

## MONDAY MANNA

25 November 2019

### REMEMBERING TO BE THANKFUL – AT ALL TIMES

By Robert J. Tamasy

What are you thankful for – your career, your family, your health, financial prosperity? How often do you pause to ponder or reflect on the positives in your life – to be genuinely thankful? And when you do give thanks, to whom, or what, do you express your gratitude?

For many people in the United States, this week marks two important events: The official start of the Christmas season (although for many retailers, that began around the middle of August), and the observance of Thanksgiving Day, a holiday in which men, women and children offer thanks for their blessings in life. For some, it is a time to direct attention to the God who bestows those blessings. Others focus their thankfulness elsewhere – perhaps to good fortune, their own efforts, or random circumstances.

Personally, I offer thanks to God, whom the Bible describes as the Creator, provider and sustainer of all that is, ever has been and ever will be. I recognise that I possess certain gifts and abilities, but also understand I did nothing to earn them. I certainly could not purchase them anywhere. I believe the Lord gave them to me to develop and use in bringing glory to Him. And for that, and many other things, I thank Him.

At the same time, I do not believe thanksgiving should be confined to a particular day or season. One of the earliest Bible verses I learned admonishes, *“give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18). As I understand it, “in all circumstances” or “in everything” (as another translation terms it) means...in all circumstances. In everything.

So, this means we are to give thanks not only for good things that happen in our lives, what we typically define as our “blessings,” but also for difficult, even painful circumstances. Another passage presents it this way: *“In every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”* (Philippians 4:6).

It is easy to feel gratitude at those times when everything seems to be going well. All the bills are paid; we have more than enough clothes to wear; we have a roof over our heads and food in the refrigerator; we have not had any health setbacks; we find our work enjoyable and rewarding. As some might say, “It’s all good!”

However, we all have learned that in life, hardships and adversities do occur. Emergencies happen, upsetting our budgets. We or someone we love receive a concerning medical report. Our jobs become tedious, frustrating, even agonising – yet we have no better options. How do we remain thankful at times like that? I think we find the answer in the Scriptures. Our focus should be on God, who promises to always be with us and to meet our needs, not on our circumstances, no matter how troubling they may be.

In a well-known psalm, the writer describes numerous setbacks and admits, *“In my anguish I cried to the Lord.”* But then he adds, *“and he answered by setting me free. The Lord is with me, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”* (Psalm 118:5-6). Having this assurance, at both the beginning and the end of the psalm, he is able to exhort his readers, *“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures forever”* (Psalm 118:1,29).

When we trust that God is in control, we can give thanks to Him in good times and bad times. We can, as another Psalm tells us, *“Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise His name”* (Psalm 100:4).

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### **Reflection/Discussion Questions**

To revisit the opening question, what things in your life are you most thankful for?

Are there things in your life – difficult realities or circumstances – for which you find difficult to feel any measure of thankfulness? If so, what are they, and how have you been dealing with them?

What is your reaction to reading biblical passages that tell us to “give thanks in all circumstances” or “in every situation”? How can that even be possible?

How could shifting our focus away from difficult or challenging circumstances and instead, directing it toward God, whom the Scriptures describe as “good, his love endures forever,” change our feelings of thankfulness – or the lack of it? Explain your answer.

*NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:*

Psalm 95:1-2, 147:1,7

Daniel 6:10

Ephesians 5:19-20

Colossians 3:17