



October 2017

Dear Friend,

As I write this from my tiny house on this unusually crisp September morning, I am filled with gratitude and hope. This feeling is a welcome one, one I want to share, as the news coming in over the last several weeks (and continuing, now) has often left me worrying and feeling quite incapable to help. So many people experiencing total destruction of their lives – I can easily slip into a place of anger and despair, my heart pleading, “why?” And then, in perfect timing, I read this beautiful gem of an experience from my friend, Crystal, and her husband, Shane, working in their yard:

“Shane was pretty bummed about having to destroy a cardinal's nest with his bare hands. He physically went outside, reached into the bush and dragged it out. Then went back and mutilated it to keep the cardinal from coming back. I could hear her just a-fussing. But she'd only gotten a small portion of it completed. We both felt really bad about it. But we knew something that little birdie didn't – that in less than two weeks, that bush would be completely uprooted and gone. And if she'd completed her nest, her babies would have gone right with it. Then, Shane said something that was so true. He said, ‘You know, sometimes we're like the cardinal. Working hard, doing our best, building our lives for something great. And this big, mean man comes along and, what we think, tears down everything we've done. But it's only because He sees something coming that we can't. *We may never know what that something is. But it's always to protect us.*’ Thank you, Lord. He always knows best.”

This reminded me of so many truths, things I know in my heart but forget so often with my head. We are absolutely, undoubtedly cherished by the one who formed us. We are his children and he is our proud and loving father. He has the long view of our circumstances here on earth; he knows things we don't know and may not ever see. He tells us this in Jeremiah 29, through a letter from the prophet Jeremiah to the exiled Israelites – people who had lost everything, had to leave their homes and start over in a new land, as captives. God told them, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the

LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.’” His Word was true for them (as he kept his promises to his people!) and it’s true for us today, and for the generations to come. We have experienced his deep love, most clearly in the midst of our hardest times. There are countless examples in his Word of how he requires nothing of us but to surrender to his love. We don’t have to come to him all “good” and ready. We don’t have to make up for things we’ve done. We simply let him love us and entrust ourselves to his son, Jesus, who has already made us “good.” How? By living the life we should have lived, and taking the punishment we all deserve. THAT is love. THAT is the ultimate protection and rescue.

We certainly grieve the hard things here – just like the mama cardinal. Jesus is right with us, grieving the death and destruction on this earth, just like my friends were so sad to have to destroy her nest. But I am bursting with hope and gratitude because of the truth of the gospel. The idea that this is not forever and we have, in Jesus, a glorious eternity ahead of us – this gives me the strength to endure hard things, and to enter into others’ hard things alongside them, trusting and knowing we have the love and protection of our perfect Father.

I pray this gives you encouragement, offers hope, and that you may know how beloved you are.

Ashley Putman

*And do not forget to do good and to share with others,
for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Hebrews 13:16*