

A few years ago Robert Altman made a movie based on the popular weekly radio show *A Prairie Home Companion*. As things turned out, it was the beloved director's last film, for he died a few months after its release.

Actors who worked with Altman say they loved to make movies with him. They appreciated the trust he placed in them—Altman would tell the actors what he wanted to achieve in a particular scene, then he would start the cameras and give the actors free reign. Yes, there was always a script, but it was more of an outline.

This improvisational style is evident in all of Altman's films: characters frequently interrupt each other's speaking, and movement is unstructured. For instance, in *A Prairie Home Companion*, the performers in a radio variety show romp through an upbeat song with abandon. In the frolicsome spirit of the moment, G. K. approaches Lola to give her a friendly embrace, but she has turned aside and so does not notice his gesture. I detected a moment's hesitation as G. K. slowly lowers his arms and appears to wonder what he should do next.

If, as Shakespeare wrote, "All the world's a stage," and if God is the director, then God is, I believe, a director in the manner of Robert Altman. In our best moments we actors desire to follow God's direction—that is, to do God's will. But God seldom, if ever, tells us explicitly how to accomplish that. Yes, we have the storyline of the Bible; we have the counsel of wise and faithful saints who acted their parts before us; and we have the Holy Spirit as our "coach." But the actual *acting*—the responsibility to "flesh out" our roles as the story moves to its dramatic conclusion—well, we just have to improvise. We must be familiar with the story (the gospel) and with the director's "vision" in order to act our parts in ways that are true to that vision. But as to where to stand, what to say, and where to move next, God trusts us to make those decisions.

Admittedly, we don't always make the best decisions. But the cameras keep rolling, and we adapt to the circumstances and press on. As long as we "stay in character" (that is, remain faithful), the story progresses toward its intended resolution, and the Director is pleased.

For the new year, you may have resolved to follow God's will better. Here's a tip: Don't become so anxious about "doing it right" that you get paralyzed and do nothing at all. Like a good trouper, remember the script, accept the help of your fellow actors, follow the guidance of your coach, stay in character, and keep going.