

Let's Be Clear: We Do Not Deserve God's Hand of Blessing

A fellow pastor and I were racing to the airport to pick up some guests coming to our city. Our churches were co-hosting a conference and some of the inbound passengers were to be speakers at our event. Our guests were flying in from Ethiopia, and this would be their very first visit to America.

It wasn't hard to spot the group we were to pick up. Amidst the rush of people getting off the plane, mostly Anglos, like myself, there slowly walked several men with the darkest skin pigment I had ever seen. They all were dressed in similar army-fatigue-green clothes of nondescript design. Coming down the airport corridor, their gait was slow, every step measured. The men were looking around in all directions—awed by the sights, sounds, wall-sized ads and airport shopping kiosks: Their first moments in noisy, neon America.

No mistaking it, these were our Ethiopian guests. What struck me most about their appearance was that all were so very, very *thin*. And I don't just mean "skinny" compared to today's near-universal American corpulence. The men appeared to be borderline malnourished. Their arms looked like lengths of shiny black broomsticks strung together. Bony elbows moved like loose hinges, swinging freely as the men ambled toward us. But their gaunt faces carried broad smiles as we all met for the first time, embracing, praying concisely, then hurrying to our van.

When I offered to pull in somewhere and get the men a snack, the men agreed enthusiastically. Because it was early on a Sunday morning, the only thing open was a grocery store. "Walk inside with me," I said, trying to hustle the group along.

"We'll find something for everyone to eat! What would you like? Orange juice? A muffin or bagel?"

The next few moments became a memory I will never forget. While the supermarket we entered was well-stocked and fairly new, it was by no means the nicest grocery store I'd ever seen. There are "grocery stores," and then there are glitzy, big-box expo stores, decked out like a trade-show convention showcasing food as a lifestyle. This particular store wasn't all that fancy, and yet it left our Ethiopian friends dumbstruck. So much food, and so many choices—everywhere. At the end of an aisle one of the men picked up a box of Frosted Flakes, slowly rotating it around, just staring at it in silence. Looking up and down at the aisle's end cap display, the man said, "There are so many [boxes] here."

The other pastor and I could tell that the men were speechless over this typical American grocery. Gently taking one man by the elbow, I led the group around the corner.

"Take a look at this," I said. A 100-foot long aisle of countless choices loomed before us: *The cereal aisle*. For what seemed like a very long time, the men gazed at the hundreds of boxes with mouths open. No tour group at an art museum could have projected more reverent awe. I think if we had shown them the bread aisle and meat departments, their credulity would have been exhausted.

And here is the question one man asked that I will never forget: In almost a whisper, an Ethiopian pastor turned to me and asked, "Is there a food repository like this in every city?" His eyes had an almost had pleading look about them, and his question thoroughly caught me off-guard: "Is there a food repository like this in every city?"

I noticed one of the pastors seemed to be counting something on his fingers. I thought of how the stocked shelves of this ordinary grocery store could feed so many of their fellow

citizens who lay starving. Conviction fell over me as I thought of how simpler foods and “off brands” we might turn our nose at would be delicacies to billions outside America. “My brother,” I said, “there is a food repository like this on nearly every corner.”

What might all of this have to do with America at Thanksgiving 2017? My point is to remind myself how very good we have it here in the . How many dread the “chore” of grocery shopping? Yet we Americans enjoy such bounty that many in the world, for whom hunger pain is a daily reality, would be rendered speechless at the mere sight of your local store’s inventory.

We are so blessed in America! Our infrastructure is reliable, our gasoline is cheap, our food is affordable and the choices endless. We should be thankful that America is a nation whose backbone was—and largely still is—the family.

Americans enjoy amenities people from other eras would have fainted over, such as hot water on demand and the ability to maintain personal hygiene. We have cell phones, paved roads, hospitals and backyards not filled with dangerous animals.

We are fortunate to be a nation of over 300,000 churches, and we still may freely broadcast Christian content via the airwaves and online. In our country, problems are addressed with (relatively) orderly elections and not violent revolutions.

Regarding the proliferation of churches throughout the colonies, Thomas Paine in 1776 said, “Where, say some, is the King of America? I’ll tell you, friend, He reigns above!” As God has uniquely blessed America, it is only prudent to consider how to keep America in this position.

We do not deserve God’s hand of blessing. But this Thanksgiving, let’s be grateful for it and humble enough to pray with gratitude and sincerity. Thank God for our liberty—and for the food repository in every city. {eoa}

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