



In Plane Site

I recently went to see an accountant whose office I'd never been to. In the lobby I glanced through the directory three or four times, but couldn't find him. Was he listed under another name? Was I in the wrong building? I phoned him. "Where are you?" He verified that he was in the same building I was. I looked again at the directory. Still nothing. I climbed the stairs, wandered around and found his office anyway.

"By the way, your name is missing from the directory downstairs," I informed him. "You really should get that fixed. Your clients will be confused."

He followed me downstairs, and to my astonishment, there, in plain sight, in the same directory I had searched only minutes ago, was his name. He turned his head and regarded me with one eyebrow cocked.

"Well," I tried to explain, "there's a space under your name, which makes it seem to be part of the directory heading. That's why I didn't notice it, and just looked at the list below..."

"Uh-huh," he said.

"Okay," I said sheepishly, "I guess I was confused."

On the way home, I thought of my decades in publication design and editing. There were always hundreds of errors our meticulous proofreaders caught. But a few times we had major mistakes (misspelled headlines or photo captions switched) detected just in the nick of time before printing (or after!). These devious errors had hidden themselves in plain sight, evading the eyes of seasoned professionals. We just didn't expect to see big, obvious errors like this, so we didn't look for them.

When I don't expect something to be in a certain place, that's always the last place I look in the kitchen, garage or living room. This principle seems to apply to keys, TV remotes, garage door openers, cell phones, billfolds, glasses, tools, uncashed checks, credit cards, you name it—and I think it also applies to life.

Ponder with me for a moment—you might not expect to find anything good or

thankworthy about aging, about sickness or disability, about the loss of family and friends, about unemployment, about war, about natural disasters. Okay, this is grim, which is why we don't like to dwell on this stuff. But keep pondering anyway.

I didn't expect anything good about being old, but I'm thankful for a relatively long life. I didn't expect anything good about sickness, but I'm thankful it motivates me to take better care of myself. I didn't expect anything good about the loss of family or friends, but I'm thankful for having known and loved so many great people. A few lean years taught frugality and resourcefulness (and thankfulness that we may later be in a position to help those in need). War years taught an appreciation of peace. Natural disasters taught gratefulness for times of safety and the times we have been spared from such calamities. There's plenty to be thankful for in places we least expect.

Before you think I'm just reciting the old saying "every cloud has a silver lining," let me suggest that we're talking about much more than a silver lining.

"My Christian brothers, you should be happy when you have all kinds of tests. You know these prove your faith. It helps you not to give up. Learn well how to wait so you will be strong and complete and in need of nothing." (James 1:2-4, New Life Version). I like the clarity of this translation. The gist is that Christ-followers are not immune from troubles. Troubles are a necessary part of this physical life and Jesus uses them to infuse us with his patience.

Sometimes we've made requests of God and we think he hasn't responded, because they weren't answered where and how we expect. Maybe we've given up and we regard them as never received or totally lost. Or maybe we're just confused. Perhaps we should take a look in the places we least expect. Maybe many great gifts from God have already been there for quite a while right under our noses—in plain sight (or plane site). □

—Monte Wolverton