

“A Different Reason for Gratitude”

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As I began to muse about the month of November and this article, I was drawn to the thought of Thanksgiving Day – a wonderful holiday which combines both secular and religious observance. It doesn't matter what church people attend; as a nation, we are called to pause for one day to celebrate God's gifts to us. Most often, we do this in the context of a meal – sometimes with family or friends, or also observed in countless soup kitchens and other programs which reach out to the poor, the homeless, or those who have no one else with whom to share a meal. Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays! As one of my friends puts it daily, “Let us pray in thanksgiving for prayers answered and blessings received.”

My musings, however, soon began to take a strange turn: I started to become aware of the many blessings I've received which were disguised, at first, as disappointments or difficulties. These “blessings in disguise” happened when it seemed as if God was precisely NOT answering my prayers for something, or that the answer to what I was asking was “No.”

I was taken back a number of years to when I lived in Tennessee in the heart of the land of country music. I recalled a song recorded by Garth Brooks: “Unanswered Prayers.” In the song, Brooks reminisces about the times when he thought his prayers (about wanting to marry his high school girlfriend, for example) were “not answered” in a way he wanted. It was those “unanswered prayers” that eventually led to his meeting his wife and experiencing a life filled with love.

I've had some of the same experiences. I've often prayed fervently for one thing, only to have something else happen. Eventually, though, I've experienced that God's plan was a much better idea than what I had initially had in mind. Those “unanswered prayers” have led to wonderful experiences in ministry and to my meeting some very important people in my life.

My Aunt Angie always says, “If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.” I've come to know how true that is. God's wisdom and God's plans are often beyond our imagination, and what God has in store for us is usually beyond the horizon of our expectations.

As our nation pauses this month to gratefully acknowledge God's blessings, maybe we should all pause to remember the unexpected blessings that God had in store for us—blessings that will, despite our own plans, bring us much more than we can ever hope for.