

Giving Thanks for What's Missing

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

November is the time when we celebrate Thanksgiving, reflecting on the blessings God has given us. We give thanks for faith, loved ones, and the countless gifts that enrich our lives. The psalmist reminds us to *"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever" (Psalm 107:1)*. And each of us has so much to be thankful for!

But this Thanksgiving, I'd like to invite us to think about gratitude from a slightly different perspective. Have you ever thanked God for something you didn't receive?

Perhaps there was a job you desperately wanted but didn't get, only to discover another opportunity that was a much better fit. Maybe a relationship you hoped would work out came to an end, making room for healthier and more fulfilling relationships. Or perhaps a plan you were convinced was perfect for you never materialized. At the time, you may have felt terribly disappointed. Yet years later, looking back, you found yourself thinking, "Thank you, God. I'm so glad that didn't happen the way I wanted it to!"

Of course, not everything missing from our lives eventually becomes something for which we are thankful. There are genuine losses, illnesses, and heartbreaks that we would never call blessings, and faith does not require us to pretend otherwise. But there are also those remarkable moments when we discover that something we once regarded as a great disappointment became part of the path toward something we now treasure.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us of something important about the relationship between God's wisdom and our own. Speaking through the prophet, God declares, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8)*. These words remind us that our understanding is limited. We can only see life from where we are standing today, while God's wisdom extends far beyond anything we can comprehend.

When we pray, we naturally ask God for the things we believe will make our lives better. And there is nothing wrong with that! Jesus himself encourages us to ask, seek, and knock. But sometimes, with the benefit of hindsight, we begin to understand that what we wanted so badly might not have been what was best for us after all. The plan that fell apart opened new possibilities. The door that closed caused us to notice a window that had been open all along. And occasionally, we can look back at one of those old prayers and smile, saying, "Lord, I really wanted that. But thank you for knowing more than I did."

While we may not always understand why life unfolds as it does, sometimes the passage of time gives us a new appreciation for the unexpected ways God works in our lives. In fact, the very things we thought we needed turn out to be things we're grateful we never received.

So this Thanksgiving, as we count our blessings, perhaps we can also remember some of the things we didn't receive. Is there something you once desperately wanted that you are now grateful you didn't receive? And might remembering those experiences help you trust God with the things you're praying about today?

May we give thanks for the blessings we have received, for those we are only beginning to recognize, and perhaps even for a few things we are now grateful we never received at all.

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone!

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Jonathan