

MONDAY MANNA

28 December 2020

AFTER THE 'WORST OF TIMES,' PLANNING FOR BETTER TIMES

By Robert J. Tamasy

Charles Dickens, in his classic novel, *The Tale of Two Cities*, opened with the declaration, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." In some respects, it is hard to believe another calendar year is nearly over – but many of us would agree that calling it the "worst of times" is a good description.

If 2020 were a manufactured product for sale, it probably would have been recalled by now. The global pandemic has had serious repercussions at every level of life, even beyond the deaths and illnesses it has caused. For the marketplace and economies throughout the world, consequences have been severe.

Businesses have been shut down, some permanently. Schools were closed, and in many cases, virtual learning continues online. Many jobs have been lost. And our sense of freedom, the ability to go wherever and whenever we want – without masks – has been severely limited. In some parts of the world, severe weather and huge fires have stolen attention from the coronavirus. And now we are wondering about the development of a COVID-19 vaccine, and whether it will be effective.

Be honest: when the calendar turned to 2020 back on January 1, could you have imagined what this year has brought? If you anticipated this, we all would like your advice on future investments. Because if this year has taught us anything, it is to expect the unexpected. As we look ahead to the next year, how should this affect our planning and goal-setting? The Bible has some wise advice to follow:

Be careful about where we place our trust. As we look to the future, we often put our confidence in ourselves, the government, or the economy. This past year, however, has shown that none of these is as reliable as we thought. *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight"* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Be diligent to proceed with the right motives. A good question to ask as we establish goals, whether for a new year or a new enterprise, is "Why am I doing this?" If our desire is to serve and honour God through our lives and our work, we can trust that He will direct our efforts. *"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed"* (Proverbs 16:3).

Be realistic in your plans and expectations. At times we believe we know exactly what we should do and when to implement our plans, but then something unexpected occurs – like a pandemic – and then those ideas and preparations fall by the wayside. Often, in retrospect, we discover that although what we had hoped to happen did not occur, an even better result came about. This is why trusting God, and not our own limited perspectives, is best. *"A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?"* (Proverbs 20:24).

Be certain to put God first in your goal-setting and planning. Focusing on what we want and what we intend to accomplish sometimes works, but often our own efforts fall far short of what we had hoped. By committing what we do to God, He not only will enable us to achieve our goals but also will help us to more clearly define what our desires and dreams actually should be. *"Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: he will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun"* (Psalm 37:3-5).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

At the beginning of this current year, what were some of your goals and expectations? Did you have any idea that the year would turn out to be as turbulent and chaotic as it has been?

How have you responded to the pandemic and its ramifications as the year has unfolded? What has happened to the plans and goals you established at the outset?

What role has your faith in God played – if at all – in how you have coped with the setbacks that have resulted from COVID-19 and its many restrictions?

As you look ahead to the coming year, knowing from recent experience how unexpected events can derail even the best-conceived plans, are you incorporating faith in God and His direction into your planning and goal-setting? Explain your answer.

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

Proverbs 16:4,9, 19:21, 27:1

Ecclesiastes 3:22, 5:18-20, 9:11-12

Colossians 3:17,23-24