

Greetings!

Well, here we are again, autumn leaves, football and that great Thanksgiving dinner; turkey, southern style cornbread dressing (made like mom's), cranberry sauce and of course pumpkin and pecan pies! I've wondered why we don't eat like this more often during the rest of the year. I know you're looking forward to the day with excitement, or are you? It has always been one of my favorite holidays, with the exception of one particular year. So, let me tell you about the time I hated Thanksgiving Day.

That Hated Thanksgiving Day

It was Thanksgiving many years ago that I pulled back onto my street, parked, and begin to cry uncontrollably. What had always been a wonderful day for our family was, for the first time, a day I would rather have skipped. I sat for awhile, crying and talking through it with God. I wasn't happy and I wanted Him to know it.

Frank had spent the day with us, and I had just returned from taking him home. He lived in a one-room rental with few belongings, and what he did own was dirty and strewn about the room. The smell on both Frank and the room was almost unbearable. Frank was an alcoholic and had suffered from diabetes for years. As a result, he was missing one leg, used crutches to move around, and often needed a shoulder to lean on so he wouldn't fall.

Frank was alone in the world, with no family or close friends with whom to spend Thanksgiving, so I felt that I couldn't allow him to spend another one having his dinner at the homeless shelter. Even though my heart wasn't in it, I did the "Christian" thing and invited Frank to have Thanksgiving dinner with us.

It was a tough year for us; a friend had died only months prior from AIDS; Uncle Ron, as he was called by our kids, was our closest friend. Having his own key to our house, we would often arrive home to find him inside, TV on, snoring loudly as he slept in my recliner. For several months before his passing, we had spent hours at his hospital bedside helping in any way we possibly could.

Ron had spent many Thanksgivings at our table. He would bring his sauerkraut (which we "southerners" promptly turned our noses up at the offensive smell!), and we would spend the day eating, watching movies and taking a nap before the "second course" of eating began. Now, he was gone and here was Frank.

I was angry with God, *"How could He do this to me!"* The sadness was overwhelming as the late afternoon sun filtered through my tear-filled eyes. Ron's passing had left a void that Frank couldn't fill, and it was God that I blamed for this empty feeling. Then, my anger turned toward myself. How could I be so selfish? Since when had I so totally begun to miss the intent of this holiday?

A short time afterward, Frank passed away from complications with his diabetes. Now, years later, I am able to see the bigger picture that surrounded that day. Though my heart ached from the loss of a dear friend, I had become a friend to Frank. Rather than spending his day alone, he spent it in conversation with our family, and returned to his room with enough leftovers to carry him for several days. I think he enjoyed his Thanksgiving Day with us.

I have become thankful, over time, for a Thanksgiving Day that I so hated; thankful that I was able to enjoy a deep friendship with someone during his last years and able to be a friend to someone else during his last days. Like myself on that day, we've come to see much about life as it relates to us and our feelings, rather than see it from someone else's perspective. God wanted me to see Thanksgiving that year from Frank's perspective, but I wasn't willing to let go of myself long enough to do so.

I have since apologized to God for being angry with Him, and I've expressed my gratitude for the wonderful blessings He has placed in my life. While having great food, and a day just to hang out with our friends and family, Thanksgiving really is about more than these things. It is about looking at life from a different perspective. It's about understanding the bigger picture that expands beyond ourselves and knowing that everything has its place and its time in our lives, even if it is just temporary.

And that's just a thought . . .

My Final Word

I hesitated writing this week's Just a Thought because I didn't want you to think that I was crying in my chocolate milk, and just wanted your pity. The reality is, many will celebrate this holiday season under adverse conditions. One of our friends will "celebrate" her first Thanksgiving since her husband's sudden death last year, and another one will spend it in a rehab center. She spent this past year in the hospital after a stroke and, while confined to the hospital, she lost her home and most of what she owned. Regardless, she was proud to show me how she had learned to walk again, one step at a time, just a couple of weeks ago. On Christmas day 2008, I visited two different hospitals to spend a few minutes with friends who were recovering from life threatening conditions. Adversity takes no break during the holidays and is no respecter of persons.

Whatever your situation might be this year, my prayer is that you'll make it through and somewhere down the road you'll see the bigger picture that surrounded this time of your life. I know it's difficult when you're "in the moment", but I have faith in you, and in the God we trust. My advice to you? Be careful and don't allow the emotional anger to steal what could otherwise be a wonderful day.

For the rest of you who are on top of life right now, sacrifice a moment and help someone else who needs a friend. Who knows, maybe circumstances will be reversed next year and you'll be the one having a difficult time.

Have a *thankful* Thanksgiving Day!

Chris

