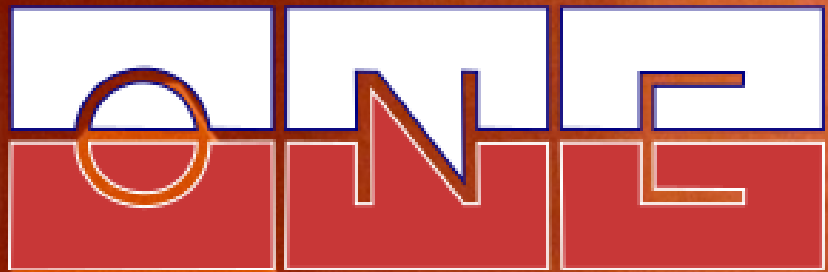
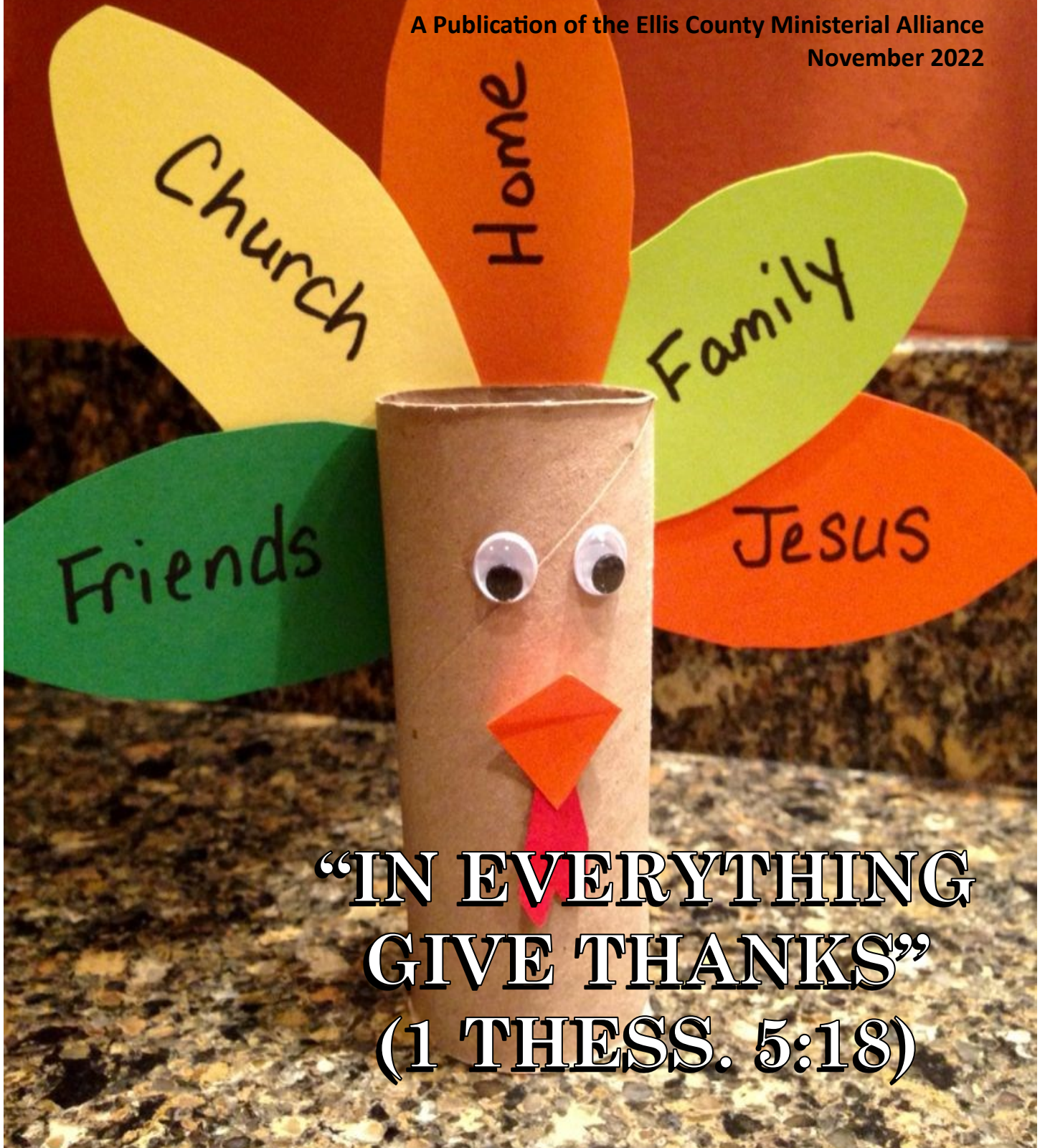


# INSIDE:

+ Giving thanks to  
God in tough times



A Publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance  
November 2022



**“IN EVERYTHING  
GIVE THANKS”  
(1 THESS. 5:18)**



ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) which guides its mission, content, and theme. The ECMA encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies, and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to [one@ourecma.com](mailto:one@ourecma.com).

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### Editor's Note:

With Thanksgiving coming up, we asked our writers how is it possible to give thanks even in tough times?

## ***Thanking God for the Blessings in the Thorns***

### ***Written by:***

***Rev. Jonathan McCottry***

There is a misconception that blessings or being blessed comes only during times of prosperity and during times of plenty.

Carefully consider Thanksgiving Day. The roots of this day are firmly planted in times of trouble.

This day was birthed from an Old Testament feast that was observed by the Pilgrims as they struggled to survive in the New World. Thanksgiving is a contradiction to the thought that blessings only come to the "blessed." Thanksgiving was observed, as declared by President Abraham Lincoln, amid one of this nation's darkest moments. It was

during a time of turmoil and tragedy that we as a nation were challenged to count our blessings.

Thanksgiving Day is usually the fourth Thursday in November. Many may find themselves wondering, "What reason is there to be thankful?"

In the Old Testament, the children of Israel were held in bondage for 400 years, wandering in the wilderness for 40 more years. They set aside a specific time each year for a feast to thank God for His blessings. For the children of Israel, the bondage and wilderness journey led them to the Promised Land.

The Pilgrims, alone in a foreign and hostile land, suffering from deprivation

and disease, and facing the promise of another deadly winter, set aside a day to "break bread" with the residents of this new land to give thanks to God. The sufferings of those first terrible years opened the doors to the new Promised Land.

American citizens, in the midst of a civil war that pitted brother against brother and family against family, in a brutal and bloody conflict over the right of all men to be free, observed a day of thanksgiving to God. This bloody conflict led to the unification of a nation that would be blessed with more prosperity and freedom than any nation in the modern era.

## ***Thanking God for the Blessings in the Thorns (Continued)***

No matter how dark the situation, when God's children humbly seek His help, God's people always find comfort, peace and promise in the hands of the Lord. We see what He has done even in the darkest moments and with deepest wounds.

At one point in the lesson on God's love, we are reminded that a valley of trials is a part of the landscape of faith, and every bit as essential as the mountaintop. In the valley of trials, we are overwhelmed by His absence. However, on the mountaintop we are overjoyed by God's presence. Both places should bring us to our knees--the one, in hopelessness without dependence on His strength to endure, the other, in exhilaration of joy. In dark times we learn to depend on Jesus.

We must learn how to trust Him when we are ostracized and criticized, when rejected by our friends, when betrayed by our associates, when we face trouble on our job, when there is no refuge in

the church as our fellow members are plotting and planning to wreak destruction and doom on us because we will not compromise.

It is a sad day for the church when the family of God feels neglected in the house of God. However, that is sometimes the case today. (2 Timothy 4:3-5 KJV.) It is in these times that we overlook the fact that there are blessings in the thorns. It is time to thank God for our thorns when things don't go our way.

Often we don't thank God for our trials, heartaches, and difficulties. Although we are willing to praise Him for His goodness, we sometimes fail to realize that even adverse circumstances are blessings in disguise.

Scottish preacher George Matheson had that problem. He realized that he was not as ready to praise God when things went wrong as he was when they went right. However, after he began to lose his eyesight, he changed his thinking. He struggled for some months with this weary burden until he

reached the point where he could pray, "My God, I have never thanked You for my thorn. I have thanked You a thousand times for my roses, but not once for my thorn. I have been looking forward to a world where I shall get compensated for my cross, but I have never thought of my cross as itself a present glory. Teach me the value of my thorn."

When we count our blessings, we should include the weaknesses, the hardships, the burdens, and the trials we face. If we do, we might find that God has used our difficulties more than the "good" things to help us grow spiritually. It is in those dark places that we discover the sufficiency of His grace.

Take a moment and think about the way God has led you. When you praise God for your blessings, do you also remember to thank Him for the thorns?



*The Rev. Jonathan McCottry is the Pastor of Hays Prayer Chapel.*

## ***Jesus Is Beside Us in Our Suffering and Struggles***

**Written by:**

**Rev. Cana Moore**

Suffering and difficulties are present in the life of every person. There exists no person who is free from challenges, and even young children who have not suffered themselves bear the lasting repercussions of the suffering of others.

Trauma is an epigenetic trait, which means it can be passed down from generation to generation. This means many of us bear the effects of suffering that happened to our parents and grandparents. How is it even fair that we should not only wrestle with our own problems and difficult times, but also our forebearers as well?

Our central question for this issue is that of thankfulness in difficult times. I do not need to name the problems you might be having in your life, because you are all too aware of them. They sit in your mind and weigh down your days, making simple tasks complicated and sometimes even stealing the joy out of things you

once found to be fun. Whether this is a systemic struggle, like the effects of racism or class issues, or a specific event, like a marital struggle or a medical problem, some days it seems like trouble is all around us. It can be a nearly impossible challenge to even want to be grateful, let alone to find words to express our thankfulness when everything is going wrong.

I would like for us to think about gratitude through the lens of the presence of Jesus. One of the most beautiful facts of Jesus' incarnation is that in doing so, God enters into the human experience in a distinct way. Jesus-who-is-God now knows what it is to struggle in a human way.

Hebrews 4:15 reminds us of this, saying, *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin."* (NRSV)

Depending on your translation, "weakness" may read "sickness,"

"infirmities," or "frailty." The use of "suffering" is also a good translation here. The truth of Jesus demonstrates that God does not leave us in our trouble alone, but comes to us when we cannot come to God and joins us in the suffering of our world.

What does this mean for our thankful spirit when we encounter hard times? It means that we are not alone and that we can be thankful because of God's presence. Sometimes our circumstances feel impossible to be grateful for, but when we are aware that we are not alone, then we can express gratitude for the God who is always with us and knows our suffering and struggle.

Christians should never weaponize the virtue of gratitude against people, nor should thankfulness be a test of one's faith or dedication. Life is too complicated to make outward expressions of thanksgiving into a proof of one's love of God.

But awareness of our own gratitude and the

## ***Jesus Is Beside Us in Our Suffering and Struggles (Continued)***

need we have to know that we are not alone can give us the capacity to be thankful for God's presence with us even when we are in a place where we cannot see to

step forward. When we know that God is not just aware of our needs, but is beside us in the struggle, then true thankfulness can occur in difficult times.



*The Rev. Cana Moore is the pastor of Hays Christian Church*

## ***Giving Thanks in All Circumstances—Even in Tough Times***

**Written by:**  
**Becky Rogowski**

I tend to be a “glass half-full” type of person. I want to believe I was born this way because it is so engrained in me. However long it's been, if you know me, I'm an eternal optimist. If there's a silver lining to be found, I'll find it. I've never been a “Debbie Downer.”

I once read that people respond to their circumstances depending on what the circumstances are. When things are going well, people are happy and view things positively. Alternately, when things are not going so well, people view the world negatively. I don't necessarily think I agree with the statement. I think with the proper mindset, people can find positives in negative situations. I'm not saying it's easy, but I definitely think it's possible.

Thanksgiving Day may come once a year, but it is important that people be thankful and grateful on a very frequent basis. It is important for our hearts and minds to be healthy, and an important (and simple) way to help accomplish that is by thinking of things to be thankful for.

Scripture also tells us that being thankful is important. Scripture teaches us to give thanks in all circumstances.

Paul the apostle says in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, *“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* David said in Psalm 34:1, *“I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”*

He isn't saying, “Give thanks when things are going well” or “Give thanks when you're having a great day.” He says

give thanks in ALL circumstances.

In 2020 (the Covid year), my granddad was approaching 100 years old in early November. He was living in an assisted living facility, so our contact with him (unfortunately) was limited. He was in good enough health that it seemed most likely he would successfully reach this huge milestone of a birthday. Our family was making plans to celebrate and to have a gathering as safely as we could. We were hoping for an extended family Thanksgiving with Granddad as the star of the show.

Granddad ended up getting sick in October and did not recover. This was a very sad thing for our family. To come within less than a month of a major milestone was a bummer. We didn't let it ruin our celebrations, though. We found all sorts of

## ***Giving Thanks in All Circumstances (Continued)***

positives. Granddad's long life produced all of us, and all of the things we have each accomplished were possible because of him. I could write a separate column on all the great things about my granddad, but I choose to just say our family felt very grateful while gathering to remember his life and his influence on our family. We found many positives in a definitely not-positive situation.

Other examples are the recent hurricanes and flooding in Florida. Many devastating things have happened. The amount of loss for so many is

tremendous. It would be easy to slip into some real negative and depressing thinking. However, I've heard so many stories about people seeing the best in others. There have been so many instances of amazing generosity between neighbors and even strangers. People are getting their needs met, and rebuilding is already beginning.

When tragedies hit, people frequently use the phrase from Mister Rogers, ". . . (L)ook for the helpers. The helpers are always there." This is a perfect example of this more positive mindset.

It might not always be the first thing that comes to mind during negative happenings, but it is important to stop and think, "Could it be worse? Where is the silver lining to what is happening? What can I learn from this?"

God is there for us all the time. He is good and loving. His love is in that silver lining if we take the time to be thankful and grateful--especially in the tough times.



*Becky Rogowski is a member of Hays First Presbyterian Church.*

## ***Learning to Look Past Ourselves in Times of Despair***

***Written by:***  
***Cheryl Glassman***

Have you ever spent time alone in a relaxing place? I love spending time on a mountaintop, breathing in crisp cool air, or standing in a milo field, milo heads waving to me in the Kansas wind. Or perhaps sitting on my back porch late at night, marveling at the absence of light on earth and the brilliance of the stars in the sky.

These moments take me

far away from the events in the world. I believe we all need these moments, no matter how brief, to help us reboot our hearts and minds. We have all faced sadness or hardship; some, so much more than others. Can these serene moments of peace or other "God moments" really help us when life throws us a curve? And when we experience difficulty or loss, why even try to be thankful?

I remember many times in my own life when I was in the middle of a terrible loss or

painful situation. It was a difficult feeling. One such time was when my best friend, Paula Huser, was fighting cancer. She had asked me to accompany her and be her caregiver while she tried to find a way to overcome the wicked beast eating away at her. She fought hard through the treatments. When she woke up at night calling my name so she could throw up, or get a new blanket because she was drenched with sweat, I did what I could to

## ***Learning to Look Past Ourselves in Times of Despair (Continued)***

help her. She died a few days into the treatment.

I also remember when my mother had a subarachnoid brain bleed with a subsequent stroke that left her paralyzed from the chest down. She was our rock, and our lives were changed forever.

During both of these situations I was wrapped in my own sadness. I did not see past myself. But God does put people and images in our path to help us.

When I returned to work as a nurse after my mom was dismissed from the hospital, I was still feeling sorry for myself. I was the charge nurse on the surgical unit and made rounds on all the patients. The last room I entered was occupied by a female patient.

When I entered, I said hello to her and her husband. I asked how they were doing and her husband said "fine." I then told them to let me know if I could do anything to help them. As I turned to leave, the husband asked his wife, "Would you like some water?"

She turned her eyes toward him and blinked

once. Her husband took a washcloth, wet it with water, and squeezed a few droplets on her tongue. "More?" he asked.

She blinked twice for "no." I went to the nurse's station and checked the chart. The woman was completely paralyzed, unable to speak, chew, or move. I went to the break room and cried, knowing God had given me this moment to see past myself. Granted, when we are in the moment of grief, it is never easy.

I also think of the people around the world, particularly now in Ukraine and in hurricane ravaged areas, those who live in extreme poverty, or are facing severe illness or loss. There are people here in our own community dealing with unbelievable hardship and sadness. Many have it worse, but that doesn't make our hearts hurt any less when we are faced with despair.

Yet, if we CAN allow ourselves to look past ourselves, God will be there. He will wrap us in His presence and give us hope. He can enrich us so we can be there to help others. It is for this we must always be

thankful. He will lift us from the darkness. As it says in Psalm 50:14-15, *"Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the most High. And call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."*

I also think of the wisdom of Maya Angelou, "Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer. And let faith be the bridge you build to overcome evil and welcome good."

The song "Give Thanks To The Lord" by Dan Schutte says, "Give thanks to the God who has blessed our land, who guards every step with a mighty hand, whose love is forever, whose love is forever, whose love is forever more."

May you find many wondrous people and things to be thankful for. And don't forget to reboot. Have a blessed Thanksgiving!



*Cheryl Glassman is the Director of Music at St. Nicholas of Myra Catholic Church in Hays.*