observation**

Jesus healed a group of ten lepers—men with visible skin diseases, shunned and outcast. Of the ten, only a Samaritan came back to say “thank you.” This real-life experience echoed Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan. Israel’s long history included incredibly low times of misery at the hands of tyrants (notably exile in Babylon—cf. 2 Kings 24:13-14, 25:11). It also included their joyous gratitude for God’s action to deliver them from exile. Psalm 126 poetically recalled the gladness of the times when God lifted Israel up from their lowly status, and prayed that God would again allow them to live in the joy of divine deliverance.

### **Application**

Unlike the story in Luke 17, where only one of ten bothered to say “thank you,” Ephesians 5:20 invited God’s people to “always give thanks to God the Father for everything.” Whatever your current problems, take time to list anything you’re thankful for (e.g. a glorious sunset, a child’s giggle, the velvety texture of a dog’s ears, your favorite meal, a roof over your head, Jesus’ love) and thank God for it. Make a game of it—make daily gratitude your way of life. The second half of Psalm 126 was a confident prayer, trusting that the same God who delivered in the past would do it again. How can weaving the practice of gratitude into your life help you to pray, and mean, the words of the psalm: “Let those who plant with tears reap the harvest with joyful shouts”?

### **Prayer**

Lord, it’s easy for me to celebrate the raise, the new job, the healthy new baby. I wish it weren’t so easy for me to forget my gratitude every time things don’t turn out as I’d wished, especially in these times of economic stress and political polarization. Make me more and more like the Samaritan who remembered to express gratitude. Amen.