



Thank God!

The black SUV barreled past two stop signs and into the intersection, where it walloped the rear left side of my aging Honda CRV hard enough to spin it around 180 degrees. No one was injured in either car. The CRV wasn't so lucky. The guy at the collision shop shook his head. It was totaled.

Just minutes before the accident, I had been pondering my 175,000 mile Honda. Sure, it might run for another 100,000 miles, but over the last couple of years, repairs had been costly. I wasn't looking forward to selling it and buying something else. And then BAM!

As I searched for an economical used car, I mentioned a couple of brands to our neighbor, Bill, who is also our mechanic. He winced, and suggested a more reliable brand. *Slim chance*, I thought. They're either too spendy or have mileage higher than my dear departed Honda. But I searched online and found a model Bill recommended with only 12,000 miles and for less money than I anticipated. I test-drove it the next morning. Bill checked it out and was impressed. It should last as long as my driving capabilities. Maybe longer.

So, *thank God* there were no injuries. *Thank God* both parties had insurance. *Thank God* the other driver's car could be repaired. *Thank God* for my neighbor's helpful insight. *Thank God* for the lady who apparently kept the car I would eventually buy in her garage for seven years.

But wait—what if there had been injuries? What if I had let my insurance lapse? What if Bill had been on vacation? What if I had bought a lemon? Would I thank God *then*?

Giving thanks usually works like this: You receive something called a *blessing*. It's usually a *thing* we believe makes us happy (both the NT Greek word for *blessing* and the English word are related to *happiness*). If we believe the *thing* makes us happy, we deem it to be good, and reciprocate by giving thanks (for a discussion on this topic, see Greg Albrecht's cover article on blessings in the May 2017 *Plain Truth*). After all, we reason, if we fail to give thanks for the good thing, God might get offended and withhold future good things.

The opposite of a blessing is another kind of thing—one that we think makes us *unhappy*. Let's call it adversity (superstitious folks might call it a *curse*). We don't tend to thank God for these things, *as if* this might prompt him to send us *more* adversity. We sure don't want that, because we believe our happiness is conditional on *external things* (although Jesus clearly says otherwise in Matthew 5:3-12).

In the minutes after my accident, was my first impulse to *thank God*? Not really—other than maybe thanking him for the parties not being injured. Back home, sitting in our living room, I began to realize that this particular adversity might have a beneficial outcome. Oh sure, *then* I was thankful. We call it a *blessing in disguise*—because, paradoxically, it was a bad thing with a good outcome.

Given a choice, we'd rather not have a mixed bag. We'd prefer good things over bad, blessings over adversities, assets over liabilities. Yet major life transitions are often mixed bags—things that are difficult to endure, but ultimately yield positive results. That being the case, **why would we use our blessings or adversities as a barometer of our standing with God?**

I'm thinking maybe we ought to take a far broader view, and vigorously thank God for the whole enchilada, gristly bits and habanero peppers included. In this temporal, world, we are required to navigate euphoria and despair, triumph and disaster. *If it isn't one thing—it's another!* As Gilda Radner's character on *Saturday Night Live*, Roseanne Roseanadana, used to say, "*It's always something.*"

If we can learn to step back and consider all these somethings together, and begin to see, as Richard Rohr observes, "that God is in all situations, and that God can and will use even bad situations for good, then everything and everywhere becomes an occasion for good and an encounter with God."

Then we can see our way clear to "*give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). □

—Monte Wolverton