Hi Ladies!

What interesting days we are all living through! And yet, we can joyously proclaim the words of David from Psalm 145:

1 I will extol you, my God and King,  
   and bless your name forever and ever.  
2 Every day I will bless you  
   and praise your name forever and ever.  
3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,  
   and his greatness is unsearchable.

Let us press on and continue to be women who proclaim the greatness of our God! Let us continue to meet with Him in His Word. I wanted to make you aware of some opportunities for continued study in His Word:

1. If you are interested in starting a new Bible study, you have many options available to you. Each semester, we record various women’s bible studies. They are available to you at briarwood.org/women. Then once on the women’s page look for the button that says AUDIO (located in the blue bar under the picture of the cup) and you will see all the various studies that have been recorded. https://briarwood.org/women-of-the-covenant/women-of-the-covenant-audio/

2. If you were in the Joshua study, the lessons are continuing to be recorded each week and are available in the AUDIO section listed earlier.

3. We have also started a brand new study on the book of ESTHER. Each Monday (starting March 23rd) there will be a new recording on the AUDIO page. In addition to the recordings, we have other resources available for this particular study. By selecting https://briarwood.org/women-of-the-covenant/study-of-the-book-of-esther/ you can access homework, which will allow you to prepare for each podcast. You will also find information on how to join our private Facebook page for discussion regarding the study of Esther.

We would also like to encourage you to follow our Women’s Instagram page: briarwoodwomen and our Women’s Facebook page: Briarwood Women of the Covenant. These will be our main line of communication over the next few weeks. We will post updates, encouraging articles and podcasts, and some fun items to keep us connected. We do ask that you comment, share, and participate in our online community.

If you have particular prayer requests, please do not hesitate to let us know. We want to join you in praying for the various requests that you have. Please know that Katie and I miss seeing each of you and we look forward to the day we can gather in person!

Love Bunches!!

-Kristie
We asked some of our Bible teachers to write a few words of encouragement, practical advice, or just personal thoughts on social distancing and self-isolation. Enjoy!

A Word from Elizabeth Bondurant

I was thinking the other day of a story from “The Hiding Place.” It’s the part when the two sisters are in the concentration camps and get moved to a new barracks. Soon they realize this new jam-packed “dorm-room” has fleas. Corrie is depressed and angry—how could God move them to this horrible room? She asks Betsie what in the world can they do. Betsie remembers that scripture says to give thanks in all circumstances—even in a room with fleas—even for the fleas. And so they do (with gritted teeth I’m sure.) They thank God for the fleas. As time goes on they realize that the guards are not coming in for searches and checks like they had in the old barracks. As they wonder why, they soon realize it is because of the fleas. They had more freedom than ever before to share Christ with the women around them and to teach God’s word and it was BECAUSE of the fleas! God is so good!

This is a story I have heard many times from a dear friend and mentor, and it just keeps ruminating in my mind as we face this coronavirus. God knows what He is doing. He works everything—even fleas, even viruses and economy crashes, and devastating hardships, even things meant for evil—He works them for His purposes! For the saving of many lives (Genesis 50:20). My first encouragement to you sisters is to keep your eyes on Him. Lift your eyes to the hills, for where does our help come from? Our help is from the Lord, the maker of Heaven and earth. Oh Lord that we may be women with anticipatory eyes and minds—hopeful and prayerful of what you may be doing for YOUR Kingdom? Help us to keep our eyes off of ourselves, and focused on Your Kingdom every single day. Help us live in our God-called identity in Isaiah 43:10–11 where you tell us “You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he… I even I am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior… You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord—“that I am God!”

My second encouragement is to spend some time in solitude before the Lord to look inward at what He is revealing in us during these weeks. I know this may sound contrary to the encouragement to forget self and focus on Him. But it isn’t. It is just a complimentary part of the process of getting our eyes on Him. If you have any exposure to JH Ranch or have spent much time around Jason Ellerbee, surely you’ve heard the quote—“Circumstances don’t make or break you, they reveal you.” Wow… if we took this to heart and searched ourselves for what is being revealed in us right now— I believe he could lead us, and our church community into a deep season of repentance. What are we trusting in (feeling secure or insecure in) besides Him? Our bank account balances, our paychecks, our pantries or toilet paper stashes? Oh God, break us of this—this is sin against Yahweh. Just as your people did in the wilderness, so we lack faith. It is sin that crushes you and hinders us from YOUR Inheritance, from you yourself. What are we fearful of? What does this reveal about hearts? What are we angry about? Resentful of? Frustrated with? Lord, open our eyes and search us! (Psalm 139:23-24) I know for me, I already feel overwhelmed with this conviction of what is coming out of me. But I am a firm believer that when communities walk in seasons of repentance His Spirit pour forth and new life is found. My prayers and hugs and my pleas for mercy abound with you all! ~Elizabeth Bondurant
A Word from Mary Anne Turnbull

Well, it is spring break, which for many students has stretched into early summer break, and I had planned to be on a cruise in the Caribbean with the love of my life. However, I am instead spending my time canceling cruises and trips for my clients, while trying to keep an optimistic outlook and attitude as I see all the business I worked hard to build evaporate...at least for the near future. It could be discouraging and disheartening, IF... I did not remember that God is still on His throne, and that He is not surprised by one bit of this crisis. While weddings, funerals, visits to elderly loved ones and those in the hospital, proms, graduations, sports seasons, and the list goes on... are all canceled or suspended, I was asked to respond with what I have learned during this time of social distancing. Some of my thoughts were:

Take life one day at a time
This too shall pass - life will return to normal
God knows what’s next and isn’t surprised by any of this ... Blessed be the name of the Lord who gives and takes away
Gratitude fills my heart for our President and Vice President and their advisors and their transparency (Pray for those in authority)
Gratitude for my Pastor and church leadership in their creativity (Pray for those in authority)
Amazement at the creativity of friends who post encouraging and funny items on social media
Laughter is great medicine
Facts not Fear is an important warning
Look for ways to serve and encourage others
There are so many Scripture verses that come to mind about not worrying, but trusting - and it makes me grateful for Scripture memory over the years

But, I miss my grandchildren and my church family, and we are having to be more intentional about calling others in our Bible studies, Sunday school class and friends. I feel loved and cared for by my church family and encouraged to stay in the Word of God and spending time with God while we can not spend time with each others.

I’ve learned to use Zoom and GroupMe (which I never knew about a week ago) to stay in touch with my Sunday school class, Bible Study ladies, and my business team, so even in this distancing, I am growing and learning. And I am washing my hands a lot more!

Prayers continue for all affected that our eyes will be fixed on our great God.

"You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You." Isaiah 26:3

Lord, keep me stayed!

-Mary Anne Turnbull

The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exalt over you with loud singing.

Zephaniah 3:17
A Word From Joy Moore

Re-focus. Again.

When news of COVID19 swept over the news media, twitter, and every phone conversation, my thoughts were of an encounter I had too many years ago to count.

Rushing through the grocery store one cold January day, I had started down the cereal aisle when I spotted a woman who was the counselor at my children’s school. I didn’t know her well. We had exchanged greetings at a school open house and I had seen her in the hallway at church. But I heard that life had hit a rough patch for her. In a short span of time “sorrows like sea billows” swept over her. Her husband had died unexpectedly, she was diagnosed with cancer, and her daughter in law was killed in a house fire on Christmas Eve.

After our hellos, I asked how she was doing, expecting an “I’m hanging in there” answer. Instead, I have never forgotten what she said. She told me that as she was seeking the Lord in all that had happened, she read the account of King Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles. Things weren’t looking good as he was facing an imminent enemy invasion, “a great multitude...from beyond the sea.” This king’s reaction? He felt powerless and was afraid.

Then leaning in close, she said, “And that’s exactly how I was. But the final words of Jehoshaphat’s prayer, ‘O our God...we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you’ have helped me focus on the only One who can hold me steady. I get up every morning and put my eyes on Him.”

That grocery cart theology has taught my heart again and again. “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” –2 Chronicles 20:12b.

Today I am praying for us all as we look to Him, ‘for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. –Joel 2:13

~Joy Moore
A Word From Donna Evans

CALM in the Chaos

Like many of you, Bruce, James Bruce, and I have been social distancing, even from our granddaughters who live less than ten minutes away. I decided early on in the “shelter in place” process that I can only take so much of the 24/7 news cycle. Bruce decided early on to work in the yard as much as possible. And we both have been praying that God would help us steward this awkward, but necessary, social distancing season well.

Day #5 of our social distancing found me literally looking for something to do besides read, study, or even write. I needed to keep my hands busy because inwardly I was “churning and burning.”

Looking around at the dust in my bedroom, I remembered my Granny’s annual spring-cleaning each year. Granny temporarily moved mattresses to her back yard for some much needed air and sunshine. I wasn’t ready to go that far, but I asked Bruce to help me move furniture in our bedroom so that I could clean baseboards and vacuum under the bed. I put on some Christian music and set about my work. As I cleaned woodwork, I prayed for family members, church members, government leaders, frontline medical providers, and countries like Italy, which have been so impacted by the corona virus. I prayed for the development of a corona vaccine, small business owners affected by the forced closures, and for God to somehow use this suffering for our collective good and for His glory.

After I finished the baseboards, I began cleaning my shutters. After the shutters, I dusted furniture and our ceiling fan. Each time I thought I was through, I realized something else needed my attention. At one point I realized that spring-cleaning is much like sanctification. The more sin I confess, the more sin I find that needs to be confessed and cleaned, not up, but out! My Sonos music continued to play, I continued to clean, and I actually found my anxious mind and heart as engaged as my hands. Both my hands and my heart were producing results.

Several hours later I was ready to move our mattress. Bruce fussed a little bit about that, even hinting that it really wasn’t necessary, but I insisted. It took both of us to move it. As we did, both of us spotted some prescription eyeglasses that had been missing for over a year! Bruce had replaced them a couple of weeks after he’d lost them, but we were thrilled to finally solve the mystery of the missing glasses. I felt much like the woman in Luke 15 when upon finding her lost coin said, “Rejoice with me!” We not only rejoiced; we laughed!

By the time my spring-cleaning session was done, I not only had a clean room, but a lighter heart as well. All of us are being affected by the corona virus pandemic. The prophet Isaiah’s words are as applicable today as they were when they were written 2700 years ago: “Be careful; keep calm; and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart.”

If you’re looking for something to help you remember to stay calm, just remember Christ Always Loves Me! Indeed He does! –Donna Evans
**Other Women’s Ministry Updates:**

**Cookbook:**

The Women’s Ministry is considering putting together a Briarwood Cookbook - full of recipes, stories, and memories from some of our more seasoned members. Since we are all staying home right now, can I ask you to start to collect your favorite 2-3 recipes. If your recipe has been used at several class potlucks or church events we will want to know that as well. Some of you longer standing Briarwood members may have a recipe that has made it to numerous prayer breakfasts through the years...we would love to know that information.

We have a team of women who will begin to explore all of our options regarding how to best go about putting together a Briarwood Cookbook. So, while we are not ready to accept recipes and stories yet - now is the time to start thinking and planning what you will submit.

**The Ladies Connection** scheduled for April 2nd has been postponed. We will keep you up to date when we have a new date for the event.

**Easter baskets for Daniel Cason.** We are in a holding pattern on this one until we get closer to the date. We will keep you posted.