

EMERGE INTO GIVING THANKS—NOVEMBER 2017

Be thankful when you don't know something ... for it gives you the opportunity to learn.

Be thankful for the difficult times ... during those times you grow.

Be thankful for your limitations ... they give you opportunities for improvement.

Be thankful for each new challenge... which will build your strength and character.

Be thankful for your mistakes ... they will teach you valuable lessons.

Be thankful when you're tired and weary ... because it means you've given your all.

It's easy to be thankful for the 'good' things ... yet, a life of rich fulfillment comes to those who are thankful for the setbacks.

Gratitude can turn a negative into a positive ... find a way to be thankful for your troubles and they can become your blessings. ~ Author Unknown

Most of us can agree that giving thanks is easier when life is good and things are going our way. During difficult, painful or uncertain times, it sometimes requires an extra portion of strength to feel grateful. For example, when we lose a loved one, have health issues, experience the heartache of a wayward child, lose a job, or any other of life's calamities, mustering up the strength to praise God or give thanks does not come easy. The good news, though, is that most of us only have to look back at our past, to give thanks. We know 'the stuff' God has brought us through and, that history enables us to put one foot in front of the other to move forward and give thanks. We understand that if He could fix THAT, He can fix THIS...if it's His Will. And, like our elders used to say, we can "*praise God, anyhow!*"

The Book of Job provides us with an example of someone who experienced great loss and tragedy, but *praised God anyhow!* Many of us have our own Job experiences. We can attest to being in valleys so deep, we never thought we would be able to climb out. Those valleys may have been debt, sickness, loss of someone or something, or a myriad of other misfortunes where we not only survived, but thrived. Perhaps, some are now living debt-free, while others have overcome pain, illness and doctors are marveling at the prognosis. Maybe God replaced the love of our lives with someone or something that eased or replaced the heartache of loss. Whatever that valley was—today we have ***emerged into giving thanks!***

I'm thankful for my struggle because without it I would not have stumbled across my strength. Too often, we place limits on what we think God is able to do in our lives. Moreover, some of us attach giving thanks to tangible things such as blessings of money, people or possessions. However, those of us that have experienced God's goodness or deliverance, passed through valleys, survived trials and tribulation, and made it through 'on the other side,' are thankful just to be alive to see another day! It's unfortunate that sometimes it takes experiencing and overcoming valleys in our lives to really appreciate the 'mountaintop' experiences—the joy, peace, comfort and faith that God's got you!

This month, as we ***emerge into giving thanks***, it's important to remember that we should not let anything or anyone break our spirit or rob us of our joy. Our life is greater than our successes, failures or trials. For far too many, contentment is an elusive commodity because we are so busy seeking more or greater.

It is not God's desire to hold any good thing from us, but those of us that are parents understand that you can't give a child everything he or she wants. We would not allow a six-year-old to drive our car just because he wants to, would we? It's the same with Christ—sometimes He withholds things from us for our good or because He knows we are not ready for it.

God's love for us is unconditional and He desires for us to operate out of that same agape love. We can't or should not put restrictions on how, why or when we give thanks. Each morning and throughout the day, we should be thankful that we are alive, while basking in the knowledge that God loves us—even if *nobody else does!* We can be thankful—even if our circumstances are not as we would like—because we have the freedom to change them or pursue something different. If we can't change our circumstances, we still have the ability to change our response to those circumstances.

God desires for us to be givers—and not just givers of money! Giving should be looked upon as an investment into our divine future. Moreover, we should have a certain attitude toward and through the giving experience. In 2 Corinthians 9:7, we read, "*You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.*" When we emerge into giving thanks, we should not do so out of ritual, obligation, or with the expectation that we will receive a blessing for doing so. And, while certainly there is the law of reciprocity (*there will be a time of harvest and a time to reap*), we must remember that *we are blessed to be a blessing*—not to expect one.

Sometimes giving thanks requires us to be vulnerable or inconvenienced. We should not go to God giving thanks with our masks on. He already knows our heart, so giving thanks may require us to be vulnerable. We may need to confess our lack of faith or selfishness, our inability to wholeheartedly place our faith and trust in God, or our reluctance to give up control. In these instances, it may be appropriate to thank God for not giving up on us, the way we sometimes give up on Him, and for loving us in spite of ourselves.

It may not always be convenient to give thanks, but we must make the time to do so. Here's a reminder of some of the more obvious things we can emerge into giving thanks for, that some of us take for granted:

Even though I clutch my blanket and growl when the alarm rings, thank you, Lord, that I can hear. There are many who are deaf.

Even though I keep my eyes closed against the morning light as long as possible, thank you, Lord, that I can see. Many are blind.

Even though I huddle in my bed and put off rising, thank you Lord, that I have the strength to rise. There are many who are bedridden.

Even though the first hour of my day is hectic, when socks are lost, toast is burned and tempers are short, and my children are so loud, thank you, Lord, for my family. There are many who are lonely.

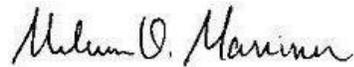
Even though our breakfast table never looks like the pictures in magazines and the menu is at times unbalanced, thank you, Lord, for the food we have. There are many who are hungry.

Even though the routine of my job is monotonous, thank you, Lord, for the opportunity to work. There are many who have no job.

Even though I grumble and bemoan my fate from day to day and wish my circumstances were not so modest, thank you, Lord, for life. ~ unknown

In this season of Thanksgiving, let's **emerge into giving thanks**; not just on one day of the year, but every day!

Peace and power,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melvin O. Marriner".

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