

An elderly man in Phoenix calls his son in New York and says, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing; 45 years of misery is enough."

"Pop, what are you talking about?" the son screams.

"We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," the old man says. "We're sick of each other, and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her." Then he hangs up.

Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. "Like heck they're getting divorced," she shouts, "I'll take care of this." She calls Phoenix immediately, and screams at the old man, "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?"

The old man hangs up his phone and turns to his wife. "Okay," he says, "They're coming for Thanksgiving and paying their own fares."

I don't know how those kids will react when they get home, but maybe it does take the threat of something bad to help see the good we already have. Back during the dark days of 1929, a group of ministers gathered to discuss how they should conduct their Thanksgiving Sunday services. Things were about as bad as they could get, with no sign of relief. The bread lines were depressingly long, the stock market had plummeted, and the term Great Depression seemed an apt description for the mood of the country. The ministers thought they should only lightly touch upon the subject of Thanksgiving in deference to the human misery all about them.

After all, what was there was to be thankful for? But one pastor of a large congregation in the city that rallied the group. This was not the time, he suggested, to give mere passing mention to Thanksgiving, just the opposite. This was the time for the nation to get matters in perspective and thank God for blessings always present, but perhaps suppressed due to intense hardship.

I suggest to you the ministers struck upon something. The most intense moments of thankfulness are not found in times of plenty, but when difficulties abound. Think of the Pilgrims that first Thanksgiving. Half their number dead, men without a country, but still there was thanksgiving to God. Their gratitude was not for something but in something. It was that same sense of gratitude that lead Abraham Lincoln to formally establish the first Thanksgiving Day in the midst of national civil war, when the butcher's list of casualties seemed to have no end and the very nation struggled for survival.

Perhaps in your own life, right now, things are tense or difficult and certainly the news shows never tire of listing all the crises that face our nation, so maybe this really is the time to count our blessings for a change. It is a time when each of us needs to ask ourselves the question: Have I taken inventory of my life lately? Have I made an effort to count all the things that I do have in life instead of complaining about the things that I don't have. What I am suggesting here is not some shallow "count your blessings" platitude. But from time to time, in a genuine kind of a way, we need to sit down and do some talking to ourselves about all of the gifts and opportunities and challenges that God has given each one of us.

Perhaps there is a deep underlying wisdom in the children's poem that says: "**Count your blessings one by one, and you might be surprised what the Lord has done.**"

The truly important things in life are generally the intangibles, like the way we present ourselves to others. The one that is often forgotten and undoubtedly the most important is our faith. It is only through faith that we come together as a community to give thanks to God this day. It is our faith in peoples, institutions, and ideas which allows our society to progress. As we gather around the dining room table and celebrate with family, friends, and loved ones, sharing the produce of the land, let us be mindful of the great gifts God has given us.