

THE WHAT, WHO AND WHY OF THANKSGIVING
By Robert J. Tamasy

This week the United States marks the annual Thanksgiving Day observance. Similar holidays on various dates are observed in other nations, including Canada, Germany, Japan, Austria, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Liberia, and unofficially in countries such as Brazil and Philippines. Researching special days for thanksgiving has shown that observances also are conducted in the Dutch town of Leiden and the Australian territory of Norfolk Island.

This raises some questions: If we observe a day of thanksgiving, what should we be thankful for? And to whom should we be thankful? What if we live in a country that does not have any designated observance for thanksgiving? Let's look at these questions individually, using the Bible as a guide:

What should we be thankful for? Sometimes we are inclined to pat ourselves on the back when we experience success and important accomplishments. It might be true that we have worked hard to achieve those things through our abilities. However, how did those opportunities come about? How did we receive the innate talents and skills we used? We certainly did not purchase them at the mall or a specialty store. In many cases, we were born with traits useful for the kinds of work we do.

What about circumstances that were not desirable, times of hardship and adversity that we could not avoid? Should we be thankful for those as well? A friend of mine, Albert, after experiencing many difficult times personally and professionally, concluded yes, we should be thankful, even for the "bad stuff." Because God uses such things in our lives for our ultimate good and His glory.

So, the Scriptures teach, we should be thankful during the good times in life – but also for the bad times. Because the Lord uses them all as part of His refining process for us. The Bible says, "Rejoice always.... In everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16,18).

To whom should we be thankful? As noted above, in many cases we did not create the opportunities that led us to success and notable achievements. And the abilities and talents we utilized might have been developed and refined with time and practice, but the "raw material" was given to us by God.

This is why the Scriptures urge us to, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:16-17).

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What if ‘Thanksgiving Day’ is not observed in the nation where you live? Being thankful – or even having a personal ‘thanksgiving day’ observance – does not require a national edict or even a local proclamation. It can be, and should be, a natural response for the blessings we receive every day.

In fact, for those of us who believe as James 1:17 says, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows,” our giving of thanks should be an everyday occurrence. As the psalmist wrote, “...that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O Lord, my God, I will give You thanks forever” (Psalm 30:12).

© 2023. Robert J. Tamasy has written *Marketplace Ambassadors: CBMC’s Continuing Legacy of Evangelism and Discipleship*; *Business at Its Best: Timeless Wisdom from Proverbs for Today’s Workplace*; *Pursuing Life With a Shepherd’s Heart*, coauthored with Ken Johnson; and *The Heart of Mentoring*, coauthored with David A.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. If you live in a nation that observes a day of thanksgiving in some form, what is that like? How does that special day affect you – do you have any special traditions or practices that assist in your ability to give thanks?
2. However, if you live in a nation or area that does not celebrate a “Thanksgiving Day,” do you think such an observance should be held in some official way? Why or why not?
3. When you experience times of major success or significant accomplishment, what is your typical response? Do you bask in self-satisfaction and pat yourself on the back, figuratively if not literally? Do you pray or express thankfulness to God for making those achievements possible? Or perhaps some of both? Explain your answer.
4. What do you think of the idea of being thankful even during times of adversity, great trials, and struggle? Does that seem difficult to do? How can someone possibly be thankful for having to undergo serious hardships?

CHALLENGE

There are many ways for demonstrating and expressing thankfulness. We can do so through prayer, with biblical meditation, and by “paying it forward,” extending to someone else a blessing similar to what we have received. Another method for showing thankfulness is by expressing it to other people. Think of someone – or a small group of friends – with whom you can tell about things God has done that you are thankful for. Maybe even today.

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:
Psalm 50:14-15; John 6:5-13; Romans 5:3-5, 8:28-39; 2 Corinthians 9:10-15; James 1:2-4

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