

Becky L McCoy (00:00):

You lose your job at a local nonprofit. Your mom has major surgery and you can't be with her. Then a global pandemic hits. This is Sucker Punched.

Becky L McCoy (00:20):

I'm here today with Marlena Graves and I'm really excited to have her here with us to talk about, um, the current global pandemic and how to show compassion and what it looks like to live in this really, uh, worrisome, um, and fearful time. So Marlena, thank you for sharing your time with us.

Marlena Graves (00:50):

I'm very glad and delighted to be here.

Becky L McCoy (00:53):

So we're just going to jump right in. Um, and I am curious to know how has the development and spread of COVID-19 affected you?

Marlena Graves (01:03):

Yeah, well there've been some, uh, really daily effects on our lives, like everyone else. Um, I live in Ohio and governor Mike DeWine has done, in my opinion, a pretty good job of getting ahead of things. We were one of the first States, I think along with California to shut things down, shut school down right away. I forget exactly though, what day it was. It, my daughters came home, but right away maybe the 12th or 13th of March. Um, and then, uh, you know, the colleges and universities were shut down too. Um, you know, and I shouldn't say shutdown. They were told to go online and uh, church gatherings, et cetera, et cetera, number of people. And so, um, it was a shelter in place suggestion already for about two weeks, but it was official on Monday. It was officially, we were officially told the shelter place on Monday, even though we've been, for all intents and purposes, acting like it for almost two weeks or a week and a half.

Marlena Graves (02:12):

So, um, that's here in Ohio. And uh, like everyone else, we've had to scramble. My husband's, I'm a university professor and so he had to get his classes online. Thankfully they gave him like a, a day, I think it was actually Friday, March 13th off from the normal gathering of classes to, um, get his stuff online and then, um, on Monday. So I think, would that be the 16th of March? My girls started their first day of homeschooling all day. [inaudible] and that should normally be a problem, I don't think. But we have to share computers. When my computer died, um, and someone for, unfortunately one of Sean's students gave us her old one cause someone gave her one. So that works out. But just trying to share the computers and we don't have a TV in our home. Um, I don't think, we never really have an, uh, we don't have Hulu or anything, but we do, we did get a YouTube TV so Sean could watch sports, but just those little things that, um,

Marlena Graves (03:30):

Require a computer, the girls want to see a show or something requires juggling. And so there's like everyone else, there's an inconvenience to it. I also have a writing deadline for April 1st for a book for InterVarsity on the Enneagram, the Enneagram nine.

Becky L McCoy (03:46):

Yay.

Marlena Graves (03:46):

Yeah. We're trying to just figure out how to use our computers and share them. Mmm. For work and for, um writing and for the girls. And so that's, that's fine. That's an a minor inconvenience, but it makes it a little bit chaotic. And of course, um, I know you live in Connecticut and we live in Northwest Ohio and Toledo an hour South of Detroit. And so it's cold and we can't always go out every day if it's raining or what have you. So trying to keep people busy and entertained. Um,

Becky L McCoy (04:26):

yeah, for sure.

Marlena Graves (04:27):

Yeah. Our girls don't, uh, you know, they like us to be involved in everything, which is fine, highly engaging, except if we have work to do that's different.

Marlena Graves (04:37):

But again, I'm not saying anything others haven't gone through.

Becky L McCoy (04:41):

How have you experienced it in your body and in your heart and your mind?

Marlena Graves (04:47):

Yeah. Um, I would say last week when my girls started homeschooling, I felt overwhelmed and I didn't mention my mom had surgery on March 12th. Um, Oh, I guess in November. Doctors, she had a mild stroke in November. And then doctors doing just a regular scan found a mass in her right lung. They asked her, of course, if she was a smoker, she had ever smoked and the answer's no. And, uh, they scheduled a, uh, this surgery for March 12th in Pennsylvania in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. And whether it was the mass was cancerous or not, they had to do the same type of treatment, which was remove it, part of her right lobe. So she had that surgery and I was thinking about going to see her.

Marlena Graves (05:39):

Uh, this was before, I think it might've been actually the same day that hospitals started saying no visitors. But I keep, I'm not exactly sure. I think visitors weren't allowed, but I didn't know that. Um, but I had just returned from trying to finish this book for IVP from California for writing for a week. And so I had a cold and I didn't want, I don't think I had the virus. I mean I did have a cough, but I, also didn't want to go and infect her without knowing cause I could be a carrier without knowing like has been said. So I guess to wrap this all up, chaos, a little bit chaotic in the household. Children cooped up and my mom having surgery and not having been able to go see her was difficult because, um, you know, it was a major surgery and we just found out yesterday was cancer, but it wasn't the type of cancer that, um, I guess it was contained so it's not anywhere else. So they think they got it.

Becky L McCoy (06:44):

Wow. Well that's great news.

Marlena Graves (06:47):

Yeah.

Becky L McCoy (06:48):

Oh that you must, I can't even imagine all the conflicting emotions that you have trying to care for your children and your mom and not being able to be everywhere at once.

Marlena Graves (07:02):

Yeah. And I know, you know, I, uh, okay. I know there are people that are worse off. I mean, I did talk about the inconveniences, but, um, a friend of Sean's that was in graduate school with his wife, um, I don't know all the details cause I only found out last week, but they found a cancer in her brain and she had to have surgery and then they can't go see her and she's like not that much older than me.

Becky L McCoy (07:31):

Terrifying.

Marlena Graves (07:32):

Yeah. I mean there's people going through major, major, um, life circumstances and funerals that people can't attend or weddings. So I'm sure you've heard about all those things.

Becky L McCoy (07:47):

Yeah, for sure. When you, um, when you look at what is going on, I mean, we can really only speak to our specific communities or our, you know, we both live in the United States. What are the, your fears with how, what things are happening and how everything is developing?

Marlena Graves (08:13):

Well, my sister's a nurse, um, in Pennsylvania, anywhere my parents live. And you know, I have a little bit of worried about her. Um, cause I think they had to take care of someone with the virus and she has three little girls. She's a single mom, so I worry about her getting sick. Mmm. I think what I worry about, I mean there's a couple of things. One is just, that, people we know and love and just people in general getting sick. Um, and how you don't know what it's gonna do to your body. If it strikes you. I mean, you could be young or old. One person might be fine. Another, it could tragic, it could be, you know, it could take their life. And so I worry about that. I worry about, um, uh, for myself before this, before this outbreak in the United States, I lost my job on February 10th, which was a surprise, but it was for budget cuts.

Marlena Graves (09:16):

I worked with migrant farm workers as a communications director of the farm labor organizing committee. And so I did have an interview at the end of, um, February and then I was going for a second interview for a job, but it was postponed because of the virus. So, you know, I think about, okay, am I going to, are we going to be able to cover all of our, um, expenses and, you know, writing this book for InterVarsity. When I get it done, I will get paid some money. So that'll help. But I have, um, I think about, you know, undocumented workers and other people that might work in restaurants or, you know, I don't know how much construction is going on the most vulnerable people who already have a difficult

time. I think about them, um, and how they're surviving because they don't get government help or benefits.

Marlena Graves ([10:09](#)):

Yeah. So, Mmm. Can you share a little bit more about what you've seen and how this is disproportionately affecting different groups of people?

Marlena Graves ([10:23](#)):

Yeah. And, um, the first thought I had, again, I said I like many of them. Others was okay when the schools closed, poor kids won't have food to eat. I experienced that as I was young as a young person. And, um, others, you know, I saw on Twitter, others echoing similar sentiments, but I'm so glad I saw it here in the Toledo public school system. We're right outside of Toledo, so our girls are in Toledo public schools, but, um, you know, the superintendent and the, um, staff and just the administration and teachers all work together to have certain schools open so kids could go and just, um, grab and go breakfast and lunch. So I'm very thrilled about that. Yeah. And the elderly.

Marlena Graves ([11:11](#)):

I think about, you know, people in my church or my neighbors, you know, um, I can check on them from social distance part, but, um, if people just struggling with loneliness or if they can't go get their medications. So at my church or you know, our church put out a list of people that needed to be checked on and, um, ask for volunteers to call. And so I, you know, I did that last week and I have a couple people on my list that I just need to check on and make sure that they're okay. It's an extension of pastoral care. Um, our church is a pretty good church and you will get cared for. Uh, you'll get pastoral care, but it's just overwhelming right now at this time.

Becky L McCoy ([11:57](#)):

Yeah, sure. What do you, what do you think are some of the realities of living in the time of a global pandemic?

Marlena Graves ([12:11](#)):

I was talking to someone about this the other day, but, um, I think, and Becky, you know about this in a real personal way, in a, in a way that I wish you didn't know about it. But I just think that with technology and with development and our culture, it seems as though we see ourselves as invincible and immortal. And I've never thought of myself in that way. I have a chapter, my upcoming book called Memento Mori, you know, thinking about your death. It's something I've always thought about since I was young, I always thought almost every single day I've thought to myself, I'm going to die. It's not because I'm a morbid person. I don't think it's just, I don't know why that reality strikes me like I don't have a long life to live a however long it is. And so, you know, kids and I say kids, college students and other people going out to the beaches and nothing's going to happen to them.

Marlena Graves ([13:16](#)):

That's kind of that thought of invincibility or some churches, I guess Liberty university, you know, not taking precautions to make sure that people are healthy. And just almost making it seem that, um, experts, some of my friends who I know who've been at the national institutes of health or work there or intern there, Mmm. Just dismissing what experts say, saying that people are blowing it out of proportion. I mean initially that's what the president said and acted like this was no big deal. And so that

was unfortunate. And so almost like America's invincible too, that's just not true. I mean I just saw, you know, I hear people falling ill or I read on Twitter about, uh, the um, Eastern Orthodox theologian, David Bentley Hart. Uh, I saw a report that he was sick. And so I just think that hopefully not that I want a pandemic to help us realize that we are Mmm fragile, but I think it will help us be more realistic about life that night. They're living in America and, or having lots of money if you fall into that category, nor having technology can protect you from the inevitability of death. And I know that sounds morbid but, but I think that will change the way we live.

Becky L McCoy ([14:49](#)):

Yeah, for sure. Cause that's reality.

Marlena Graves ([14:52](#)):

Yeah. And so, and, and another thing is I hope that it's a way that we could grow to love our neighbors more and love people and think about them more being forced to do that at this time.

Becky L McCoy ([15:04](#)):

Yeah. So how, what do you think that can look like? How can we care for and show compassion for one another?

Marlena Graves ([15:15](#)):

I think, you know, things like this podcast, um, checking in with people. So I think physically checking in and when I say physically, I mean social distance physically. So again, where I live, I don't live out in the rural area. There's people that might, that are listening to this podcast. But you know, my yard is adjacent to my neighbor's yards. So, um, you know, a wave or I asked a one that's a senior citizen next door to us. How are you doing? Can we do anything for you? Mmm. I mean it was a human interaction even though at a distance, probably more like 15 feet. But, um, just even if you live somewhere where your neighbors close by, you know, keep social distance. But I guess maybe wearing a glove, knock on the door, stand behind the door, you know, anyway that you can see if the people around you are okay.

Marlena Graves ([16:13](#)):

Um, it occurred to me when I lived in an apartment in Rochester, New York before we had girls. Yeah. I was really convicted about this because, um, you know, I'd go to church, we were youth leaders go on to graduate school and we were so busy during the day that we would just come home at night and just like fall into bed. And then it occurred to me one day is like, I don't even know the neighbors next to me in the apartment next to me. Like we're living our lives, like they don't exist. Uh, I knew there was an elderly lady, um, in the apartment below me, but I didn't know anything about her. And like, they could be dying or having the worst day of their lives and in total need of a neighbor. And here I am a Christian teaching kids to love their neighbors and I am loving neighbors in my city.

Marlena Graves ([17:01](#)):

And you know that I've gone through flooding and disaster to relieve three hours away, but I'm not even, I don't even know the people right next to me, like physically next to me. And so that was a real wake up call. Um, and so everywhere I've lived I've tried to get to know my literal physical neighbors. Mmm and that could be just like a, Hey, hello. And this, this epidemic. Of course. Let me give the caveat. I want everyone to be safe. I don't want you to infect your neighbors, but is there a way that you can

check on your actual neighbors and just say, Hey, my name is so and so if you need anything, I'm here. Okay.

Becky L McCoy ([17:40](#)):

Do you think there's a way Mmm, that we could kind of flex and strengthen our compassion muscles that might change the way we view both our, our literal physical neighbors and our community neighbors once this is over?

Marlena Graves ([17:58](#)):

my thought would be to continue on checking on people and caring for people. Um, one of my friends that I met online, and he's an author, uh, his name is Terrence Lester. He's in Atlanta. And his organization is called love beyond walls. He and his wife's organization and uh, they've been on CNN and good morning America this week because, Mmm Hmm. He was once homeless and he is, he thought about how the homeless population or, or the unhoused population, they don't have anywhere to wash their hands, especially with businesses closed down. Um, and so he took it upon himself and some others, like the Christian rapper LeCrae, uh, pitched in to buy portable, uh, you know, hand washing stations, the kind that are in, uh, mobile homes or I mean campers. Um, and they'll stick those out, uh, where homeless people can go and wash their hands. I mean, just even a simple thing like that, that this epidemic has brought to the fore this pandemic. And so my thought is that, especially those of us that claim to be Christians, that we'd never be too busy to love our neighbors.

Becky L McCoy ([19:20](#)):

Hmm. Do you think, that if we really take on that call to love our neighbors without excuses that there can be positive cultural impacts, um, on both compassion and maybe resiliency too. On, on our culture as a whole?

Marlena Graves ([19:46](#)):

I think so. I mean, Becky, you know, I mean, I think Christians, if we claim to follow Jesus, we should be the ones that are the most compassionate loneliness and feeling forgotten is bad for the soul. You know, we read reports about people die because they're lonely or there are sicknesses or diseases or just being alone. There's lots of senior citizens that either live alone or alone in, um, nursing homes. Uh, there's a lot of loneliness. Um, and there's a lot of, um, as you've seen polarization and othering of people, I think that if we can be present, ideally in person, but this pandemic is forcing us to be creative. But if we could be present to other people and allow and receive other people's presence in our lives, that would be good for us because our S our society fosters individualism. Mmm. And for fosters, um, the thought that I'm too ashamed to ask for help or to say I'm lonely or whatever it is, and, uh, I can do this on my own and we can't do it on our own. Absolutely cannot do it. On our own. And I think this pandemic is bringing that to the fore. My only concern is that we go back into our American rat race again and forget all these things.

Becky L McCoy ([21:23](#)):

Yeah. It strikes me what you just said. Um, that we're really making space for each other in our lives. And, and it's, it's so funny cause that's how I usually tend to define hospitality is making space in your life for other people. And how in a time when we can't entertain other people in our homes, which is how people, you know, people usually use those two terms interchangeably. We can be so incredibly hospitable, um, without even being in the same space.

Marlena Graves ([22:00](#)):

Yeah. And that's beautiful. You know, I think about ways, how can I be hospitable? I mean with our time as, you know, making time for people, again, either a person or you know, online like this or texting or however we can make space for people. And obviously there's only so many people we can keep track of really well. But even, you know, a text, a tweet, a Facebook or anything that says, I'm thinking about you, I care about you. I think it's helpful.

Becky L McCoy ([22:34](#)):

What are one or two ways that you would encourage the people listening to practice resilience and figure out what it looks like to endure during, uh, a time when we don't know how long quarantining will last or we don't know when quote unquote normal life will come back or if it will come back. How would you encourage them?

Marlena Graves ([22:58](#)):

Yeah, I think thinking that this could be, and it could be right, I've heard the term 18 months thrown around. I don't know how long this is going to last. I mean, I don't think anybody does exactly, but that can be very discouraging. I think I'd go back to, um, what allows me to often endure is that, you know, in scripture at least it says we have a enough manna for today. You know, give us today our daily bread. We pray that's the Lord's prayer. And even if a listener is not part of the Christian faith, they might've heard that. And so I think the way to endure and to Mmm be resilient in this is just to think of it as, okay, each day's a new day. Forget about yesterday. You know, what's one thing I can do to be healthy, you know? Uh, well I, uh, I know I mentioned to you earlier, not in the podcast, but that my family has to get out every day somewhat somehow.

Marlena Graves ([24:07](#)):

Even if that's just stepping outside our front door, even if it's cold, um, or just smelling fresh air. And I think another way to indoors just to reach out to at least one person, whether it's a family member, again, a neighbor, it could be online or just call someone and not to have the mentality mentality, excuse me, you're a bother. Because some people are like, well, I don't want to bother you. I would just put that to the side and just reach out to one person. Um, because the chances are as if you're feeling lonely or overwhelmed or exhausted that other people are too. So try to make a personal connection in some way. And think of the day is a new day and that you just need enough for today cause you don't know. And I don't know what tomorrow will bring and we could only just do day.

Marlena Graves ([25:04](#)):

And for some people, for some people it's the next moment I'm thinking about, especially those people that you know are fighting substance abuse or just, uh, you know, are in alcoholics anonymous or any of the other, um, programs where they sometimes minute by minute, you know, they can just move on for the next minute. And for some people just waking up in the morning, getting out of bed is a miracle. You know, people that struggle with major depression. And so think about for in your life, like what's one thing that you can do because we don't think our way into change. We do our way into change. And so maybe it is getting up out of bed, maybe it's acting, you know, putting your clothes on, like you're getting dressed for the day even though you're going to be inside. I don't know what it is for you, but that, um, one thing connecting with other people and realizing that you can only do today is what I would suggest.

Becky L McCoy ([26:10](#)):

You can find Marlena online on her website, [MarlenaGraves.com](#) on Twitter at [Marlina underscore graves](#) [[@marlena_graves](#)] and preorder her book *The Way Up Is Down: becoming yourself by forgetting yourself*. I recommend ordering through your local bookstore. Mine is [banksquarebooks.com](#) uh, bank square books in mystic, Connecticut, and help support these local bookstores. You can find me online on my website, [BeckyLMcCoy.com](#) or on social media [@BeckyLMcCoy](#). Please review the podcast, rate it, subscribe, share it with all your friends, and let's continue to be resilient together.