

We have a friend named Steve who loves gadgets. The boys and I enjoy going to his house, because he always has something new for us to play with. It's almost better than visiting a hardware store. He's retired now and has been having some health setbacks, so Sam and I went to visit him and his wife, Denise, last week.

We hadn't been there very long when Steve went into their spare bedroom where he keeps all his gadgets and came out carrying this odd looking contraption. He said, "Guess what this is?"

We took turns guessing, but couldn't figure it out.

Then Steve said, "They're night vision goggles. They let you see in the dark."

Well, what kid hasn't dreamed of having something like that! That's almost as good as the X-ray glasses they used to sell in the back of comic books. *See through walls! See through clothes! Amaze and Impress Your Friends!*

Sam looked at Steve and said, "Can we take them home?"

I take Sam with me everywhere I go, because he's still willing to ask people the kind of questions I'm too polite to ask.

So Steve let us take them home.

We drove home, went out into the yard, by then it was dark, and tried out the goggles. They were interesting, but not all that different than if you had a flashlight. Then we looked at the sky.

Night vision goggles work by gathering and magnifying all available light. Which meant that even the dimmest stars normally invisible to the human eye can be easily seen through night vision goggles. If you've ever been way out in the country miles from the nearest city and have marveled at the number of stars, multiply that number millions of times and that's what the sky looks like through night vision goggles. It is, in a word, staggering.

When I was a kid, my brother Glenn dared me to pour a gallon of milk in a bucket and see if I could stand in our kitchen and swirl the bucket around so quickly over my head that no milk would come out. It turns I couldn't, but the sky reminded me of our kitchen. Everywhere you looked, there were millions of white spots.

It was really quite beautiful. I resort to humor in describing it, because I struggle to find the words that can capture the experience. When I realize I was seeing only a tiny sliver of one galaxy in a universe of perhaps 100 billion galaxies, and that some of the galaxies contain in excess of one trillion stars, I am left nearly speechless.

And here's the thing. All that beauty, all that loveliness, has been over my head all this time, and I had no idea. I mean, I knew there were stars up there, but I had no idea they looked like that. Because it took a method of seeing them that hadn't been available to me. You know what it made me think? It made me wonder what else I've been missing? What else is right in front of me I've either not been equipped to see, haven't had the tools to see, maybe haven't had the sensitivity to see, or have just been too busy to notice? What else have I been missing? What have you been missing?

Jesus enters the synagogue one Sabbath day, and sees a man with a withered hand. Let's stop and think about that. Here's a man with an obvious handicap. Probably grew up in that community. Probably known to everyone. Probably been right in front of them all these years. Now truthfully, there wasn't much they could have done to fix the guy's hand. There were no hospitals and surgeons then. Probably wasn't much they could have done. But when someone came along who could, don't you think their amazement and appreciation would have been so great they might have overlooked the Sabbath violation?

I tell you, I'd be really bothered by them, if I weren't just like them.

There was a man at our house this past week who'd come to give us a bid on work we needed done. I had to show him something outside and it was raining. He was using a cane and couldn't walk very fast. I felt myself feeling impatient and getting annoyed because I was having to stand in the rain longer than I wanted. When he caught up with me, he apologized for moving so slowly, then explained he'd been wounded while serving in the military, and the doctors had told him he probably wouldn't ever walk again, but now he was walking with a cane and one day he was going to walk without it. And I'd been thinking my life was tough because I was getting rained on. Geez, talk about blindness! Talk about having a miracle in front of you and not noticing it? What else have I been missing? What have you been missing? What do we all miss?

There's so much beauty, friends, so much wonder in this world. A while back I was in St. Louis, staying at a hotel across from the Archway. Some folks invited me out to dinner and we went to the hotel restaurant whose windows overlooked the Archway. Very elegant. It's the kind of place I like to eat when someone else is paying. But I was very self-conscious because they were paying me to speak so I knew I had to act smart, even though I didn't feel smart. So I couldn't relax, because I just knew I had a big chunk of lettuce wedged in my front teeth and there was toilet paper stuck to the bottom of my shoe and everyone was staring at me and trying not to laugh.

And when we're self-conscious, when we are all we're thinking about, we tend not to engage the world around us too deeply because we're too busy being aware of ourselves. So it took me awhile to notice that the other people in the restaurant were getting out of their chairs and walking toward the window. It had been raining all day, but while we were eating, the sun had come out and there were two rainbows in the eastern sky, arching right over the top of the Archway. It was dazzling, like God was in first grade and had broken open a box of Crayolas and gone wild with them. Colors I didn't even know could be in rainbows. If we had opened the windows, we could have smelled the crayons, it seemed so real.

Before long all the people in the restaurant were out of their chairs and pressed against the windows, looking at the rainbows, talking excitedly. Then this hush descended. It got very quiet, like in church when something holy is happening, and then this lady standing next to me whispered, "What a gift."

What a gift. And I almost missed it because I was worrying what people thought of me. The stars, the rainbows, the gifts from God, the triumph of the human spirit, and if we forget to look closely, if we fail to see them, we miss so much. So Thanksgiving is our day to say to God and one another, "Oh, yes, I see them. What a gift! Thank you!"