

To Bee Gentle

A Bible Study During COVID-19 Restrictions

Proverbs 16:24: "Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."

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Your Will, Lord!

Have you noticed that the COVID-19 restriction can trigger both faith and fear? I have. I think it's an understandable human response and that God is not surprised at all. He is loving and gentle with us and wants us to be gentle with ourselves, during this unprecedented time, as well. But sometimes, it's not easy or automatic. For example, here is what happened with me recently.

A friend asked me to write a devotion that might encourage her and our school community. I felt delighted at the opportunity to write for her. However, the idea that my writing would be sent to a larger audience didn't feel comfortable to me. It triggered some fear.

I am the Women's Ministry Director of Risen Savior Lutheran Church in Chandler, Arizona, and write Bible studies for the women. I can comfortably share studies with a few family members and friends. My children attend or have graduated from CGLS (Christ's Greenfield Lutheran School) in Gilbert, Arizona. I write devotions for the CGLS's middle school year end trips. As long as I share my writing with small groups like these and the CGLS MOPS group, I am more at ease. But when I think beyond that, I hesitate.

My friend mentioned her invitation to write in a group text with our prayer team. With generous hearts, they all lifted me up expressing support. Alluding to Esther 4:14³, one lady wrote, "Perhaps you were

born for such a time as this.” I chuckled, because this really was the perfect verse for me.

“I will pray about it,” I responded. “But it feels like I’m jumping off the high dive and that’s not comfortable to me. However, I imagine you all in your goggles and floaties catching me, if I decide to dive into these uncharted waters.”

I stopped texting and prayed, “Lord, may your will be done. If you want me to take this on, would you please give me Your words?” In the Lord’s sense of humor, my children just happened to play nicely for most of that Sunday afternoon. I found myself at my computer, writing through lunch and then continuing until the sun went down. I took a break when the kids yelled, “What’s for dinner?”

The Gift of Gentleness

The next morning, I decided to give myself a personal gift. It’s the gift of gentleness. Over the past year I’ve been encouraged to offer myself gentleness in all my life roles. I wonder if you, too, might benefit from being gentle on yourself during this season.

I happened to have a previously scheduled call with my coach that morning. She asked, “How are you doing with all of the shifting, fluctuating and adjusting during these COVID-19 restrictions?” I told her

the ways that my family and I were modifying things. Also, I expressed that my heart was fluctuating about the new writing project.

And then I reminded myself of something I read in *The Intentional Woman*⁴ by Joan C. Webb and Carol Travilla. The authors invite us to “Come as You Are Today” as we approach both God and our current life circumstances. The chapter is based on the verse Psalm 32:8, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.”⁵ God’s words remind me that He knows where I have been and where I am right now. He also knows what purposes He desires me to fulfill to bring Him honor and glory—even the purposes that I didn’t plan or prepare for.

I felt my shoulders relax. I do trust God with my life. I do trust Him in the details of my goings and comings. I trust Him when I rest. I trust Him even when the waters of my voyage are muddled. I do believe God will guide my pathway in this project. He promises to instruct me and teach me in the way I should go. He keeps His promises.

I also know He loves me. This reality helps me to come up for air. So, here I am sharing with you and being gentle on myself. I can do both!

Perhaps you can relate to my fear of exposure. Maybe different kinds of fears threaten your peace of mind during these COVID-19

restrictions. You'll be invited to bring those to your awareness and God's love during this study.

By the way, I am still treading water while writing this Bible Study. It remains a little scary for me, but I'm enjoying my time with God in the water and the view is pleasant!

God enjoys being with you too. He will meet both you and me in our specific needs.

Losses and Changes

We all encounter loss because of the COVID-19 virus. And these losses inevitably result in changes. Changes can bring about struggles, as well as benefits.

Loss is defined as: "the fact or process of losing something or someone, the state or feeling of grief when deprived of someone or something of value."⁶

During these COVID-19 limitations, it's likely you are encountering changes—spiritually, mentally, emotionally, relationally and physically. Have you faced old or new fears? Are you hesitating to jump beyond your fear into the water below? Or have you already jumped and need to learn to maneuver the cluttered waters? Maybe you were more like pushed off and didn't have a say in the matter. I understand.

In this writing area of my life I chose to jump into the blue water. In other areas of my life, I was pushed into the water. During those times, sometimes I forgot to have a life vest that is available for me to cling to.

Changes that are beyond our control can be tough. If you haven't opened your gift of gentleness yet, now might be a good time. Keep this gift close by as you prepare to do a reflective exercise just for you.

Losses/Changes During This Coronavirus Crisis

You will have the opportunity to contemplate your own losses and changes in the Reflection 1 provided below. I encourage you to consider all the areas and roles of your life where you're now experiencing loss and change:

- Relationships (including with your spouse, children, extended family members, friends, social media acquaintances, co-workers, ministry partners, neighbors, teachers, caregivers, doctors)
- Work/Volunteerism
- Home Life (including Finances)
- Extra-Curricular Activities
- Worship (public and personal)

- Health/Self-Care

Allowing yourself the time to take note of your losses and changes can benefit you in the days, months and seasons to come. Then you'll know what you're dealing with...and what you can pray about... and what you are grateful for...and what kind of help you can ask for... and where to reduce your unrealistic expectations and offer yourself gentleness. I will give you more instructions about how to do Reflection 1, but first let's take a moment to enjoy some encouragement from God to you.

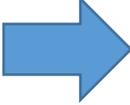
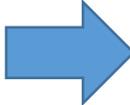
An Empathetic Savior

Before you take the time to work through the below Reflection 1, I invite you to read about Jesus as your Great High Priest in Hebrews 4:14-16. Notice how the writer of the Hebrews characterizes our understanding and compassionate Savior. (Underline the phrases in this passage that especially impact you.)

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every

way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”⁷

Reflection 1.

Loss  Change and Change  Loss (Struggles/Benefits)

Each of us leads a unique, intricate and complex life. That reality can be both exciting and perplexing. Soon you will have the opportunity to contemplate, acknowledge and list some of your own losses and changes that have occurred during these “stay at home” restrictions. Many of you are quite aware of what has changed. Others might not have had the time to reflect on what’s been happening in and around you.

I invite you to take a few moments and sit with yourself and God. Ask Him to help you gain insight and clarity about what you’re facing right now. Then invite Him into each area of your life to help you make loving and wise decisions about how to face your fears, concerns, losses and changes.

To help you discover your own distinctive personal losses and changes, I have listed some examples from my life. As you’ll notice, these changes and losses have given way to some struggles as well as

positive adjustments. The benefits from the positive adjustments were unexpected and at the moment, I'll accept them as a treasure.

During this exercise, I kept my gift of gentleness close. This helped me to simply write down my realities in each area without placing any undue judgment on myself or my family. I tried to stay away from negative self-talk. At a later time, I want to further evaluate my changes and losses with God. It's then that I will assess whether they are struggles and/or benefits and how they might overlap and be both.

Annie's Examples

Relationship Losses/Changes (spouse, children, extended family members, friends, social media acquaintances, co-workers, ministry partners, neighbors, teachers, caregivers, doctors):

- My parents who winter in Arizona returned back to Missouri two weeks before they wanted to. We connect more through snail mail now. I don't get to see my friends and children's teachers at the CGLS morning drop-off and pick-up. I now use more forms of technology to communicate. I am learning with how to flex in my communication methods.

- A few close friends are nurses and first responders. I am humbled by their continued commitment to keeping our community safe and healthy.
- Most of the ladies in my Women's Ministry are over 60 and many of them live alone. I'm concerned for their overall health. My prayer journal has more entries than usual with requests from friends of friends impacted firsthand with the virus.
- My husband and I have friends who work in industries that are downsizing. They revealed to us their stress levels about their future are high. We are praying for them.
- I can't have my neighbors over to my house. My family started a video challenge with our extended relatives and neighbors.

Work/Volunteerism Losses/Changes:

- I'm adjusting the times of day when I perform my ministry work and volunteerism. I'm learning how to work in more noise, since my four children are now home.
- The families of the local mission where I volunteer in Phoenix are considered high-risk and homeless. Most are laid off due to industry closures. My ministry has always provided monthly food, household items and hygiene products. Since the quarantine, this

has changed to weekly donations and this means more trips to get supplies.

- My husband is the primary breadwinner of our family. It is hard seeing him so concerned about the state of the economy.
- I planned to start a new online course this spring. I'm holding off on enrolling, because it's not the best time to spend the money. It's disappointing.

Home Life/Finances *Losses/Changes*:

- Because my children are home now, I'm partnering with their teachers to do at-home learning.
- One of my daughters created a chore chart. My family is helping more with daily household responsibilities. My children are growing their cooking and baking skills. We now have a family cook night. We are eating out less and saving money in this area. I am grateful for these unexpected benefits.
- My front room turned into a kid's fort, my dining room table is now a classroom and other areas of the house are out of order. I recognize these are probably short-term.
- We tried a couple organizational projects during the same time we were transitioning to doing school to home. Sometimes I get

too enthused about these projects and don't reserve enough energy for the many other things that need to get done. Waiting until the weekend for these special projects is a better option for my family.

Extra-Curricular Activities *Losses/Changes*:

- My daughters' sports have been postponed. They miss their teammates as well as the physical and mental components of their sports activities. I miss seeing my girls competing. I miss seeing the parents of their teammates. We don't currently leave our house after dinner for sports. Our Saturdays are not busy with sporting activities as they were before. Although we are saving money on gas, this is an area of felt loss for us.
- We are being creative with our exercise. Our family doesn't consider ourselves hikers, but we are trying "easy" hikes. Surprisingly, we are walking and biking more.
- My daughters and I spend more time being creative together. We picked up a new passion for making handmade cards—and we decorated one another's room doors. These activities, along with coloring and painting, are some ways we've found to relieve stress and bring us enjoyment.

Worship Losses/Changes (public and personal):

- I dearly miss worshipping at my church, Risen Savior Lutheran, on Sunday mornings. I also miss attending chapel in person at CGLS. We tried online worship. Although I appreciate the efforts made by our church and school, this is just not the same for me.
- My Thursday morning and Monday evening Bible studies are postponed in person. We are utilizing Zoom and YouTube for Bible study. It's a different way to connect with my friends.
- I did a family devotion with my daughters about working through frustrations. This came as the result of extra loud voices and different temperaments and their responses to the restrictions. The girls are taking turns to read family devotions. This is an activity I hope we continue after the stay at home rules are lifted.

Health/Self-Care Losses/Changes:

- My husband and I watch the news nightly. Its heart-wrenching hearing about the deaths and diagnoses of so many people from COVID-19.
- All my children have environmental allergies. The initial symptoms of the virus start off the same except for a fever. It's hard not to give in to worry.

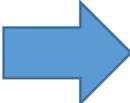
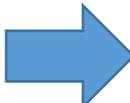
- I haven't been sleeping as well at night, because my mind is racing more than usual. I don't want to admit it, but I am also eating more baked goods which keeps me up at night.

In Your World

Now it's your turn. My examples and experiences may help you think of situations you have not considered for yourself. They also may be drastically different than yours, but be assured that your specific and unique circumstances are valid and important for you to notice. I want to encourage you to just "be yourself."

Think of this as a brain and heart dump of your fears, concerns, losses and changes as it relates to the COVID-19 virus and restrictions. Write as much or as little as you are comfortable with. If you want to be descriptive, go for it.

Reflection 1.

Loss  Change and Change  Loss (Struggles/Benefits)

One way to use your gift of gentleness in the exercise below is to relieve yourself of the tendency for judging, belittling or over-analyzing yourself. If you find yourself stuck in one area, consider moving on to the next area and then come back to it later. You do not need to share

this with anyone, unless you want to. So, you can be authentic here— with yourself and with your empathetic Savior.

Relationships Losses/Changes (spouse, children, extended family members, friends, social media acquaintances, co-workers, ministry partners, neighbors, teachers, caregivers, doctors):

Work/ Volunteerism Losses/Changes:

Home Life/Finances *Losses/Changes*:

Extra-Curricular Activities *Losses/Changes*:

Worship *Losses/Changes* (public and personal):

Health/Self-Care Losses/Changes:

Everyday Life

In the midst of these COVID-19 restrictions, we still encounter everyday life. These ordinary daily situations include the monotony of the mundane *and* surprises, blessings *and* unwanted struggles, amazements *and* inconveniences. And if you're like my family and me, the limitations of the "stay at home orders" make the surprises, struggles and inconveniences seem more disruptive.

Just in the last few weeks we experienced these random daily inconveniences: our car's tire suddenly went flat, our dog required an urgent trip to the animal hospital, the home air conditioning unit acted up, a refrigerator shelf broke and fell into pieces, and then our daughter's prized fish unexpectedly died.

Although we partnered with the Lord to work through all these unanticipated circumstances, I admit they felt annoying at first. Perhaps my story helps you understand how your own family's inconveniences

intersect with the frustrations inherent in the current COVID-19 restrictions. Take a moment and think about how the tug and pull of everyday life is impacting you now. God is gentle with us during these times and I think He wants us to remain gentle with ourselves, also.

My God, My Helper

With the acknowledgement of your losses and changes, you may be thinking, “I need help!” Psalm 121 speaks to me during seasons of loss and change. As an Arizonan, it’s extra special because of its references to the mountains and the sun. The mountains remind me of God’s protection and power to help and the sun reminds me of His faithfulness. I hope this blesses and comforts you! (Underline the phrases in this passage that speak specifically to you in your personal situation and circumstances.)

Psalm 121:1-8

“I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;

indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;
the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.”⁸

He is Risen, Indeed!

We celebrated the Lenten season and Easter holiday during these current COVID-19 restrictions. It helped me to acknowledge afresh that Christ's death and resurrection give me eternal hope for the future as well as peace for any fear and anxiety that I experience during these uncertain times.

I appreciated the words I read on a Hallmark card my in-laws sent me: “He is risen! The resurrection is the beautiful fulfillment of Christ’s promise...The blessed evidence of His eternal love...The wonderful assurance of life everlasting.” I cling to these truths this season. And this feels like gentleness to me.

Let's Pray!

Heavenly Father, the Psalm above reminds us that
our help can come from you!

You are the one true God, the King of all creation.

You are with me in my goings, sleep, wanderings, wonderings,
doubts, questions, uncertainties,
disappointments, and discouragements.

You are an unsleeping guardian that never rests.

I can always call out to you for help!

You promise to never let my foot slip,
even when the ways and days ahead are unclear
and feel treacherous at times.

Your protection is unfailing.

When I am worn and parched from the heat of the sun,
you promise I'll be without harm.

When the pressures mount, you provide me with a place to rest.

You provide shade when I feel weak.

You extend your strength to me,
when I feel fragile in my thoughts towards myself and others.

Your arms give me a safe place to share my intimate and honest
concerns about my losses and changes.

As a Pilgrim, I am in spaces of the desert that feel unprotected,
desolate, archaic, chaotic and even unruly at times.

I cry out to you! Please respond as you have before in my life.

I lift up those who are hurting.

Please make them aware of your great love, power,
protection, provision, grace and mercy
for today and the days ahead.

I will rest knowing that as you carried me in the past,
you have my present in the palm of your hand.

It is in Jesus' name we pray. Amen!

NOTE: If you enjoyed this Bible study, would you please consider sending a donation to one of my favorite charities, **Children First Leadership Academy** (<https://cfaphoenix.org/>)? I am raising money to provide them with food and supplies during the COVID-19 restriction. A donation can be made to:

Risen Savior Lutheran Church and in the memo write: **Children First Leadership Academy**. Please mail your check directly to: Risen Savior Lutheran Church at 23914 S. Alma School Rd., Chandler, AZ 85248.

Notes

1. "Proverbs 16:24." [https://www.biblegateway.com/ Proverbs 16:24](https://www.biblegateway.com/Proverbs%2016:24). Accessed 27 Mar. 2020
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4. Travilla, Carol and Webb, C. Joan. *The Intentional Woman*. NavPress/ Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, IL 60188, 2002
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*In Gentleness,
Pause, Pray, Renew, Rejoice!
Annie Wolf*