



Happy Summer, Ladies!

About this time of the year, our Women's Ministry team is usually dreaming, praying, and planning for the upcoming year. While future plans remain uncertain, our hope and expectation is that we'll be able to meet together in the coming months for Bible study, mentoring, fellowship, events, and more.

In the meantime, I wanted to help us feel connected through more than just TV and computer screens. Plus, getting snail mail is always a treat in this day and age. This newsletter contains reflections, poetry, outdoor excursion ideas, a summer recipe, and more from various women in our MBCC church family.

We'll be in touch soon with opportunities to connect and plug in. Enjoy the remaining days of summer, and know that we're praying for you and your loved ones!



Blessings,
Kelley Brown
MBCC Women's Ministry Director
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MBCC Women's NEWSLETTER



SUMMER 2020

Holding Tightly to my Father's Hand

Reflection on the Quarantine

by Libby Pryor

I have learned and relearned so many lessons from 73+ days of sheltering in place! I have found time to be reflective, read an incredible book, *The Masterpiece*, and am listening to Bible studies via podcasts which bring comfort and hope through His word. I pray A LOT! Even though I am isolated, I have not been fearful. The peace of God has been with me every day. He has been loving and caring for me through all of the uncertainty. When I began to feel uneasy or sorry for myself, I stop and remember



how grateful I am for God's protection and blessing me with everything I need. It has reminded me that everyone is not safe and healthy and my focus needed to be on others and not myself. I pray for those suffering from the virus, those working on the front lines and for God to heal our land. Since I cannot see family and friends, I have sent texts, emails, social media messages and had telephone conversations to offer and receive encouragement. I have even made new friends during this pandemic... those I pass on the other side of the street during my daily walks. It may only be brief chats of "how are you today?" but none the less God has put those people in my path for a reason. I should never be surprised by what He is doing and how He is working!

For those who know me, working in my yard is a daily occurrence, weather permitting. It has and continues to be incredible therapy for me and a constant reminder of God's creation. As I look all around me, God is in every bird that sings, every tree, every flower and the soil I dig.

No matter what is happening all around us, God is sovereign, incredibly faithful and loving. I surrender all to Him and know He will bring us through this. My prayer is we will be a people of greater compassion and humility.

"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

- Jeremiah 29:11

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MOUNTAIN BROOK
COMMUNITY
CHURCH

Ashley's Adventures



My name is Ashley Matteo, and I have been attending MBCC since I was in college (a long time ago). I'm married to Dan Matteo, and we're in the Fusion Community Group. We have two crazy boys ages 9 and 11. With so many summer camps and plans cancelled, I wanted to share a list of some of our family's favorite fun outdoor activities to enjoy with your family, kids, or friends. Feel free to reach out with additional ideas or questions!

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Even MORE fun details and info can be found at mbcc.us/women.

Short Road Trips

BANKHEAD FOREST WATERFALLS

Don't miss Kinlock Falls and Turkey Foot Falls (parking can be limited). Double Springs, AL

COVERED BRIDGES OF BLOUNT COUNTY

3 separate Covered Bridges that you can drive over. My favorite one is Swann Covered Bridge. Good access to water play as well. Another must-see in this area is **MARDIS MILL FALLS**. Park on the side of the road and it's 1/4 mile walk to the falls and also has a rope swing.



Pro Tips: Bring food and drinks, extra clothes, towels, band-aids, and a bag for your kids to collect nature finds along the way. Plan entertainment for the car (music, family games, DVD, etc.). Enjoy a treat together afterward (i.e. an ICEE from the gas station, ice cream or a try a local spot like Tip Top Grill in Bluff Park or Whistlestop Café in Irondale).



SHOAL CREEK PARK

Great for biking, hiking, and a fun creek; also beautiful seasonal wildflowers. | Montevallo, AL

ORR PARK

Unique wooden carved tree trunks, creek, and large field with paved walking path. Located behind Montevallo Elementary School.

FALLING ROCK FALLS

One mile hike to a large waterfall (becomes quite steep at the end). | Montevallo, AL

NATURAL BRIDGE PARK

One mile shaded hike that goes under caves. Haleyville, AL

NOCCALULA FALLS

Enjoy a waterfall, picnic area, mountain biking and hiking Gadsden, AL

TANNEHILL STATE PARK

Fun mountain biking trails, or if your kids are younger they can ride around the park and campground area; fishing and playing in the water. My boys' favorite spot is the Country Store where the candy is less than 25 cents, and the freshly roasted peanuts are only \$1 per bag. | McCalla, AL

CAHABA RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

As far as I know, this is the best place to see the Cahaba Lilies that bloom from Mother's Day to Father's Day. It has a beach area and a rope swing. Also good for fishing if it's not too crowded. West Blocton, AL

Birmingham Area Parks

- ALDRIDGE GARDENS
- BLACK MOUNTAIN MTN. BIKE TRAILS
- BOTANICAL GARDENS
- CAHABA RIVER PARK
- MCCALLUM PARK
- MOSS ROCK PRESERVE
- RED MOUNTAIN PARK
- RUFFNER MOUNTAIN
- TURKEY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE
- VESTAVIA LIBRARY TRAILS



Pro Tips
on some local parks:

DUNNAVANT VALLEY HIKING TRAIL

Trail follows a creek and is great for all ages. Definitely plan to find the Octopus tree trunk that leans over the creek.

OAK MOUNTAIN STATE PARK

- BMX track - fun for bikes; access an easy trail at the parking lot (goes to the dam and lake); good for all ages, very scenic.
- Maggie's Glen - fun trail to a secret creek and a hollow tree trunk young kids can fit inside.
- North Trailhead Lake trail - biking trail that isn't too technical; it's the first trail on your left.

- Flipside Beach - has an inflatable aqua park and wakeboarding park if you want an extra special adventure (at the north side of the park).
- King's Chair- The most epic overlook, but it's a steep climb and almost 5 miles round trip.

ROSS BRIDGE

A partially paved trail with wooden train playground for the little kids. Continue on a gravel trail for another 1.5-2 miles. There is also a shaded creek and fun tunnel to look through. To access these trails pass the main entrance on your right and continue on Ross Bridge Parkway for about one more mile until you see a gravel parking pad.

Paved Bike Paths

- JEMISON TRAIL - Mountain Brook
- LAKESHORE PARKWAY
- ROTARY TRAIL - Railroad Park to Sloss Furnaces
- VULCAN TRAIL - 1.7 miles
- HIGH ORE LINE TRAIL - 6 miles round trip
- CHIEF LADIGA TRAIL - Oxford, AL, up to 60 miles



Legend:

- Hiking
- Scenic
- Biking
- Climbing
- Waterfall
- Kayaking
- Swimming
- Entry fee
- Picnic area
- Playground
- Fishing

And if not, He is Still good

by Alex Fly

It seems the whole world has been hurting lately. The can't-catch-your-breath kind of hurting. The crying-in-the-middle-of-the-night kind of hurting. The haunting, always-right-around-the-corner kind of hurting that packs a punch. And I want so badly to pack Hurt a bag and bid him farewell at the bus stop with a "please never come back" closing remark. I want us all to be able to walk away from the pain and heartache once and for all.

But life doesn't work like that. We're all vulnerable to pain. We're all bound to hurt. We're all fighting to make it through the darkness. None of this is new; it's as old as Adam and Eve and the eating of the forbidden fruit itself.

Do you know how we're going to make it through the valleys of life, really and truly? Prepare your Sunday School answers, friends. No matter how elementary or cliché it may sound, God is the only way. He is the One who makes beauty from our ashes (Isaiah 61). The One who turns our curses into our blessings (Nehemiah 13). The One who meets us right smack-dab in the middle of the fire (Daniel 3).

I recently read the story in Daniel about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They are a few of Daniel's friends who refuse to follow the king's commands to worship a golden image because they are wholeheartedly devoted to the King of kings. The ruler, Nebuchadnezzar, becomes infuriated because of their insubordination and orders his men to throw the three rebels into the fiery furnace. (If you are picturing a giant chocolate bunny as the golden image too, then I'm so glad we can share the strange results of a Veggie Tales childhood.)

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond to the king's morbid sentencing by telling him where their loyalties lie (Daniel 3:17-18). They say, "Go ahead and throw us in the fire. Our God will rescue us. But even if He doesn't, even if we die in the flames, God is still good and we will worship Him alone."

Now is about the time in the story where we expect God to show up intervene, but he allows them to fall into the fire. Was the Lord too busy or too nonchalant about the situation? Nope. It turns out that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were never alone in the fire...When the king shifts his gaze by looking into the furnace, he sees four men instead of three. God sends an angel for His servants' protection and deliverance in their moment of distress. Daniel's posse emerges from the fire without a scratch, much to the astonishment of the onlookers. At the end of the story, God gets the glory.

Here's the subtle truth that I can't stop noticing: Daniel's friends do not escape their trials. They don't find themselves miraculously prevented from entering the fiery furnace. But what makes all the difference is that they were never alone in their times of trouble, and neither are we.

I think that's pretty reassuring as we walk through the valleys of life. We aren't in those seasons of suffering by mistake. God isn't watching us in our moments of pain and thinking, "Well, I didn't see this coming."



Alex Fly

He sees us in our hurting.

He loves us in our hurting.

He never leaves us in our hurting.

God is walking right beside us, ready to comfort our aching hearts and wrap up our wounds as only He can. He will bring beauty from our lives, no matter how desperate or disappointing our situations may look at the moment.

And you might be thinking, "That's all well and good, but how do we really do this?" How do we cling to Jesus when it feels like the ground is shaking beneath our feet? How can we feel the presence of God when we feel so utterly alone?

I'd love to think there is a one-size-fits-all prayer that we can pray and move on with our day. It would be far easier if there was a "read this once" Bible verse and all of our problems grew smaller and smaller, like some sort of Alice in Wonderland cookie effect. But I haven't found that to be true in my life. Instead, I've found that it involves the continual acts of kneeling before the throne, digging into the Word, talking with God, and laying down masks in the presence of Gospel-centered community.

Chances are these spiritual practices won't make our trials go away. But they will shift our focus from our earthly troubles to our beautiful Maker. And when we shift our gazes, we might just see the fourth figure in the fire. We might just trust that God will rescue us from our deepest valleys and believe that even if we are sitting in the hurt for (what feels like) too long, He is still good. And we are never alone.

Read more of Alex's writing at theharvestletters.com

"Behind the Wall"

A Poem by Tara Thomas

The house behind the wall has a rooftop high and tall.
The wall is laid with diligent care- clean and straight and showing no wear.
But what lies hidden behind the wall isn't what it appears at all.
Untold stories overtaken by mold from days and months and years of old.
Rotten wood and sagging beams stand in place of bygone dreams.
Inhabitants work with smiling faces on walls to hide the rotten places.
They neglect the work of pain, choosing instead lives of strain.
Hearts sigh through silent lips painted with deceitful bliss.
Unknown years remain where all is vain; so much effort wasted without gain.

If the wall was broken down, what gasps of shock would then resound.
Barren, exposure reveals their shame; uncovered hope is theirs to claim.
The choice is theirs to make this day; where to rebuild and where to delay.
It's tempting to rebuild the wall. The work is light. The cost is small.
While reconstructing the broken home requires facing much unknown.
The cost will be high and the work will be hard; the wall will not be there to guard.
Where do you invest in this circumstance when you are given a second chance?
Shame is not given the final word. Hope remains; perseverance brings good.
Faith is tested; Love sustains. All glory to our God who reigns!



Tara Thomas



Leading with Love

As our nation and its communities continue to navigate racial tension and injustice, our church strives to lead with loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. In addition to sharing the grace of the Gospel, we can demonstrate neighborly love by listening and learning from the hurting and oppressed. Longtime MBCC member Dena Grant shares her perspective with us.

Interview with Dena Grant

How has racial tension or discrimination affected you and your family personally?

I grew up in Birmingham during the Civil Rights era. My first memory of that time is of my oldest brother who was in high school. He had gotten out of school to take part in one of the marches in Birmingham. My mom did not want him to go, but he was determined. She cried for fear of him being hurt. He did take a couple of blows from a baton, but he came home.



Rubin & Dena Grant

One of my memories as an adult parent is when my daughter got ready to go off to college. She had earned a National Merit Scholarship. This could be applied to any school. She chose Vanderbilt. The summer before school started we were invited to an event to see others from our area who would also be attending Vanderbilt in the fall. A woman I did not know came up to me and said that my daughter had taken her daughter's friend's place. I had to restrain myself as I have done many times. My daughter had earned the scholarship in the National Merit scholarship competition and she had placed in the ranking with her piano audition.

Rubin and I never made the money that other people with the same jobs did. I was a programmer project manager and made less than some of the programmers who worked under me.

What do you see as the church's role in racial reconciliation?

The church's mission is to make disciples. If we make disciples then we are reconciled to each other through the blood of Christ. He not only reconciles us; He makes us brothers and sisters through God our Father.

How would you describe the society/culture that you dream will one day exist?

I believe with all my heart that one day sin and evil will be no more. We who are the children of God will live with Him again as He planned before the beginning of time.

How has your faith influenced your life experiences?

My mission in life is to carry out the "Great Commission" telling others the story of redemption; and through love and good works; walking faithfully with my sisters and brothers until Christ returns or I am laid to rest.

What hope do you see in the church regarding unity and peace for people of all races?

God has blessed me with sisters and brothers who do not look like me and don't always agree with me but love me. We are family.



Belue Family



Jackson Family



Thompson Family

Please keep the Grants and our black families and children in your prayers as they navigate this tumultuous time and ongoing challenges.

Book Recommendations

Shared by the Alpha & Omega Community Group

SPIRITUAL GROWTH



- Chasing Vines** by Beth Moore
- Crazy Love** by Francis Chan
- Don't Waste Your Life** by John Piper
- Everybody Always** by Bob Goff
- Love Does** by Bob Goff
- The Red Sea Rules** by Robert J. Morgan
- Sacred Influence** by Gary Thomas

MOTIVATION FOR MOTHERS



- The Magic of Motherhood** by Ashlee Gadd
- Becoming Mom Strong** by Heidi St. John

RACIAL RECONCILIATION & EDUCATION



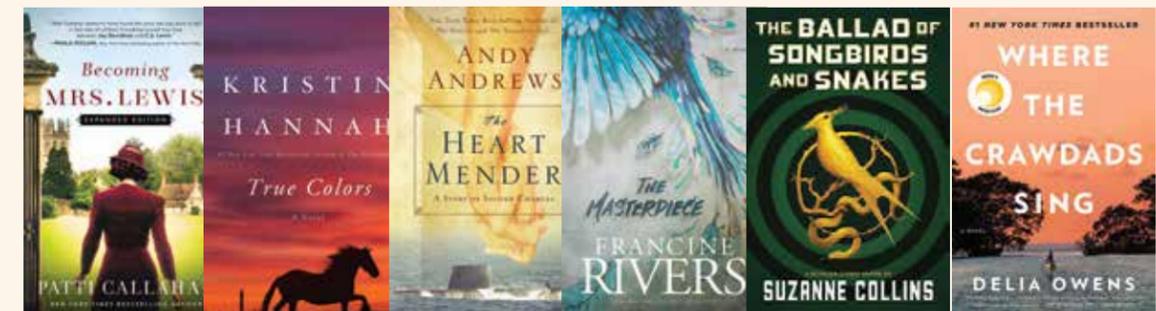
- Just Mercy** by Bryan Stevenson
- White Fragility** by Robin DiAngelo

BIBLE STUDIES

- The Church & the Racial Divide** by Trevor Atwood
- HomeGrown** by Dr. Josh and Christi Straub
- Everyday Theology** by Mary Wiley
- Better: A Study of Hebrews** by Jen Wilkin
- Jesus & Women** by Kristi McLelland

All can be found at lifeway.com

NOVELS



- Becoming Mrs. Lewis** by Patti Callahan
- True Colors** by Kristin Hannah
- The Heart Mender** by Andy Andrews
- The Masterpiece** by Francine Rivers
- The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes** by Suzanne Collins
- Where the Crawdads Sing** by Delia Owens

Please check Ben Telfair's resource page for additional recommendations and resources on racial reconciliation.

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Summer Recipe

Submitted by Abby Nevins

Fresh Vegetable and Herb Succotash | serves 4

Ingredients

1.5c corn (fresh off the cob or frozen)

1/2c chopped cucumber

1c cherry tomatoes, quartered

1/4c red onion, diced

1/2c butter beans or spring peas

Juice from 1/2 a lemon

2tsp olive oil

3-4Tbsp fresh herbs, finely chopped (Mint and basil taste great!)

1 avocado, chopped

1/3 cup crumbed feta cheese

Directions

Cook corn and beans in a skillet with some Pam or olive oil until slightly charred. Once they've cooled down, mix together everything except avocado together in a bowl and stir. Place in fridge. When ready to serve, add avocado chunks. Stir again and enjoy! This can be adjusted to anyone's taste. Add different veggies, various herbs and make your own vinaigrette!