

MONDAY MANNA

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GIVING THANKS EVEN IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY

By Robert J. Tamasy

Once again, we enter the time of year when in some countries, special thanksgiving observances take place. Even though it does not require an official holiday to be thankful, sometimes we need a reminder. Especially during a year like the one we all have been experiencing, with adversity coming in many forms. No doubt some people are wondering, "Giving thanks? For what?"

Without question, the global coronavirus pandemic has affected each of us in different ways. Some have suffered from the virus personally; others have lost loved ones. Virtually everyone has felt the economic impact of mandated shutdowns, whether through lost jobs, layoffs, or decreased profits and revenues.

As a result, we might find ourselves challenged, at a time designated for thanksgiving, to feel thankful. And yet, I am reminded of my friend Albert, whose life has been marked by one form of adversity after another: Growing up as a child in the Netherlands during World War II; illness and disease; then many challenges he had to overcome as an entrepreneur.

Some might respond to serious setbacks like these by shaking their fists at God. Instead, Albert looks back on his life with genuine gratitude. He even wrote a booklet called, "Saying 'Thank You' Even When You Don't Feel Thankful." In it Albert recounts not only the hardships he and his family had to endure, but also the many ways the Lord used those difficult times to transform his life, presenting opportunities he could never have imagined, and filling it with joy and a profound sense of fulfillment.

What is the secret? Years ago, another friend often observed, "When it is all said and done, only two things will remain: the Word of God, and people." We have the enduring, timeless truths God has given to us through the Scriptures. And then there are the lives we touch during our days on earth, people we can impact for eternity. If we keep those as our focus, we can be thankful regardless of what circumstances we encounter, good or bad.

Briefly, here are some helpful principles from the Bible about thanksgiving:

Thanksgiving is continual. We do not need to pause from activities or set aside special times to express thanks. It should be an ongoing attitude of the heart. *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Thanksgiving is expectant. Even in the midst of adversity, trust in God enables us to believe with confidence that He will use our circumstances for His – and our – ultimate good. *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28). *"Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 5:20).

Thanksgiving is giving back to God. Giving thanks to the Lord means acknowledging all He has done for us, knowing that even though we did not deserve His love, grace and mercy, He has given them to us freely – along with the material blessings of this life. *"Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song"* (Psalm 95:2). *"Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks and bless his name"* (Psalm 100:4).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

When you hear the word "thanksgiving," what comes to your mind? How easy is it for you to express thanks to others – even to God? Explain your answer.

If you were to rate your personal level of thankfulness right now, on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), what score would you give it? Why did you give it that score?

What are two or three things you feel thankful for, even if you have encountered some very difficult times during the past year?

Do you genuinely believe the biblical promise that God works all things together for good to those who love Him? How would you explain that in your own words?

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

Psalm 50:14-15, 100:1-5; 107:1-9,19-22

Philippians 4:6

Colossians 4:2

1 Timothy 4:4-5