

SAYING 'THANK YOU' WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL THANKFUL

By Robert J. Tamasy

This week in the United States millions will celebrate Thanksgiving Day. Similar observances take place in other countries and in cultures around the world. For many people this serves as a time to "count their blessings," reflecting on the good things they have experienced over the past year. A wonderful tradition, no doubt, but what about those – perhaps yourself included – that have endured great hardship and loss?

How do you sincerely express thanksgiving when it seems you have little reason for feeling thankful? This is a question my longtime friend, Albert Diepeveen, has wrestled with over the course of his life. In fact, years ago I helped him with writing and producing a booklet he called, "Saying 'Thank You' When You Don't Feel Thankful."

Born in the Netherlands, Albert and his family lived through the horrors of World War II. Food supplies were meager and, like many of their friends and neighbors, they had to survive without even the barest essentials. Largely due to malnutrition, he contracted tuberculosis, confining him to a bed for more than three years, most of those in a hospital room.

Albert overcame his struggles with tuberculosis, but health problems have lingered throughout his life. In 1958, he and his wife immigrated to the United States, where he was able to establish several successful small companies. Being an entrepreneur, he experienced firsthand the ups and downs of business.

Despite facing adversity in many forms, Albert radiates a sense of joy and peace many people cannot understand. But my friend has learned the secret, as his booklet states, of being able to say "thank you" even when you do not feel thankful. That secret, he is quick to point out, is his faith in Jesus Christ and confidence that "*in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*" (Romans 8:28).

Let Albert explain: "As I studied the Scriptures I realized God cannot lie, and He has never made a mistake. God loves each one of us. He brings circumstances into our lives for our own benefit."

Talking about his life before having a transforming encounter with Jesus, he says, "I had attended a Christian school and had been raised in a Christian home. But I had never seen in His Word (the Bible) what I clearly see now. Do you know that there are about 10,000 promises in God's Word? And what He promises, you can trust in. We can all count on what it says."

So when Albert discovered a certain passage in the Bible, he recognized the importance of *being* thankful to God even when he did not *feel* thankful: "One Sunday my pastor was speaking on a verse that says, 'Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus' (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The pastor then repeated, 'Give thanks in all circumstances,' adding, 'If someone loves you, he will never let anything happen to you that will not be good for you.'"

For Albert, this has been the lesson of a lifetime. Despite illnesses, business setbacks, financial struggles and other hardships, he has learned to say "thank you" even when he does not feel thankful. Can you?

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Do you take part in a special day of thanksgiving, or do you have a personal tradition for expressing gratitude for what you have experienced and received in life?
2. Have you ever tried to say "thank you" when you do not feel thankful for the problems and issues you are facing? How difficult is that for you?
3. When you read, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you," what does that say to you? What thoughts come to mind when you read that?
4. What difference would it make – in being able to express thanks when you do not feel thankful – if you really believed God has your best interests at heart and is actively involved in doing what is truly best for you? Explain your answer.

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to review some other passages that relate to this topic, consider the following verses:

Isaiah 41:10; Jeremiah 29:11-13; Psalm 23:1-6; 100:4-5; Ephesians 3:20, 5:19-20