Hello Ladies!

Here we are at the beginning of May. We are in the middle of our spring and it has been a strange season of life! For many of us, social distancing has placed us at home more hours of the day than we usually get. So we have had more time to be outside; we have started our yard work as a family; and we have embraced the cooler days in order to pick weeds and clean up areas long forgotten in our yards. While there is an uncertainty and still crazy pace to this social distancing, there is also a slowing for many of us. A chance to stop and look around. This slowing down has given me opportunity to look around and see what the Lord does every year in spring. He revives the ground with His watering and gives the sun to produce growth.

Hosea 6:3 says "Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth."

This spring we have experienced the gorgeous days of sunshine and breezes and we have had many days of spring rains watering our gardens so that they may produce fruit in season. I pray this spring is a reminder to us that as we press on to know our Lord - He will produce in us the fruit He desires in season!

This newsletter we have once again asked different women in our church to write about their time at home, their walk with the Lord, their story of faith, and just musings from the day. Our prayer is that the newsletter would encourage you and remind you of the Lord's goodness in this season!

Love you all!!!

Kristie
"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4 (NIV)

I don’t know about you, but during this time of pandemic quarantine, I am missing a lot more than Clorox wipes, flour, and hand sanitizer. After the first week of shelter at home, I quickly realized that I miss our church community, kisses from my granddaughters, and the normal rhythm of my sometimes all-too-busy life. Early on in our quarantine Bruce and I began praying that we would steward this season of imposed isolation well. The first week of the initial two-week quarantine, I was cleaning like a Tasmanian devil and cooking like Martha Stewart! By the second week, I was tired of both and looking for something else to fill the sameness of our days. That was one aspect of Covid 19 that I wasn’t prepared for— the sameness of each day.

During week 2 and 3 of Covid 19 quarantine, I developed a new respect for two very different biblical characters: the recently liberated Israelites who wandered in the wilderness grumbling and complaining over God’s daily provision of heavenly manna and the Apostle Paul. Up until now, each time I read through the Bible and came to the "grumbling in the wilderness" passages, I’d smugly think to myself, "How could they grumble like that against God? They sure have a short memory of what God has done for them. I would never do that!" Truthfully, I’m not sure I made it three days before I began grumbling about all of my pandemic losses. I counted each loss: live church instead of video streaming church: FaceTime with my grand-children instead of hugs and kisses; the loss of freedom to congregate with more than 10 people; the ability to host friends for a meal; shortages at Costco and Publix, the cancellation of long anticipated weddings, and the downsizing of family funerals. Suddenly I identified with the ungrateful Israelites in more ways than I cared to count.

But Week 2 of the pandemic quarantine also became a turning point in another way. Our church leadership asked all of our adult Sunday school teachers to record each week’s lesson so that the audio would be available on its web site. I’m teaching an adult women’s class this quarter and we’re studying Romans 1-8, The Gospel and the Doctrines of Grace. Normally I use power point slides and handouts to teach each week’s lesson. Teaching and recording to an empty room and a black computer screen proved very difficult for that first recording. I quickly decided that I needed to write and record a script for each week's Romans lesson. That process, of course, requires a lot more thought and time, but it has turned out to be a great personal blessing. By the time our quarantine is ended, I may just have a Bible study book as the fruit of this labor.

In the process of writing my weekly Romans scripts, it suddenly dawned on me that the Apostle Paul had a much longer confinement than my six weeks quarantine. Acts 28:28 records Paul's two year Roman house arrest with these words, "For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ." But Paul didn’t just preach the gospel to those who came to see him. Boldly without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” But Paul didn’t just preach the gospel to those who came to see him. Paul wrote letters to strengthen, equip, and encourage churches scattered throughout the Romans Empire (Philippians and Colossians). He also wrote letters to encourage, equip, and strengthen young pastors (Timothy and Titus). Instead of grumbling, Paul wrote, "Do all things without complaining or arguing." (Philippians 2:14) Instead of "churning and burning" over his circumstances, Paul rejoiced in the Lord (Philippians 4:4). And instead of counting his losses as losses, He counted even his gains as losses in view of the "surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."
(Philippians 3:7-8) Paul’s words and his example both challenge me to do the same.

Long before he penned those words from a Roman prison, Paul had learned two valuable lessons about endurance and encouragement. Endurance is the ability to keep doing something difficult, unpleasant, or painful for a long time. Encouragement gives someone support, confidence or hope. The Apostle Paul needed both endurance and encouragement as he defended the gospel; faced hostility and opposition; suffered multiple beatings, imprisonment, and shipwrecks; and ultimately died for his faith. The source for Paul’s endurance and encouragement is the same as ours today: God’s Word and God himself.

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 15:4-6)

Read Paul’s words carefully and you’ll discover that endurance and encouragement are God given gifts designed to bring us hope and God glory. Biblical hope is not a wishful thinking as in "I hope the quarantine will be over soon." Biblical hope is a confident expectation that God is able to do what He says He will do. It is a faith that looks forward in the midst of adversity and suffering and says confidently with Paul, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Most, if not all of us, could use a good dose of endurance and encouragement today as we quarantine, homeschool, work from home, watch the news, count the cumulative losses of our freedoms and 401Ks, and face our worst fears. God gives us endurance and encouragement as we open our Bibles, read His word, and seek to, with the help of the Holy Spirit, apply it to our lives. Look closely at the Romans 15:4-5 passage and you’ll see that Paul’s words in verse 5 are actually a prayer. Paul’s prayer for the Romans is my prayer for each of us today.

May God give us endurance and encouragement today for such a time as this.
Amen and Amen, Donna

Jessica Ivey | Tiny Blessings

Since becoming a new mom last December it has seemed like social distancing is just a part of the role. First came flu season, and then after two weeks of getting out and back to church, the stay-at-home order. And while I wouldn’t choose these circumstances if I could, there have been some sweet graces in the midst of it all.

When my husband, Nathan, first went back to work at the end of January I had a really hard time being at home. I loved my job and love working and was feeling unproductive and like I wasn’t really doing much of anything. Around March, just when things were starting to shut down due to the virus, Joanna seemed to be becoming a “real person!” She started smiling and laughing and responding when you talk or sing to her. Suddenly I realize d that I wasn’t alone at home at all and that what I was doing was indeed important and worthwhile.

Joanna is adopted and taking the time to form a secure attachment with her was very important from before she even came home with us. Because of the pandemic, Joanna and I have spent a lot more time just staying at home, playing and singing and doing all the things I realize a lot of people wish they had more time to do with their baby. Also Nathan has been able to work at home, giving him the chance to see Joanna during the day. There have been some sad things too. We desperately missed being with our church family on Easter, and both Joanna’s baptism and adoption day have been delayed, but we have established some new family traditions and activities that we wouldn’t have otherwise. I look forward to the day when we can come back to church physically and visit with family and friends, but in the meantime God has reminded me that His purposes are multi-faceted (thanks, Pastor Reeder!) and that He is orchestrating all things for our good and His glory.
It was WWII, and her husband was coming home. She cleaned the wallpaper, and stippled the old linoleum. The house was spotless, and she was eagerly awaiting his arrival. He walked up on the porch, deposited his duffle bag, and she didn’t see him for four days. I don’t remember that, but it was one of many times when my Daddy didn’t come home for days. I do remember watching the sidewalk when it was time for him to come home from work. In our small town in those days, he walked to work. It was a straight shot, and I could see him well before he crossed the last street where I would run to meet him, relieved that he would be home and sober that night, and Momma wouldn’t be upset.

As children, my siblings and I attended church at Temple Baptist in Johnson City, Tennessee. I wanted to give my heart to Christ during bible school. However, it didn’t seem to take. I was always a good girl, but I knew there was no power in my life to live any other way than for myself. At times when I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit drawing me to Himself, I would walk the aisle and “rededicate” my life, but still there was no power to conquer my self-centeredness.

As a young Mother I was given the opportunity to teach Sunday school. My character and dependability had those in charge believing I was a Christian. I thought so too, I just didn’t think I was a “good Christian”. I planned on being a good Christian at some point in my life, but I wasn’t ready to relinquish the controls to God.

It was while teaching Isaiah 6 to those senior high girls that God’s irresistible call came. As I told the girls about Isaiah’s vision of the Lord in the temple, and about the foundations of the thresholds shaking and the house filling with smoke, and about how the six winged seraphim flying around were calling; “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory,” the truth of God’s word gripped my heart. I left the class and went into the worship service in a daze. I don’t remember what the sermon was that day, but I do remember my conversation with the Lord. I knew He had wooed me for years. I had heard His call on numerous occasions. I had tried to bargain with the Lord by giving Him a piece of my life while maintaining control. That day the call was indeed irresistible. I said, “Lord, I don’t know if you even still want me, but if you do here I am.” I yielded complete control and felt as though I was stretched out on the floor like Isaiah must have felt when he said, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips.” When one of the seraphim flew to him and placed a coal on his mouth, it said, “your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” My life has never been the same. I didn’t realize that I had become a Christian that day. In fact when Dave & I joined Briarwood in October of 1969, and I gave my testimony to the elders, I said I had received Christ as my Savior at 8 and as my Lord at 23. Crawford Nevins asked me when the change took place. It was at 23 when I taught Isaiah 6 to a group of senior high girls that I lost my desire to cling to this life, and I began to look forward to Christ’s return. It was also then that the truth of God’s Word came alive to me, and I began to read it with an understanding heart. Later, I pondered why Crawford asked that. I called Frank Barker, and asked him if you could receive Christ as your Savior at one time and as your Lord at another. Frank replied, “No, if He’s not your Lord, He’s not your Savior.”

These days are different from any I have experienced in my lifetime. There are only two options left open to those of us awaiting His return; either a rapid decline in the moral fiber of our world, or a great awakening. As a Grandmother, I have prepared myself for either option that our sovereign Father permits. However, I have concern for my Grandchildren ranging from ages 6 to 32, and an 8 month old Great Grandson. While praying for them this week, I was led again to Isaiah 44: 2-4 “Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you; Fear not, O Jacob my servant, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.” God’s Word is our reality, and we rest our entire human personality upon His reliability and trustworthiness.
Amy Lattner | Renovations

Our home is currently under construction. We began the project one month before the world shut down. So, while I read all the posts of people honing their cooking skills, we are unplugging the microwave to plug in the toaster. We are learning you can make hard-boiled eggs in your electric kettle and that the griddle fits nicely on dad’s workbench in the garage! To say we are living on top of one another is an understatement. So why are we renovating? We moved into this 50-year-old house several years ago and like me she has seen younger days. She has unexplained noises, cracks in the foundation, a leak here and there and light switches that don’t work anything. (I find I have more in common with this house than I realized). I believe most of us do home renovation projects to fix something broken, to bring decor up to date or to simply enhance some aspect of your home. As this renovation continues...slowly...very slowly...I am being reminded that I need spiritual renovation just like my home needs physical rejuvenation.

Sometimes I have a thought process or a relationship that is broken. Often there is an area in my life that needs improving. Thankfully nothing about my God is ever outdated or needs adjusting but what about my responses to life around me. Renovation takes planning and effort. We took a good hard look at our space to figure out what was necessary and how we want to use the space. We studied our budget. Spiritual renovation also takes planning and effort. I will never renovate my prayer life or my personal relationships without hard work. The Holy Spirit though is the ultimate contractor and I cannot even begin without Him. He moves me along toward the rebuilding of my life to look more like Jesus. He points out that space collecting cobwebs or that room that needs more light. The Father is gracious to give me strength, help, and encouragement to make the needed changes.

What part of your “spiritual home” needs an update? An area that perhaps needs refreshing? What is in need of a total renovation? Ask the Lord and He will show you what areas need extra maintenance or to be torn apart and made new. Like checking on my house upkeep, I should take time to check on my spiritual maintenance. Is my time well spent? Is my prayer life fervent? Am I taking time for fellowship with believers? Do I make reading the Word a priority? What on my “spiritual home” checklist am I neglecting or overlooking? I plan on taking this unprecedented time off to begin some spiritual renovation. Will you join me? I am starting right after I pour myself a cup of coffee—“Reno Style”. You know, grind the beans on the ironing board, and make coffee in the bedroom. Walk downstairs through the den to the fridge in the garage for the creamer and find the sugar bowl buried somewhere on the card table. Don’t worry if it cools off through the process. I will just unplug the toaster and plug in the microwave!
This book examines what I consider one of life's greatest paradoxes: that strength is found in humility. The problem is, humility does not come naturally to us. As we grow up, we find that pride is ingrained in our very being as we seek to prove to the world that our lives matter. We want to stand out in the crowd. Very few of us want to be completely out of the spotlight with a sense that his or her life is not important. One of the most important truths I have learned over the course of my life is that we are responsible for seeking a humble life and cultivating a humble heart. We must therefore realize that humility is a choice that we must first make, and then pursue. - Richard E. Simmons III

Memphis, 1939. Twelve-year-old Rill Foss and her four younger siblings live a magical life aboard their family’s Mississippi River shantyboat. But when their father must rush their mother to the hospital one stormy night, Rill is left in charge—until strangers arrive in force. Wrenched from all that is familiar and thrown into a Tennessee Children’s Home Society orphanage, the Foss children are assured that they will soon be returned to their parents—but they quickly realize the dark truth. At the mercy of the facility’s cruel director, Rill fights to keep her sisters and brother together in a world of danger and uncertainty.

Aiken, South Carolina, present day. Born into wealth and privilege, Avery Stafford seems to have it all: a successful career as a federal prosecutor, a handsome fiancé, and a lavish wedding on the horizon. But when Avery returns home to help her father weather a health crisis, a chance encounter leaves her with uncomfortable questions and compels her to take a journey through her family’s long-hidden history, on a path that will ultimately lead either to devastation or to redemption.

Based on one of America’s most notorious real-life scandals—in which Georgia Tann, director of a Memphis-based adoption organization, kidnapped and sold poor children to wealthy families all over the country—Lisa Wingate’s riveting, wrenching, and ultimately uplifting tale reminds us how, even though the paths we take can lead to many places, the heart never forgets where we belong.

Whether it’s her work today as a reporter and host for Fox News, her years in law school, or the time she spent competing in pageants like Miss America, Shannon Bream has spent her entire adult life navigating high-pressure environments where perfection is expected and competition is the name of the game. But in this laugh-out-loud book of stories and inspiration, Shannon shares the moments away from the cameras and the halls of government, in which she learned that the values and faith of her blue-collar upbringing could keep her grounded in a world where everyone wants you to be something other than who you are.

In Finding the Bright Side, Shannon continues a conversation about authenticity, humility, and trusting in God that she’s already begun with her followers on social media. She shares behind-the-scenes stories from Washington, D.C., revelations from her time reporting on the Supreme Court, and lessons learned from the most challenging moments of her life—from the time she was fired from her first job and told, “You’re the worst person I’ve ever seen on TV,” to the time she heard “There is no cure.” But through all of this, faith (and a little bit of stubbornness!) has helped Shannon to keep hope, find purpose in the pain, and find laughs along the way.
Mary Ann Friday | Pandemic Reflections

The year 2020 began with a huge life step as I took the plunge and bought my first house. This decision carried its own moments of trepidation and anxiety as the realities of home ownership hit me fiercely as a young single woman. I knew God was leading me into deeper waters of trusting Him more completely with every area of my life. Securing wonderful roommates gave me some peace that I could manage this, and this would be good for my continuing maturity in the adult world, where I belong.

I am an extreme extrovert. I tend to fill my hours and days with family and friends and all kinds of people the Lord brings into my life. I also LOVE to travel and plan trips to fun places and do fun and meaningful things. I am on the go all the time. In February, I planned a little getaway with a few single friends over the Valentine’s holiday weekend. Then I was able to go snow skiing in Colorado with some other friends in early March. It was about this time that I began to pay more attention to the murmurings of a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern,” a new corona virus recently named COVID-19. **STRANGE.** This is one word that comes to mind when I think about the world we all find ourselves living in. This potent virus has convened upon us a season of change, unmet expectations, and a general disruption to my life that caught me off guard. However, the Lord is reminding me over and over that none of this caught Him off guard, and He is using these circumstances to remind me that I am not in control – He is!

My family had planned a little “bucket list” trip in mid March to attend some Major League Baseball Spring Training games in the Phoenix, Arizona area. The day before we were to leave, the NBA announced the cancelling of the rest of their basketball season. Then came the news that college basketball’s March Madness would not take place. My family knew it was only a matter of time before MLB would potentially follow suit and announce its cancellation of the baseball season. Until hours before our early flight the next morning, my family was still on the fence of whether we should follow through with our plans out west or not. This COVID-19 virus was becoming a much bigger issue. We decided to trust God with the plan and boarded our flight the next morning. Upon touch down in Arizona, after flying for a few hours, we took our phones off airplane mode to the announcement that all Spring Training games had officially been suspended. We were still taxing to our gate as the disappointment of this news sunk in. Providentially, God has blessed me with the most optimistic earthly father that leads our family so well. We immediately switched gears and started making lemonade out of the lemons we had been handed, and made the most of our short time in Arizona. My 88-year-old grandmother, “Granny” (aka Briarwood member, Mary Douglas) was with us on this adventure, and we ended up having a lovely little overnight road trip to the Grand Canyon. This was Granny’s first time to see the famous national park and world heritage site! Seeing her reaction to this marvel in God’s beautiful creation was a moment I will treasure always! And by God’s grace and mercy, we traveled effortlessly through the airports back home a few days later (just prior to seeing our country overtaken by gloves and facemasks!). The Lord protected us during this trip and has continued to give us all outstanding health!

The Lord has also given me the gift of TIME. Anyone who knows me can attest to the fact that I struggle with time management. I always need more! Even through the uncertain moments of future roommates not being able to move in by April 1st like we all had originally planned on due to the “Shelter at Home” mandate by Governor Ivey, my extroverted self was forced to stay home. This gave me time to get my house better organized and settled into the new space. What I thought was going to be the worst time possible to become a homeowner actually has turned into the biggest blessing. Being able to slowly trickle furniture and boxes from my parent’s house into my new home has been a very good blessing, indeed. This time has also allowed me to process this major transition in my life. Now, I'm ready for my roommates to join me!

Like many others, I have had a huge decrease in my working hours and earnings. I work as a dental assistant with the best boss ever, my Dad! Dentistry has been hit hard during this time and we have all felt the strain financially. I had my first
mortgage payment staring me in the face early in this present distress as well. But, although economically we are taking a huge hit, the Lord, yet again, continues to sweetly provide! Our office was only allowed to see dental emergencies for about five weeks straight. During that time, one patient came in with a substantial amount of dental work that needed to be done right away since the patient was experiencing great pain. Our patient was now indeed in a dire emergency! In the course of one day the practice was able to make what we needed in one week! God is good! Most days I feel like I relate to the Israelites who continually needed reminders that the Lord was carrying them through the wilderness every step of the way. I don’t want to forget the lessons learned during COVID-19. I’m establishing “Ebeeneezers” now!

One of my wise mentors and dear friends, Cindy Ball, encouraged me recently. She challenged me when I mentioned how I am desperately craving time together in person and face-to-face interaction with friends and people! She sent me this text:

“Do you see how much you miss your friends? Our sweet Heavenly Father is the greatest extrovert! He loves His people! Slow down, make the most of the down moments! This is the ultimate quiet time. Listen. No solicitor calling, no airplanes flying overhead, no traffic! No need to worry, God IS moving, He is in control! We need to “Be still”... READ and LISTEN. The house stuff is a fun diversion, but be careful my friend that it does not become an idol. It’s all in His timing. He’s the One that allowed the world to come to a halt. He is moving!”

During this down time, I have enjoyed taking the opportunity to start my mornings off worshipping the Lord with Ben Parks, (son of Benny and Brenda) a gifted worship leader live on Instagram. Those 45 minutes each morning have been such a gift and truly a therapeutic way to start the day. As Pastor Reeder has been teaching, crises are providential. I’m grateful for this gentle nudge or truly measurable reminder that our world is sin-sick. This pandemic has been a God-send to me and so many others who have said, “I’m not ready to go back to the old normal” - implying there was something needing to change all along. Lamentations 3:40-41 says, “Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord! Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven.” This time has made me want to recall and return to the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:37: “…You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” What a blessing to spend extended time in God’s Word! I’m re-learning what it means to make things concrete. To not just keep thoughts in my mind, but to put them down on paper and make it a priority to write whatever is on my mind, and to diligently commune with God about those thoughts. I am continuing to deepen my trust in and surrender to Him daily by laying my own personal wants and desires at the foot of the cross. He is more than worthy of my trust! Since our days aren't quite as rushed at the moment, I've been working on being a better listener and being still. I've grown to enjoy, love, and appreciate the slower pace. I don't have to be so stimulated 24/7! I've had more time to go outside, go for long walks and hikes... all the while, praying, thinking, processing and speaking to my Savior. The Lord truly does have the whole world in His hands!

Some things I took for granted: As an extrovert, I greatly miss hugs! Seeing them, receiving them, and giving them! I’m grateful for friends who make free homemade face masks for you, and friends who will go on prayer walks with you! I’m grateful to have family locally, as I know this is not the case for everyone. I’m grateful for community!

My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.” The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD - Lamentations 3:20-26.

May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed! Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen! - Psalm 72: 17-19
August Griffith | Working From Home

What a strange month this has been. Has anyone else been struggling to “turn it off?” I’m home more than ever before, yet I feel significantly less present with my family. I hope I am not alone in this feeling. I wanted to share a few ways that have helped me to consciously turn work off and be more present in the wonderful chaos of daily life right now.

Mindful tips for this Work-From-Home season:

1. **Set a realistic schedule.** This has been hard for me. For the first several weeks I was in survival mode, learning to navigate my family’s needs as well as my own. My responsibilities as Mom, Wife, Ministry Director, and Homemaker were suddenly smashed together like an ugly mound of playdough. Ahhh! I could no longer “play” with each color separately. Setting a schedule has helped me organize the different “colors” of my day and relax when some of the playdough blends together. Schedule daily work hours and communicate those times with your family. Set an alarm on your phone to remind you, “Time to unplug!”. There will ALWAYS be more work to do. Remember, we are called to be faithful, not perfectly productive!

2. **Intentionally decompress.** I never thought I would miss my commute, but I’ve realized how essential that time was to decompress after a long workday. Replace your car time with a quick walk around the neighborhood. Some fresh air and blood flow can really help you unwind.

3. **Rein in your phone usage.** Our phones are tricky little tools. They’re both super helpful and super addicting! Set healthy boundaries around checking email, group texts, and social media. Kick your phone out of your bedroom. Minimize notifications and be intentional about when you respond to emails and messages.

4. **Prioritize, protect, and plan for your intimacy with the Lord.** You may only have time for 5 minutes in the Word and 5 minutes in prayer, but fight for it! From this time overflows any fruit. I’m sure Kristi and other WOC have devotional recommendations during this season. A personal favorite of mine is reading and praying through Psalm 119 – reading eight verses a day.

**WBL Happenings** | Our community of working women is continuing to meet, virtually. Monday through Friday the women of WBL can be found in prayer, fellowship, and accountability with groups of businesswomen around the city. Our **Small Groups** are using Zoom or Skype to connect during this time. We typically meet during lunch hour to accommodate work schedules. If you’re interested in joining a WBL Small Group, now is a great time to explore one. *New groups are being formed right now!*

WBL also offers a **Mentoring Program** that connects women in different seasons of life through one-on-one mentor relationships. We are currently seeking godly women to offer their time and experience to support younger, working women. *Are YOU available to serve as a Mentor with WBL?* Please prayerfully consider how you may bless others with your time and your talents.

If you’d like to learn more about joining a WBL Small Group or getting involved in our Mentoring program please reach out to August, august@wblbirmingham.org
Spring Luncheon with Lauren Sisler | Praise God! WBL had an amazing virtual turn-out for our Spring Luncheon! Thank you for supporting our event and inviting your peers to join us. We had 354 Attendees and we are following up with 57 women who are interested in joining our community. Please pray with us that God would continue to use this video to point women to the ultimate hope we have in Christ. The harvest is plentiful! Please also pray that God would continue to raise up laborers to join us in the mission to love working women in Birmingham. (Our Virtual Luncheon with Lauren Sisler, ESPN Sports Reporter is available to watch on our website, www.wblbirmingham.org)

Stay home, but stay connected. | Visit our website to subscribe to our Mailing List and follow other ministry happenings on Instagram (@wblbirmingham) and Facebook (@womenbusinessleaders).

Our Gift to you! | Lastly, we’d love to send you a custom designed Verse Card from our Spring Luncheon. Please send your mailing address to Carly, carly@wblbirmingham.org if you’d like one! Hundreds of women across Birmingham have this beautiful verse strategically placed in their homes to remind them of the truth!

Cheering in your stands,
August

August Griffith, WBL Director
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Jennifer Toomer | This Present Distress

“For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord”….. Jeremiah 29:11

We often times focus on the second part of this verse: “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future” as our encouragement. All Scripture is inspired by God, and the first part of Jeremiah 29:11 contains the words I have looked to and leaned on during the last 45 days. Think about those words – “I know the plans I have for you.” I cannot imagine there is any one of us who saw this pandemic coming. We prepare and plan for all sorts of things, but in the end, God sovereignly works in and around and through situations for His glory.

Like all of you, I have gone through the five stages of grief throughout this time period. Initially I was in denial: “This is crazy. This is not happening. They won't close down churches. They won't close down businesses.” These were all thoughts I had inside my head and I said out loud. Once I accepted the fact that these things were happening, I got angry. I won't digress into all the things I was angry about, but suffice it to say, I had a list! I rapidly moved past anger into bargaining. This showed up in running my business ~ how many ways can I navigate the rules to keep people working, yet not get in trouble. In my prayer life I have fought against my predilection towards bargaining with God. It is natural (and sinful) to default to “making a
“deal” in our prayers. (Think Gideon and Abraham in the Old Testament) We must battle that sinful desire to negotiate for our way in our conversations with the Lord. The next stage we experience is depression. I am not referring to the clinical state of depression, but rather the “down in the mouth” feeling that can take over us. As a child and teenager when I would be pouting or bummed out I can recall my father saying, “Fix your face Jennifer.” What he was telling me was that my face was a window into my soul, and it was clear I had an attitude issue. It is easy to succumb to those feelings when we don’t see the light at the end of the tunnel, when we don’t know how God is going to maneuver and ordain the outcome of the times we are going through, and when we don’t understand the why behind His plans. Where most of us finally have ended up is at a place of acceptance, the fifth and final stage of grief. We are where God has us, we are not in control, and we must move forward each day with faith and trust. So here is my encouragement to you. The only way that our finite, sinful, human minds and hearts can move rapidly through the human emotions we experience is to rely on the truth in Scripture: “I know the plans I have for you.”

A fast breakdown of that handful of words is what we should remember and lean into.

1 ~ “I know” Our Heavenly, Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnipresent Father KNOWS. He is in control, He knows what He is doing, and He is Sovereign over us. When we have no control over what is going on around us, it forces us back to the realization we should live and exist with every single day…. That HE KNOWS. PS: we are never in control and we need to stop believing that lie of sinfulness.

2 ~ “the plans I have” There is A plan. It is not OUR plan, it is HIS plan and there is one. Our Faithful Father knows what He is doing and all things are by design and have passed through His hands before they occur.

3 ~ “for you” Our Father knows the hairs on our head, the days, minutes, the seconds of each of our individual lives. We are not just a bulk of humanity to Him. He has redeemed us, called us, saved us, justified us and is sanctifying us. He has created each of us uniquely, in His image and we are precious in His sight… each and every one of us. The plans that He knows and He has were designed for little old you and little old me.

4 ~ “declares the Lord” Back in middle school days we learned what a declarative statement was. A declarative statement is a true and factual statement. Our Lord isn’t suggesting, thinking, hoping or wondering about anything. He has declared that He is in charge of the plans He has for us.

How comforting it is to me to stop trying to understand, stop trying to rationalize, stop trying to make an argument for what I want to happen, and lean in to the Living Hope that we have in our Father…. Who knows the plans He has for us. I pray the truth of Scripture comes alive in your heart and mind and that we will all look first to the infallible words in the Bible to instruct how we pray, how we think and how we react to This Present Distress.
We asked Dr. Chesley Peed to engage with a general scenario of how some of our women might be feeling right now. The following is the scenario and her encouragement to us as believers:

I live alone and the social distancing has become quite isolating and lonely. When it first started I had a lot of people checking on me. Now I feel forgotten. And I am starting to get mad at God about my single situation. How do I protect my thoughts from being angry with the Lord and jealous of others who have family?

Dear friend, I am so sorry you feel isolated, lonely, and forgotten. While you may be alone physically, you are not alone spiritually or even in experiencing those difficult emotions. There are many sisters (as well as brothers) whose hearts grieve when they think of their single situation.

These intense emotions are indicators of what you value – and I hear that you, dear sister, value good things such as community, family, and relationships. All three of which the Lord has shown us in His word to be essential to the Christian life. However, there is a fine line between our healthy desire for things the Lord has declared good, and our idolatry of things he created good. We know that good things, while still good, cross the line into bad when we value them more than God’s will for our lives, or when the lack of them make us question His character.

In order to keep your heart from anger, make a diligent search and pull up any “roots of bitterness” that have gained ground in your heart (Hebrews 12:15). The fruit of a “root of bitterness” could be anger or jealousy, both of which we must repent of. Know that the Lord sees your heart (Jer. 17:10; Acts 15:8) and can sympathize with you in that pain of singleness (Heb. 4:15). Whether your pain is sharp, fresh, and new, or it has waned into a dull ache, the Lord sees you struggling with it.

In your quiet time, read Psalm 63 out loud. Meditate on the verses of praise of God’s goodness. Walk through the beginning of the Psalm acknowledging how you feel about where you are, because singleness can often seem like a “dry and weary land.” End with declaring that it is His right hand that upholds you. Let this Psalm carry you to worship and provoke you to be the one who reaches out. Call a sister in Christ who might also be struggling and seek to be an encouragement to her. Go for a walk in your neighborhood, park, or other place where the appropriate social distancing guidelines can be followed. Lastly, dear sister, remember, “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7). Dwell on the divine equation of prayer and gratitude allowing room for the peace of God to guard your heart and mind.
Barrie Downs | Coloring Sheets

We are so very blessed to have Barrie draw several more selections to use as coloring sheets again this month! To print them out for use, see the PDF versions attached to this email. Enjoy!