



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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TIPS

## **Seven for You – My Age – by the Panel**

What's your age? Most women don't want to be asked that question, so I hear. But why not? Certainly, there are things about every age that are awesome...and things that are not so awesome...and why not embrace both? We asked our panel of women to share the perks of the age they are now...as well as the struggles. It's such an interesting read, always...

I'm reminded of the Beatles song "When I'm 64." I passed that age three years ago, but some of the lyrics still speak to me. I now have that song stuck in my head....darn it!

"Will you still need me, will you still feed me,  
When I'm sixty four?"

Will I still be needed? Am I still important to someone? One of my worries

The other is failing health. I spend my time going to doctors more than I'd like. My daughter called me one of the most resilient people she knows. I do try to put one foot in front of the other and keep going.

The positive outweighs the negative:

I stopped coloring my hair 10 years ago. It's a blessing to age, and I've earned every one of my grey hairs.

I'm retired, and I love the fact that I can lounge the day away if I want. I do need to buy those "days of the week" underwear, so I remember what day it is.

I love being able to visit my Mom whenever I want, spend time with my dog, Tazzie, and shop at Goodwill during their senior day sale (30% off).

We have more of our past behind us than our future days, so making the most of the time we have is important. I hope you dance! I will. – Cathy

My favorite thing about being the age that I am (68), is that I don't feel my age! I also have more confidence in the things that I do and feel that I can do almost anything. I am physically fit and healthy, I am told I don't look my age, and I am thankful that I still have my mother, and that with God's will, I will live as long as she!

My least favorite thing about being my age is that, because I had a late start in the work field, I still need to go back to work to build up my retirement. I am in competition with much younger generations. It's very difficult to come to the realization that your time on this earth is limited and there's still so much I want to do! – Anita

My favorite thing about this season of life is having time. For decades it seemed marriage, kids, job, church, and personal growth loudly demanded my time and attention. It was always a challenge to keep the plates spinning. Now, several of those areas are quieter and/or out of my control. There is more time and space for the areas that remain. It is a great season to be in.

My least favorite thing about this season is watching my 99-year-old mother decline. She is still amazing, especially for 99, but the years are catching up with her. It's hard for both of us to watch her vitality drain away. But she loves the Lord and we both know he is the one that numbers her days. Her future is in his hands. - Shelley

I am 49 years old. My favorite thing about my age is that 2/3 of my children are at the age that I can be friends with them, and my mom is alive and healthy (she lives with us.) My least favorite thing about being 49 is perimenopause (I have NO NICE WORDS) and that my children have not gotten married and had babies yet. I'm 49 and still learning patience. They are still very young

(22 and 26); I just LOVE babies. And I'm still praying that God sends them the right spouses just for them, because they are AMAZING human beings. I think it's important to choose JOY at any age, so I'm choosing JOY at 49. - Laura

I'm 68 years old and have never understood why women don't want to tell their age. It's a privilege to be alive at any age, so the fact that I'm still here breathing and moving is a perk, for sure! I think the best part of being the age I am is that I'm finally letting go of some expectations of others that I put on them and learning to live life more fully, with Him as my affirmation. That's been awesome. And...I love the flexibility that allows us to travel often, to visit fun places and see new things.

My parents are both gone and while that's so sad, it's also a relief to be at the end of watching them decline in health and mind.

As far as the hard part of being my age, it's the aging process itself. I feel like I'm on a hard road to try to stay flexible and sharp, and some days I keep a good pace on that road...and other days I just want to sit down! It's also hard to feel like what I say and do matters, and does anyone notice or care? But that goes back to the affirmation I'm now finding in my purpose in Him, in daily obedience to love Him and love others - purpose enough for years to come. And it's a reminder I have to tell myself at least once a day! – Marcy

As I rapidly approach 65, I am reminded of how much I have found my health change in the last year. Multiple wrinkles have appeared that I don't recall being there a year ago. So at this age, I find myself struggling with these new changes quite a bit. On the flip side, I love how I don't worry as much about the small things and cherish those beautiful moments in each day that come my way by God's grace. Like the last Super Moon in December that glowed so brightly in the night sky and precious moments in nature with my 23 month old grandson. So much to be thankful for as I age. In this New Year, I plan to be grateful for each precious day I'm given and also to remember that it's a privilege to be this age. - Glenna

I'm 38 years old, and I don't feel like I necessarily struggle yet with aging. But for me, the things I don't like are the energy level required with busy kids. I get tired in a different way than I did when they were little. Deeper and harder moments with the kids require teaching and instruction. Mentally, the exhaustion is hard, and I don't feel like I bounce back as quickly. I then sometimes feel sick and it takes days to feel better! It's also harder to lose weight and get in shape if you don't stay in a rhythm. I also feel more emotional with kids at their ages when they don't need me in the same way as they did. It's a hard season to find my own footing and grounding, as a mom.

The thing I love at this age is that even with emotional times, and more years of walking with the Lord, this has enabled me to take thoughts captive more quickly and turn myself around. I've enjoyed this age with the kids because we get to experience new things like traveling, conversations, etc. This year I got to do a lot of mom/daughter things and it's been vital to our relationship. I love this stage with the boys, too, and being able to support them. It's so fun to see my kids grow and become fruitful. It's a stage of parenting I'm enjoying. I often feel refreshed and renewed as my kids apply what they have learned.

The last thing, is thinking about the future is scary when I think about kids driving and going to college, where will I be? So that's hard...and exciting. I try to soak up all the good things at all the ages, and I'm grateful for the ages we all are. I'm trusting Him and thankful for Him as our anchor - Kamrin

The thing about being 12 is you're not young- but you're not old. I will say it's great for theater. I do theater year round. Being young and small means I can get younger roles, but because I'm a little older I have more experience. So I have more opportunities in the ensemble. I also like being this age because when I hang out with friends we can go do more and do stuff by ourselves, because we're a little older and are trusted with more responsibilities.

The hard thing about this age is there is a lot of school work, and you're encouraged to try new things, but have no time because there is too much work. You're overly exhausted, but teachers don't understand why, even though it's because we have to stay up late doing their homework. You just want to have free time and hang out with friends, but instead you have to do all that work in your free time.

Also another thing I enjoy about being 12 is I can start leading by example. I have younger cousins, and I want to make sure there is always someone they can look up to. When I do get older I want to be able to take them to do a bunch of fun things. And at theater and cheer, I don't want beginners or newcomers to feel out of place or lost. I want to be welcoming to them, and if they have a problem they can come to me. - Ayla

## **The Dressing – Winter Looks – by Marcy Lytle**

It's January, time to pull out the coats and sweaters and tights and cozy shoes...if you haven't already! And sometimes, it's hard to know what to wear when it's so cold outside. I do have some layering t-shirts and thicker socks just for this time of year! And here are inspirational looks for you this month:

**Blue coat** – I found this coat on Amazon and purchased it before we traveled to Vermont, back in October. It's so pretty, and not just the ordinary black or brown, but rather a pop of color. Blue goes with a lot of outfits, and it will be a nice hue even as spring approaches and cold days linger...

**Plaid skirt** – I just happened upon this plaid skirt at a discount store and snapped it up. It's great to wear with those new opaque taupe tights this season, and boots. And then I can choose any sweater combo for the top. A pretty skirt is a fun closet accessory to have for those dressy outings.

**Black Athleisure** – I am NOT an athleisure lover. However, I do have a couple suits just for those cozy winter days where I need comfort and warmth. This black one fits the bill, because it's leisurely comfortable, but the zip top and the material of the suit is also elevated enough to wear out shopping or running errands. It's from Amazon.

**Brown sweater dress** – This dress was a purchase on a whim from Walmart and when I tried it on, I realized it was way too short for a dress on me – even if I wore tights! However, I kept it to wear as a top and I love it. Sweater dresses are cozy, and if they're a bit short, then keep and wear with your favorite bottoms!

**Brooch** – These pins are in this winter, and I see them everywhere. You can purchase new ones, visit a vintage store and grab some very cool retro ones, and you can wear them on everything and in every way! I have some from my mom, and some of my own are old now! One way to keep a heavy brooch from flopping is to pin it through to your bra strap – it works!

**Monochromatic** – I put together several monochromatic looks in my closet in the fall and snapped photos of them, and saved them. This is one. It's all cream with just an accent or two. A cream button sweater with a cream warm layer underneath, cream jeans and a cream bag. Sometimes, wearing all one color looks chic and fun!

**A Suede Jacket** – I found this one at a discount store and it adds so much warmth and class to any outfit, whether it's jeans, faux leather pants, or a skirt. A great winter piece to have for now...and for years to come.

Now is a good time to purchase some warm pieces because they probably are already on sale, to make room for the bathing suits – isn't that maddening? They show up in January! Sigh....

Enjoy the winter in all its glory and look good, while you're doing it.

## **The Cousin Moms – Friendships – by Kamrin and Charissa**

It's a new year, time to start fresh again, and perhaps there are strains with our kids that we put on hold for the holidays...and now life has to start up again. This time we're looking at friendship among our kids and how it's hard to know how to navigate and set boundaries, yet encourage bonds that might last a lifetime. Raising our kids to be friendly and maintain friendships is hard. So here's some honest sharing from Kamrin and Charissa:

Charissa

Our girls are 9, 7 and almost 3, so their friendships are still blossoming. The biggest challenge that we do have is when a new year starts and some friends are not in their class. Our oldest was in a new class and her friends were in a different class. We do talk about how friends come and go, and how some friends will be with you all of life. This was an opportunity to expand and meet new friends! We just encourage our girls to:

1. Be the friend you want someone to be to you.
2. Be kind and humble.
3. Compromise and share.

We talk about what to look for in a friend. And when a friend is mean we talk about how we live in a broken world and we all act out sometimes. How do we then move forward, though?

In reality, I'm sure things will get tougher as they get older, but right now it's just teaching the girls how to be a friend and what to look for in a friend. We try as parents to make sure that we are in tune with who our girls are hanging out with. We want them to surround themselves with friends that push them to be their best person. We want to guide them into good friendships and talking through hurts, together.

We have God on our side and we have the hope in us to shine our light. Friends are a vital part of who we are and how we develop!

Kamrin

Friendships are definitely hard to manage, at any age. And we have had to talk through things differently with our daughter and our sons. Add in their different personalities, and it's hard! So, conversations with our kids are important. And also, listening to them. We teach them to be kind and speak and to be respectful, even though they don't get along with certain kids. And that might make them think they "have" to stay in a friendship that is not good for them. We sometimes swing the pendulum one way too far, and we need to stay balanced.

We have no problem telling our kids to take a break sometimes from a friendship, without being rude. But walking away or distancing from not texting, and choosing other friends, is sometimes healthy. But, they are not to be disrespectful, and to continue kindness.

If a friend is causing problems, we try to teach our kids how to handle it themselves. But sometimes, if it's still a problem, we encourage them to talk to a teacher, and then if that doesn't work, we step in. Hard things with friends is to kindly ask that person to stop, in a nice way. If it's a toxic friendship, our kids are welcome to take a break. Only one time, we actually had to call the school because of a kid that continued to make fun of our son. Our son did talk to the kid first, then we talked about choices, but then we had to talk to the principal.

On smaller scales, there is always drama with friends. We try to listen and see where they themselves have escalated the problem and how they can handle the situation themselves. We have conversations and make sure that our kids feel heard, but boundaries are okay. We also talk about how friendships change as interests change, and they don't see each other as often. Sometimes, gossip runs wild and causes division, so we talk about not engaging in gossip. And sometimes, prayer and love is the way to work through it! Friendships change as our kids age, so there's not a cookie cutter answer to friendship. It helps to look at things through a higher perspective. And often, we can learn to not take offense, when some things we can just let go.

Finally, however, some friendships are worth fighting for, through silly things that annoy. But if the relationship is negative and toxic, it's okay to walk away and grow apart. And we have to do this with character and respect, integrity and kindness.

## **Tried and True – Last Month’s Learning – by Marcy Lytle**

It’s a new year, new adventures await us, new things to try and learn, new places to visit and observe...it’s all new! And I love sharing new things I learn each month to inspire you, and to encourage you to note and learn from your own daily living, as well!

Have you seen the candles in the Magnolia section at Target? They’re always so pretty, and this one I got over the holiday season is in a vessel I can keep and use in my home!

Maybe root beer floats are only enjoyed in the summer, but why? There’s nothing cozier than having them in your home with a fire going and a good movie showing.

If you haven’t seen *Nuremberg*, it’s an amazing film starring the almost unrecognizable Russell Crowe. And I bet he gets an Oscar nod.

Puzzle You is a company that takes your photo and makes it into a jigsaw – I got one for my husband for Christmas of one of our vacation photos. Look how nice!

I saw this on Instagram, where you place three hooks on the back of a door for hanging a top, a bottom and accessories to put together outfits. It’s so fun!

I purchased more jewelry last year from Erin McDermott than I have from anywhere else – her pieces are that good! And she has sales ALL THE TIME – good ones! These earrings are a fave, but she has the coolest necklaces, ever.

Fig jam on toast with sliced almonds on top, and a side of fortified orange juice on the side. I’m just saying, this is a good breakfast!

I did it. I organized that mess of mismatched lids and containers, bought a new set, and I’m a happy camper. This set is from the Container Store. Then I have the neatest rolling bins from Lakeside Collection to house all the tiny containers. They fit so nicely under the cabinet – I have three of them! All so affordable.

Some people say scrolling Instagram is a waste of time. I beg to differ. Some people would rather scroll than read a book or watch a TV program. And Instagram is full of inspiring accounts, if you follow the right ones! That’s the key. Only follow what is of interest to you! And enjoy the scroll.

In case you love refrigerator notepads like I do, Marshalls always has a great selection. I got one with winter trees on it for December/January. They also have the cutest planners, in case you like to write instead of type.

1canoe2 has the best stand up calendars on a round wooden disk – you can choose the theme – I love one for the dates and the décor...sitting on a shelf.

I saw where a lady used an old magazine rack (the wooden kind with a handle) in her kitchen to house all her baking sheets. It was the cutest!

Overwhelmed with all your wrapping mess, after the holidays? Stuff it in a closet and leave it until July... it will be fun then to organize and anticipate the coming Christmas. I know, because it’s what I do!

Made any New Year's Resolutions for 2026? I started in December bowing physically often, and considering what it means to bow...and I've enjoyed it so much. I think I'll continue the practice...

## **In the Kitchen – After the Holidays – by Marcy Lytle**

It's January. It's time for good bites in the kitchen in the coziness of your own home, recipes you can whip up and enjoy with friends, or just your family. Things you can eat while you enjoy a movie, or do a puzzle, or whatever you do on cold winter nights...

### **Cranberry Salsa**

I know. Christmas is over. But this salsa was a hit, and it would be great all month long, when you're inside watching movies...because it's so good...with tortilla chips!

12 oz fresh cranberries

4 T pure maple syrup

½ small red onion, finely chopped

1 jalapeno chile, finely chopped

1 cup cilantro leaves, finely chopped

1 cup cooked and cooled beets finely chopped (optional, but super delish)

1 large garlic clove, minced

1 large lime, juiced

¼ t sea salt, or to taste

Add cranberries to food processor with syrup. Pulse until finely chopped. Transfer to a bowl and add rest of ingredients. Taste and season accordingly (add more salt or lime juice or syrup if desired.) (You can also use the processor to chop all ingredients if you wish.)

Place in fridge and chill for 30 minutes at least, before enjoying. Tastes good the next day, too!

### **Black Eyed Pea Dip**

- 4 cups Trappey's black eyed pea with jalapeno, juice reserved to taste
- ½ medium onion chopped and sauted.
- 4 oz green chiles
- 12 oz old English sharp cheddar

Prepare onion, Mix all other ingredients, and heat. Serve with Fritos.

### **Sheet Pan Nachos**

I've shared other recipes of these before, but they're just so easy, you need to remember this so you can make them this winter.

- Tortilla chips (use up your red and green ones if you didn't eat them over Christmas!) – stout chips not thin ones
- Shredded chicken with green chiles (Trader Joe's) or one at your store
- 1 can black beans, rinsed and drained
- Cheddar cheese, grated
- Avocado, diced with lime juice and salt

- Salsa of your choice
- Fresh tomatoes, chopped

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Prepare the shredded chicken according to package directions (I purchased the one already cooked, so I just had to heat.) Lay out the chips on a baking sheet. Making sure to drain all liquids, lay on the chicken, then the beans, and the cheese. Melt in oven til cheese melts. Top with avocado, fresh tomatoes and salsa. Enjoy right from the pan!

### **Cucumber Sandwich Plate**

I know, this is usually a spring treat, but why not enjoy in the dead of winter on pretty paper plates left over from the holidays? I found these at Marshalls.

- Cucumbers, thinly sliced
- Garden vegetable cream cheese spread
- White bread
- Hummus (store bought or make your own)
- Guacamole (store bought or make your own)
- Sliced olives
- Chips and crackers

Spread the cream cheese on the white bread, and lay on the cucumber slices. Sprinkle with black pepper. Place on the top piece of bread and cut off the edges, then cut into fourths. Line up on a plate, with three little cups in the middles, and chips on the side!

### **Nachos To-Go**

Sometimes, we both need a lunch to go. And sometimes we need something simple, to go or to stay in, while we relax and work at our desks. These nachos to-go fill that need, and they're fun and tasty!

- Chicken breasts, cubed
- Grated cheddar
- Half avocado for each person
- Salsa

Season the chicken cubes with taco seasoning, salt and pepper, and drizzle with olive oil. Then bake at 375 until the nuggets are tender. It takes less time than you think, so check them! Grab a bento box and place the chicken and cheese in one spot, the half avocado (lime juice and salt on top) in the another, and a little salsa in the last box. Enjoy...

### **Fried Rice on the Fly**

We had some random veggies, a bag of quick rice, a couple eggs, and soy sauce in the fridge and sliced almonds. And an orange! It all came together as a delicious meal.

Chop whatever veggies you have on hand into small pieces, and grill in olive oil and butter in pan. We had leeks, carrots, broccoli, onion, and a potato. These grill up nicely, while you boil your quick rice or make according to box directions.

I wanted teriyaki, so I just added honey and maple syrup, and a bit of cornstarch to the soy sauce and stirred and tasted. This was my sauce.

As the veggies were done, I squeezed fresh orange juice on top and poured in the sauce. We served it over the rice, with sliced almonds on top!

## **Bookstore – Life is Fluid – by Marcy Lytle**

There are times we feel stuck, and we aren't even sure we want to continue downstream, because of what might lie ahead. However, we flow on down the river called life... and the rain comes, the river floods, and we are barely hanging on to a very weak limb while the waters rage below. Or we come across the most picturesque spots where we want to climb out, spread a blanket and stay.

It would seem that the best spot in this fluid life would be a spot along the river when we find everything picture perfect, where all is good with our life and we are at peace. However, as life goes, the river flows, and we are on the move again out of our comfort spot, because life is fluid.

*Life is Fluid* uses the analogy of life being like a river and also the analogy of the fluidity of life being the daily water and drink we need from the life-giver, Jesus Christ. Life is fluid—ever changing. Fluid is life—Jesus Christ. It's a new look at a book in the Bible maybe you've skipped over, or never understood.

In this Bible study of Ecclesiastes, I hope you recognize your own flow of life and God's hand in every bump and turn, and the realization that holding his hand can offer you the ride of a lifetime. Kodak moments come and go, waters get swift after downpours, and sometimes we just want out altogether. But the river keeps beckoning and we have no choice but to go with the flow...

At the end of each lesson is a recipe for a drink to enjoy with friends, if you decide to read the lesson in a group. Or you can enjoy the drinks yourself! Drinks make the book so enjoyable as you sip and read, learn and grow.

Find this book in our bookstore – see the link at the top of the page! A great book for the new year.



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – The Light – by Marcy Lytle**

Isn't it just the best to see the wonder and amazement and joy in a child's eyes when they see Christmas lights on the tree or in the neighborhood? Is there anything better? Lights are fascinating to kids from the time they can focus and see them hanging on the ceiling, and at every age as they grow up in our homes. And maybe they too are a bit sad when the lights all come down and are put away.

Here are some ideas of how to enjoy light, in the month of January, with your kids, and have fun doing it.

1. Flashlight chase – Turn off all the lights and give everyone a flashlight (Dollar Tree has lots!) Flash the beams around and chase them. Do this often, all during the dreary month.
2. Light candles – It can be battery operated ones or actual ones (in jars, please – be safe!) and have dinner by candlelight. Kids will love it, and so will you!
3. Shop for nightlights – Do your kids have nightlights in their rooms, or in their bathrooms? There are so many fun and cute ones. Make this a January tradition, to get new ones!
4. Observe the moon – Bundle up and step outside on a clear night and observe the moon. Talk about its shape, how it lights up the night sky, and how God made it to rule over darkness.
5. Leave out the twinkles – Maybe you have one strand of lights you could leave up during the month of January, around a small plant, across your mantel, or inside a vase. Don't put them all away, just yet.
6. Play cave tour – turn off all the lights in the house and let different kids give a "tour" of different parts of the house using only one flashlight, as you pass it around and take turns. How fun!
7. Read by flashlight – Turn off overhead lights and enjoy a book with a flashlight alone.
8. One lamp at a time – Go through the house and turn on one lamp at a time. Talk about the shape, how it gives light, where it came from, etc. Then enjoy a treat.
9. Scavenger hunt – hide stuffies around the living room in obscure places and give kids the flashlights to find...or let them take turns.
10. Light a fire – If you have a fireplace, or a fire pit, light it and enjoy the flickers while you roast marshmallows or watch a show. If you have neither, then light a group of candles and roast over them!

What else can you do with light in the dark months of winter? Ask kids for ideas, talk about light and dark, and remind them that now Christmas is over, we can remember the Light of the World is with us always until Christmas returns again...

## **I Don't Do Teens - The Bedroom, Oh My – by Marcy Lytle**

There are some teens that keep their rooms cleaned up, and wow what a cool thing that is to behold. But LOTS of teens can't keep their rooms straight to save their neck! And parents walk in, and oh my, they just want to shut the door and scream. I remember those days, and I recall being the one that screamed!

Here are a few things I remember that might help parents of teens with floors filled with clothes, lost pieces of everything good among clutter, and smells that are indescribable and not good...

They aren't adults yet and they need suggestions and order, because they really don't know how to keep it all straight!

They need reminding over and over again, though we tire of doing it.

They could use a hand from time to time, and it can be great bonding while sorting and cleaning.

They might like board or a list to work from. Some kids thrive with lists to mark off!

They could use some inspiration, so invite them to browse for bedroom ideas, then help them make it happen.

They might be depressed, so pray for them.

They may need some organizers, so help them decide what they need and grab it.

They may require boundaries (regarding food in the room, etc.) so give it to them. And stick to your guns – no food in the bedroom!

They might need some instruction on the why's of keeping a clean room.

They may need to be given more responsibility and less privileges if room rules aren't followed.

Now all of the above requires time and effort on the part of parents, for sure. And there are some days when we just want to shut their doors and walk away. But honestly, parenting our teens on keeping their rooms clean is as important as parenting in any other area. Working together with them, praying for them, and helping them is all part of it. Maybe once a week evaluations and celebrations might be good.

And even if you feel like a failure, because it was all clean and now it's a mess again, just sigh and move forward to another day...and another try.

## **In Each Room – Art on the Walls – by Marcy Lytle**

After Christmas, if you're like me, you feel sort of lost and sad when all of the décor for the holidays is put away. Your home looks a little bleak and you're not sure if you want to put back everything the way it was before, or make a few changes. And you might be thinking about adding some art pieces around, but maybe you're not sure where to start.

I'm not an art collector, at all. And I don't spend big dollars on what I hang around my home. But I do love pretty walls and shelves, so here are a few ideas if you're wishing for something new:

Mixtiles – I've mentioned these so many time, but they're so good, and so affordable, and they hang without leaving marks on the wall – which is amazing. They take your photos you send them and print them, and frame them. My entire bedroom is full of Mixtiles. We have a large one of our Alaska trip, a covered bridge over our bed, and lots more bridges from trips on a big wall. I even have one leaning against a shelf, of the fall color in Vermont.

Family Photos – Well, this is a given, I suppose. But we only have a few family photos, and my favorite is a multi-frame one where I can change out the pictures of the kiddos as they grow and change every few months or so. I just send a few photos to Walgreens for printing from my phone, and change these out when I feel the urge!

Children's artwork – My granddaughter sold art in her front yard one year when she was about 7 or 8 years old, and I bought several pieces. I have them hanging in a column right by the front door as you walk in. She's older now and I could change them out...but I don't want to...just yet. She's now 12 and crochets the most amazing projects!

Pebble Art – I made this pebble art shadow box of our family a couple years ago, and recently added baby Corie, who is now 14 months old. We gathered flat pebbles of different sizes from a creek bed and our own back patio, and I used that strong glue E6000 to adhere. I had seen several ideas on line of how to arrange family pebble art, and this didn't take very long at all. I just placed all the pebbles where I wanted them, then picked them up and carefully glued each one. The frame is from Michaels.

Leaning art – If you have a table or a shelf against a wall, you don't have to hang the art pieces. You can just lean them. We have a big mirror that leans against the wall about our mantel, and it serves as a backdrop for candles or plants or other décor. I also lean some art pieces I found at a vintage store again the wall on a long sofa table that I don't use behind the sofa!

Clocks – These can be great wall pieces and they now come in so many cute varieties. Place one in each room of a different shape and color. We have a huge one up high in the kitchen, and a pretty green one in our bathroom.

Mirrors – Again, a no brainer. Folks have mirrors on walls all the time. But...do you have a large mirror that leans against a wall for getting dressed? It looks so pretty as a piece of art with a tall plant or some baskets flanking the sides. There are SO many pretty huge mirrors, so pick one and place it!

These are just a few ideas. Start with one room, or maybe one wall or shelf in a room. Do one each month this year and make it a fun all-year event.

And enjoy...



## **Homesteading – Happy to Host – by Leyanne Enterline**

We had our first Thanksgiving and Christmas in our new home!

I was so happy to host and yet overwhelmed at all the things I needed to do. I'm used to hosting my kids' youth group, but I feel like kids don't judge as harsh on your cleaning skills (?) Not that family is judging; however, I felt like every little nook and cranny needed to be cleaned!

We have typically been in Hawaii for Brian's work trips (before he lost his job) and have missed Thanksgiving with the family for quite a few years, now. Though I was sad not to be in Hawaii, I was thankful to be able to host all the relatives.

We hosted my side one day and Brian's the next. Obviously, there was a lot of cleaning and lots of eating! I was so happy to have our own place to host but also discouraged, as our home is not quite decorated how I would like. However, I know that can come with time. Right now, it's about being with the people we love and not about the material things.

I tried to have some nice eating decor and food on a budget. I went to Dollar Tree and purchased the gold plastic ware and plates, and found some cute turkey napkins. I put a tablecloth on our folding table and a pumpkin in the middle. Not how I had imagined the table being decorated, but it was budget friendly and cute. Then we threw it all away and reset for the next day. All that for \$14, and we had less dishes to wash when on a quick turnaround!

Everyone left our new home happy and tummies filled! My heart was full and I am so thankful for family and a home where we can serve and host.

What did you do for Thanksgiving? Any special traditions you observed for Christmas?

Happy New Year!

## **A Night to Remember – Reflection – by Marcy Lytle**

It's good to reflect on things, with our family, with the kids, after something like a holiday or an event. So why not reflect on Christmas, since it just occurred. Maybe your Christmas was picture-perfect. Or maybe it wasn't. But talking about events and feelings and God's goodness or silence...is a good thing to do as a family, once in a while...with a lot of joy thrown in.

Preparation: You will need several slices of bread for this devo, along with some peanut butter and perhaps some chocolate chips!

This lesson will be fun as you gather around a table and take one piece of bread and another, stacking them and turning them until you have a little tower tree of reflection. Have a bowl of peanut butter (or other spread) and some mini chocolate chips for taking down the tree and enjoying every bite at the end of the lesson. Or...spread peanut butter as you go and adorn with the chips!

Psalm 69:30 says,

*Then I will praise God's name with singing,  
and I will honor him with thanksgiving.*

1. What was your favorite thing about Christmas? (let everyone answer) – It's so good to give thanks when we've had some favorite moments, and to acknowledge that all good things in life come from our Father's hands. (Hold hands and bow heads, asking one person to lead out in thanksgiving.)
2. What was the hardest part of the holiday season we just had? (Let everyone answer, i.e. didn't get what I wanted, a loved one was missing, we were sick, etc.) Did the hard parts ruin the good parts? How did you feel in the hard part of the season?
3. What was your favorite Christmas song you heard during the holidays? (Let everyone answer). It wouldn't hurt to hear them all year long if we want. Good cheer, good music – it can always be enjoyed – not just at Christmas. Play one of the songs and all close eyes and listen...
4. Which food that we enjoyed was the best? (Share). We don't all enjoy and love the exact same food, and that's what makes us a family. You like one thing, I like another, but it makes for a good meal.
5. What was the favorite thing you did over the holidays? (Answer, i.e. visit grandparents, go to a show, see the lights, etc.) Could we do some of those things all year, or just at Christmas?
6. Are you sad that Christmas is over? (Let everyone answer). It's okay to feel a bit sad when it's all over, or even a bit glad, if Christmas time was hard. God knows how we feel, and he is with us either way.
7. What are you looking forward to this year? (Share). Maybe some won't know what to say, so help them...i.e. new family events, trying out for a team, getting a puppy, decorating a room, playing with new toys.

Look at our tower of reflection, the bread we have received from the Father's hand. Every good gift, every difficult circumstance, every thought of His goodness is a tower of thanksgiving that we

should build all year long. Giving thanks in all things is something we are told to do, if we love God. And giving thanks when we remember Him and his goodness makes for a good year ahead.

Take the bread, spread and sprinkle, and enjoy every bite!

## **Rooted in Love - New Year, Renewed Mind – by Kaelin Scott**

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.  
Romans 12:2a*

Happy New Year, friends! It's hard to believe another year has come and gone. I don't know about you, but it seems like every year goes by quicker than the last. Sometimes I wish I could figure out a way to slow down time. But, alas! All I can do is enjoy each day and make the most of it before it's gone. And now, as another year unfolds, I want to step into it with a renewed mind.

There has been so much darkness going on in the world, and social media only serves to amplify it all by making us aware of every little thing that ever happens. It's overwhelming and scary sometimes, and I have to admit that it makes me uneasy. What kind of world are we leaving behind for our children? There are days where I just pray for Jesus to return and take His children home.

Yet there is also still so much beauty in the world. So much joy and life and love. I see it in the smiles of my children and the color of the sunset after a long day. I see it in the flowers and trees and birds singing overhead. This world is such an amazing creation. There are still people who love others and spread kindness. There are still friends and families creating wonderful memories together.

The contrast of light and darkness is one I think about often. I know that the light will win in the end, but it feels like the darkness is steadily closing in. It's hard to be a light in a world that tries to snuff it out. It's hard to stand for truth when truth is considered hateful. It's tempting to fade into the background and quietly wait for the Lord to return. It's hard not to bend and twist yourself to fit what the world calls good. It's scary being different. It's not easy to be ridiculed and scorned for speaking your beliefs.

We must remind ourselves that it isn't us the world truly hates – it's the Lord. The darkness hates the light and wants to extinguish it. The world calls good the things that are evil, and they want us to go along with their delusions.

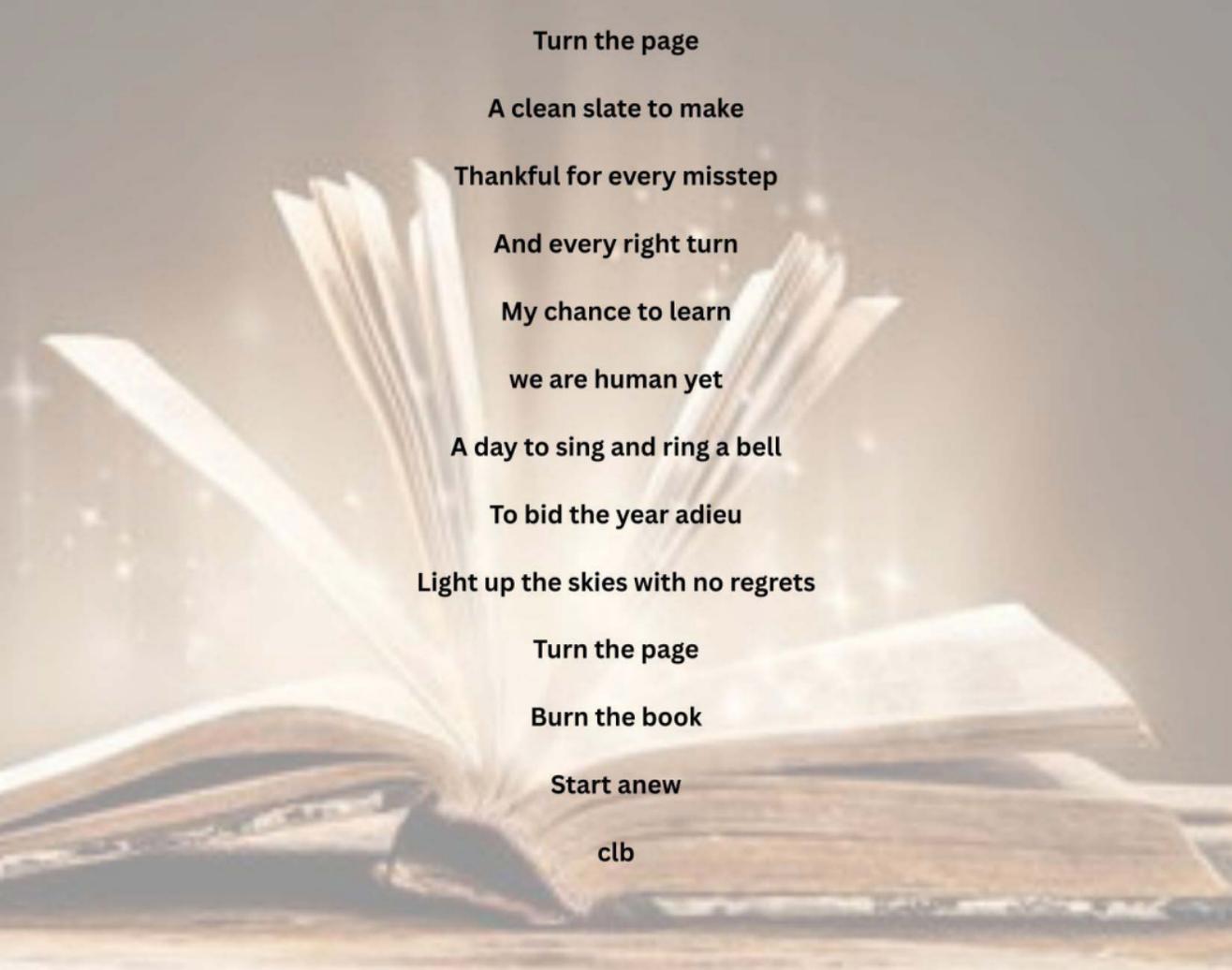
But we cannot conform to the patterns of this world, nor can we condone the things God calls evil. We must be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This means aligning our thoughts with things that are pleasing to Him. It's a constant choice to focus on things above rather than earthly things. It's a conscious decision to follow Jesus, no matter what the world throws at us.

We must daily remember to keep our eyes on Him. He is the author and perfecter of our faith. He is the true and living God. He is our Rock, on which we must build our trust. Renewing our minds means trusting Him when things look bleak. Standing for Him in the face of mockery and slander. Shining a light into the darkness so that others might find hope.

Let this year be a time for renewing our minds. Let us not conform to what the world calls good, but rather faithfully follow the One we know to be true. He alone is worthy of our devotion and our praise. Let us glorify Him and make Him known this year, keeping our eyes on Him until He returns to bring us home.



YOU



Turn the page

A clean slate to make

Thankful for every misstep

And every right turn

My chance to learn

we are human yet

A day to sing and ring a bell

To bid the year adieu

Light up the skies with no regrets

Turn the page

Burn the book

Start anew

clb

## **Inner Strength - Life after Christmas – by Michelle Wyatt**

How was your holiday? There are endless possible answers. Sometimes there is a drastic change in your environment. It goes from the chatter of various conversations to being so quiet that you can hear your own thoughts. Some feel a sigh of winding down to normalcy as something that's less stressful. Some go through a period of depression where they are lonely and miss family, soon after they walk out the door.

Reflecting on the holidays, I find to be important. It gives us a chance to put into perspective what happened and create memories by reinforcing what our favorite parts were. One can't expect to go cold-turkey. A transition phase is healthy and important. Let's say we have one person to stay before leaving, to help clean up, for example. We don't have to put that task on ourselves to accomplish alone. Remember, we're not functioning at a 100 percent because it takes so much energy, more than we realized, to host or be part of a social event of any kind, really.

Some people host Christmas after Christmas. So for those that read this and still have social gatherings to go to, one tip I have to minimize stress and protect your mental health is to not feel guilty for taking an adult time out, as I call it. For example...

- go to the restroom even if you don't really need to go just to get a break even for a minute
- put water on your face and take your time washing your hands
- take some deep breaths
- if it's nice enough outside, you can simply say you're going to get some fresh air. Maybe ask if somebody wants to take a quick walk with you.

You don't owe anybody an explanation. And I speak from experience. It takes a lot of inner strength to choose what we say and not say when we are emotionally charged.

The phrase, "Don't worry about what other people think" is honestly not so easy to do. Just when we think we've mastered those triggers, something brings that behavior up again. When that happens, give yourself grace. I know that life is a journey which involves a path with rocks and cracks and it isn't straight. Maybe it goes up and down a hill.

Regardless, pat yourself on the back for going through the journey. In fact, I've learned and it truly does help me to identify what feeling I'm experiencing, whether it's sadness, anxiety or maybe just stress. Acknowledge those emotions as if they are people and let them know that they aren't going to change what you do or who you are, and they're not going to stay long.

Keeping up decorations, at least the basics, after the main celebrating is gone, helps me remember that the season doesn't end when people walk out the door. The winter season can bring about joy, sparkle, introspection, and thinking beyond the commercialism. I am reminded of this every year I go to church the Sunday after Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>. This will actually be the first year I attend a community church. I am looking forward to receiving the message that they give, the weeks following Christmas.

What are you looking forward to? Whatever it is, however small, if I can do it, so can you!

Happy New Year!

## Healthy Habits – Get Off the Sofa – by Marcy Lytle

I was really taken aback on Black Friday this past November, when almost 100% of my friends on Instagram and Facebook said they'd rather order gifts from the comfort of their sofas on line, than head out to the stores on what used to be the biggest shopping day of the year! It hurt this heart to hear! I love getting out in the hustle/bustle to see the stores and the lights, and yes – the people that are shopping – everywhere. But I get it. It's easier and so convenient to not move, while you shop. And it got me thinking...

Sitting on the sofa, while so inviting in the wintertime, is not a good thing if that's all we do. Oh, of course, it's great to cozy up with a blanket by the fire and put on a good movie, I love that for sure! But there is also something to be said for getting off that sofa this January, and here are some ideas for keeping your body moving when all you want to do is sit. (There are times to just sit, but this list is for those times we need to move)

When sitting in a movie theater, instead of reclining the seat for the whole two hours, sit it up right and swing your legs up and down sometime during the movie to keep your blood flowing!

When watching a movie at home, get on the floor and scoot across the room or do leg lifts, at some point during the film.

When the weather is bearable, instead of staying home on the sofa, head to the mall and walk, and walk and talk, and talk. And grab a pretzel for two!

When you've spent an hour reading a good book under a warm blanket, throw off the blanket and dance. Use your phone or your TV, but find some music and move...and worship, too!

When friends are over and you've eaten and sat on the sofa talking for hours, get up after they leave and move. Stretch. Bend. Make that body that was still wake up and move.

When you've sat on the sofa and thrown your feet over his lap for a rub, and you then dozed off for a bit...wake up and smile. Head to the kitchen to clean up and make every bend purposeful, and every stretch in a cabinet a high reach. Focus on those joints!

When you're folding clothes on the sofa, or sorting things or sitting and relaxing, that's great. But when you're done, try this. Skip from room to room or jump or stop and dance, between putting away all of the things where they belong.

When you've visited friends and all you did was sit on their chairs and then their sofa for hours, take a walk. You can even do this at home, with a video, or around the neighborhood, or stop at Target and walk every aisle.

When you wake up, jump 50 times. We recently started this. Look it up. There are so many benefits to this one exercise!

Nine little reminders to get up off that sofa and move, this winter. Don't give up the sofa, just don't let it be the only place you park. Remind yourself to move and enjoy a little dance, a little skip, a walk here and there, and a whole lot of movement to keep that body going...and have fun!

## **A Hopeful Heart - Look Up – by Christina Oberon**

There's something about a forest that just slows you down. It could be the quiet or the way the trees stand so tall you can't help but feel small in the middle of them. It could be the sunlight finding its way through branches that look too thick to let anything through. Either way, I remember this day, sitting on a fallen tree in the middle of the Sequoias with the cool air brushing against my cheeks. I stopped long enough to do what is easy to skip in the rush of everyday life. I looked up.

I didn't plan to. It wasn't some intentional moment of reflection. It was just natural. The light hit my face and my spirit remembered something I desperately needed to remember: God is still here. He's still close. And even when life knocks a few things over, He doesn't. He stays steady. He stays faithful.

As the new year rolls in, that simple action keeps circling back to me - look up. Don't look up because the calendar magically wipes away everything hard or because we suddenly wake up transformed on January 1st. But look up because where we look shapes how we move. Looking up pulls our attention away from anxiety and back toward hope. Away from self-reliance and back toward God. Away from the pressure to fix everything and toward the One who actually can.

That day in the forest, when I tilted my face toward the sky, the sunlight broke through the branches like it was meant for me. I felt small, yes, but not in the "I don't matter" kind of way. It was more like being held, like remembering I'm not the one carrying the weight of the world. I'm just loved by the One who does.

You may be walking into this year carrying things you didn't expect. Maybe last year wrung you out a little. Or a lot. Maybe you're hopeful, but also tired. Maybe you're excited, but still healing. If that's where you are, you're in good company. God meets us right there in the in-between.

And when we look up, we remember that God is still above it all. Nothing we're facing, whether the unknown, the disappointment, the fear, is bigger than Him. He hasn't lost sight of us, not even for a moment. There is beauty even in what has fallen. That tree I sat on once stood tall. Now it's on its side, but it's still useful. It still holds weight. Some seasons of our lives feel that way, like something fell. But God brings purpose from places we didn't expect. Our fall could be the very thing that holds someone else up.

As this new year begins, look up and remember you're not doing this year alone. Look up and let hope settle back into the places that went quiet. Look up and let God steady what feels unsteady. And maybe this will be the year you move forward with your eyes lifted, your heart open, and your hope anchored in the One who never changes.

## Life Right Now - Let's Stay Home - By Jennifer Stephens

It's my favorite place to be. It's the place I could happily exist 99.9% of the time - if it was socially acceptable. It's not. Apparently staying there too much labels one a "hermit" or "recluse." So, I get dressed up, slather on makeup, and curl my hair. Then off I go. To the grocery store. The thrift store. Parties, even. If you ever spot me out in the wild, just know that while I may appear to be having a fantastic time (okay, maybe I truly am having a ball), I'm secretly counting the minutes - the seconds - until I can return to the place where the dress code consists of yesterday's comfy clothes plucked off the floor, messy hair buns, and me nestled inside heated blankets. With dogs. It's cozy, it's quiet, it's...

Home.

Dorothy gets it. She famously told us, "There's no place like home," while traveling the golden streets of Oz. We're all familiar with the saying, "Home Sweet Home," from the lyrics of the 1823 opera *Clari* and we fondly recall Kevin McCallister fiercely protecting his house from thieves in the movie *Home Alone*. There's just something about being home.

But home is more than just a place. It's more than four walls filled with our stuff. It's a feeling. A comfort. A sanctuary for our soul. When life out there gives noise, our hearts long for quiet. The world is loud – traffic rumbling, horns blaring, phones buzzing, lights blinding, voices screeching. All demanding our immediate attention. The world is LOUD...but God is quiet.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:11 we are reminded to "make it your ambition to lead a quiet life..." In a world filled with noise, how do we live quietly?

- ❖ scrolling less - Let's put our phones down and pick up a book. Or a paintbrush. Or a pen. Reading, painting (or any crafting), and journaling quiet our minds. Word searches and other brain games are another fun way to give ourselves peace. Remove those pesky notifications too - living without the constant dingbuzz interrupting our thoughts adds instant calm.
- ❖ skipping events - If the squares on the calendar suddenly leave zero blank spaces, consider saying "no" to the next ask. Only accept the social invitations that mean the most and simply decline the rest. No long-winded explanation required. Offer a simple, "Thanks for thinking of me, but I'm not able to attend." Kids don't need to join every sports team and attend every activity either. Give yourself and your family the gift of time.
- ❖ listening more – Consider turning off the radio in the car and don't leave the television on 24/7 (guilty!). Don't be afraid of silence. Pouring my tired body (and

worn-out ears) into the driver's seat after a long day teaching found comfort in the sweet sounds of silence on the quiet commute home. Don't do all the talking when you pray. Listen. Pause. God speaks loudest in the quietest places. When engaging with others, remember we don't need to give our opinions about everything or share our thoughts on every single topic. When we focus on listening and not on what we'll say in the void, we learn.

Embracing a quiet life when the world demands more isn't always easy to do. Setting boundaries and taking small steps each day can move us closer toward our goal. Spend time outside. Touch grass. Touch snow. Feel the wind splash your cheeks. Let's replace LOUD living with an intentionally quiet life. And even when we have to be out there doing the things, our hearts can hold onto the quiet comforts of home.

How do you lead a quiet life?



MARRIAGE

## **In Unison - Complementary Love – by Terri Barnes**

Complementary love in marriage truly is a gift.

It means each partner brings their unique qualities and abilities to the relationship. This represents two independent individuals flourishing side by side, each in their own way. When you consider it, this dynamic within a marriage is quite extraordinary.

Sometimes I wonder if Chris and I are too complementary, as we express love differently. I often overlook the importance of our balance. The differences create our shared “music.” Chris brings the tune, and I add the lyrics.

Chris is extroverted, sociable, and lively; I'm introverted, prefer solitude, and reserved. He drinks black coffee, I choose sweetened. He's joyful and energetic, while I'm peaceful and calm—movement suits him, stillness suits me.

When complementary traits meet, a balanced harmony results—something we've both experienced.

It's a sign of ambivert-like behavior.

I've also seen increased flexibility and hybrid partnership in our marriage lately.

I must ask, do you agree the phrase, “You complete me” has been ridiculed?

I think it has made people want to gag, including myself, honestly.

But I'm understanding it more than I have before.

A husband and wife's traits, while each unique, can become enhanced together.

It has naturally occurred in my marriage with more time spent bonding.

There is great purpose in marriage with complementary love.

When we notice our differences, we recognize they can form unity.

Complementary love is gifted by the Holy Spirit in marriage.

God created men and woman to have complementary roles, equal but different.

We are now in a New Year!

Join me in focusing on appreciating complementary love within marriage - God Given.

Perhaps allow room for deep appreciation of each other's personality & traits.

Happy New Year!

## **After 40 Years – Truth Be Told – by Marcy Lytle**

Really, nothing tests a marriage like hanging Christmas lights on the house, shopping for gifts, or putting together food packs for those in need during the holiday season. While all of those things are joyous and part of the celebration, I have found that every year I have choices to make when we do these things. And sometimes, I choose well and sometimes I don't.

When we started hanging the Christmas lights on the house, he had his way of measuring to see how to string them across...and I had mine. I have learned from years past that it's better to keep my mouth shut instead of criticizing his every move. Why would he want to help ever again, if I complain? So, I did succeed this past Christmas and watched him in his element. And when the lights were strung, and the red bulbs shone, I was a happy camper. And we were happy together!

Shopping for gifts is really my thing, because I have this list and I'm on a mission. He likes to saunter and observe, and I like to race through the store and find what I need, so I can mark it off my list. I have found that if I tell him a certain item we're looking for, he will hunt until he finds it. He will ask, he will go back to where I've already looked, and often...he finds it. And sometimes, we lose each other in the store, and that's a problem if he doesn't have his phone turned on. But then we find each other, and all is well. But there were a few tense moments when I was snappy with my list in hand and I had to apologize when we left the store. I grabbed his arm and squeezed it, reminding myself of the blessing he is to me.

Now, one would think that putting together giving boxes for those in need at Christmas time would be a very happy occasion. The list was specific, with sizes of cans. But often those exact sizes weren't on the shelves. I was happy with choosing the 14.5 ounce instead of the 15 ounce can listed, but he searched and wondered why there wasn't the exact can available. When the list said gummy snacks and squeeze applesauce, I knew what it meant...the food the babies eat...but he thought he knew and found something on the candy aisle. We bickered, I sighed, and we went our different directions. But guess what? We got the items, we checked them off, and we filled the boxes. And we wondered why we made a giving chore so tense!

Preparing for guests, cleaning the house, wrapping gifts, it was all part of the holiday season that is now over, and the new year is here. I smile to remember only the good and forget those little skirmishes, because they were just that – little. In the big scope of life, I often wonder why in the world we ever argue in the first place, when we have so much to give thanks for? I suppose it's because we are both humans with different strengths and weaknesses, completely opposite ways of doing things, and sometimes we get tired and shouldn't be doing at all.

I purpose every year to be kinder, softer, and sweeter...and to cultivate a heart of thanks when it comes to being married to my best friend.

Even when he does things differently than I do. My way is not the only way.

*Ain't that the truth...*

## **Date Night Fun – You and Him and Others – by Marcy Lytle**

I don't know about you, but there are some things I love to do on a date that maybe aren't his favorite, and some things he loves to do that aren't my go-to activity. And there are other times we enjoy being with another couple, and try to think of something fun to do! We've got you covered this month, with suggestions for making date night happen anyway!

*Something you love* – Maybe you enjoy a romantic movie, and he's not there for it. I hear this a lot. So off you go with your girlfriends, leaving him at home. What if...you invited him to the next romantic movie with a little card explaining the evening. "You are invited to a movie for two, where I'll sit next to you and hold your hand. We'll enjoy the snacks you like, I'll lay my head on your shoulder, and we'll go to your favorite coffee shop after, for a sip before heading home..." You get the idea.

*Something he loves* – Maybe he wants to go to a game but never invites you because you despise sports. Consider tickets for two, asking questions about the teams, and cheering right beside him...popcorn for sharing. Even dress the colors of the team he loves, and ask questions and cheer with him. It can be fun to do what he loves, instead of what we do...when it's done for two.

Maybe...he loves the romantic movies and you love the sports! But you get the picture. Plan a date he loves and one you love, and make sure to invite each other and enjoy what you normally avoid.

*Something with others in* – It can be fun to plan an evening in your home, as you prepare for another couple or two to join. But do this together! Plan the menu of snacks, and the game if you like, or even a puzzle! Work in the kitchen together as you prepare and decorate, set the ambience and greet your guests. And after they leave, clean up together, as well!

*Something with others out* – January can be a hard month to think of something exciting to do out, because it's cold and dark. But movies are a great choice, with coffee and conversation after. Or a restaurant is fine as well, with a reserved table awaiting you as you arrive. It would be fun to discuss the holidays and what you loved and didn't, and goals for the new year. Just being with another couple gets you out of the house and into some fun.

*Something* – Maybe you don't want to plan a date for him, and he won't go with you to what you like, and friends are hard to find these days. Make an effort to do "something" together as a couple, and start with communication. Make a list (separately) of date night ideas you would love. Then come together and plan them for the new year, marking them on the calendar (how fun!) Then cuddle up and watch an action thriller or a romance, or something in between...with your favorite treat and his...on the sofa under a big blanket.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **A Day in the Life – Here We are – by Bekah Holland**

By the time you're reading this, we will have just wrapped up Christmas ... a season best described as magical, meaningful, and held together with double-sided tape, caffeine, and pure determination.

Just kidding. I'm guessing most of us are still recovering from spending the last month in full turbo-super-hero mode. You know the drill: trying to find *the* perfect gifts (unless you have teenagers, in which case you should stop trying and just wrap up money ... trust me), bouncing between school parties, concerts, recitals, award ceremonies, and performances that all somehow happen in the same two-week window, and attempting to create holiday magic while quietly praying to win a lottery ticket you never actually bought because life is already expensive enough.

If you made it through, congratulations. We survived. And now, here we are ... staring down a brand-new year, full of possibility, fresh starts, and all the hope January is supposed to bring.

Here's the honest part.

While you're reading this at the beginning of a new year, I'm writing it at the end of a long, heavy one. And I'll be real with you ... I met the saddest version of myself this year, and I haven't completely found my way back to her yet.

Through ongoing circumstances, overwhelming loss, and the ache of watching people I love fight battles I can't protect them from, something in me dimmed. Add in watching a world that feels harsher and more divided than I ever imagined, and suddenly I didn't recognize the woman staring back at me in the mirror. My eyes used to sparkle. I used to feel hopeful. This version of me felt like a stranger.

And yet ... I still showed up.

I got out of bed. I did what needed to be done. I smiled and laughed in the right places. I showed up for my kids, my husband, my family, my friends. Everyone... except myself.

It's easy for me to hide my own pain. I tell myself it's because I don't want to add to anyone else's worries ... and that's partly true. But if I'm being honest, it's also because it feels safer to push the fear, hurt, and anger aside and sit alone with them in the quiet. In the dark. Where no one can hear the thoughts I don't dare say out loud. The ones that whisper that I'm not enough, and never will be.

Not long ago, I broke.

Not my usual quiet, tidy breaking ... the kind you can sweep under a rug and pretend didn't happen. This was messy and raw. Tears turned into sobs. The carefully stacked walls came down like a house of cards. And my husband and kids saw me shatter.

I thought I was failing them in that moment.

But they didn't drown in my pain. They didn't recoil or judge my fractured heart. They did what they've always done ... they showed up. They held space. They loved me right where I was.

Where I saw weakness, they saw strength. Where I felt fragile, they reminded me there is beauty in ashes, and that these cracks aren't flaws ... they're openings that let the light in.

This place ... the dark one ... it isn't where we belong.

If you find yourself there, please hear me when I say this (and know I'm saying it to myself too): you are not lost. You are not a burden. You are not too much. No matter what the quiet voices try to convince you of, your darkness is not your home.

I'm still here, gathering myself piece by piece. Learning that it's okay to fall apart sometimes. That it's okay to feel lost, as long as we keep finding our way back. Back to the people who feel like home. And back to ourselves ... who we were created to be, and who we're still becoming.

I don't really subscribe to the whole "new year, new me" thing. But I *do* believe in fresh starts. In first steps. In second and third chances. In choosing hope again ... even when it feels fragile.

So if January finds you hopeful, I'm celebrating that with you. And if it finds you tired, bruised, or still healing ... you're not behind. You're not failing. You're just human.

And that, my friend, is more than enough.

*"You are allowed to be both a masterpiece and a work in progress." Sophia Bush*

## **An Adage a Day - Bigger and Better – by Carole Gilbert**

It's another new year. Are you hoping this year will be "bigger and better?" We always want things bigger and better; our job, our home, our stuff. And there's nothing wrong with this unless it becomes our priority. Sometimes it's hard to comprehend what bigger and better really is unless we realize what we really have. This idiom is different because it has no known origin but started as a common idea and grew from other similar idioms, like "the bigger something is, the better it is."

To understand more about our lives around us and how to be happy with our living situations, we can learn a lot from the mouth of babes. An example is the conversation I had with my four-year-old granddaughter.

She asked me the question, "Why did God make the sky blue?"

I thought for a second and realized that she's not looking for a bigger and better world. She's seeing the world as it is, already bigger and better, and curious about it. I explained to her that we see God's promises in the colors He gave us everywhere. We see it in the blue sky along with the grass, trees, the sunset and sunrise, ladybugs, yellow jackets, and butterflies. They are all full of His colors for us to know He is with us. Of course, the ultimate way we know of God's promises through colors are in the rainbow that He gave us. My granddaughter was seeing the bigger and better part of the world that's around us. And she knew from whom it came. Like I said, from the mouth of babes.

God gave and gives us many things bigger and better. He gave several that we know of in His Word to be for our example. One of these was Abraham. Although successful as a shepherd and given the nickname from God as "the Good Shepherd," Abraham was given a bigger part in the world from God because he would be father to many nations and they would be blessed through him. Another is the very humble but obedient Noah who was given life with his family before, during, and after the great and first ever flood, and then went on to restore mankind. And there are many more examples.

We can also take this idiom one step further. We can bring up David and Goliath. This story gives us a different twist because the bigger of these two was not the better. Actually, it was the smaller, being David, that prevailed over the bigger, Goliath. And in fact, it is believed that this story gave birth to the idiom, "The bigger they are, the harder they fall."

Each of these didn't ask God for bigger and better things in their lives. On the contrary, a couple even told God they weren't worthy of bigger and better. But God saw differently. He realized what He had in them and blessed them more than they ever dreamed. Why did He do this? It was for His own glory. It was to fulfill the purpose of His plan. And that is exactly what happens between us and Him. We aren't worth the bigger and better we ask for but sometimes God gives it and blesses us more than we can even imagine, all for His glory and to fulfill what He has in store for our lives.

So, which do we want more of now, bigger and better from the world, or bigger and better from God? Either way, we will need to be patient for the response. Like it says in the Word, "Wait upon the Lord," Isaiah 40:31.

# To the Ends of the Earth-Jan 2026

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Last month I wrote about resurfacing the granite path through my garden, observing that “one thing leads to another.” And now, as promised, I’ll tell you about what came next: the stone mosaic, which is about 90% complete—enough to write about, I suppose.

As I worked at wetting and tamping the freshly laid decomposed granite around the concrete patio in back, I thought how nice it would be to have some stepping stones to step onto. But my vision wasn’t just a simple stone or two, or three...it was one of those works of art you see on Pinterest that uses a variety of stones of many shapes and colors. A few years ago, I had made one similar on the other side of the patio. I placed large flat stones together with smaller stones in between and filled in the spaces with even smaller stones and fine granite. This time, I wanted to kick it up a notch with concrete and a more elaborate design. This project took hold of me.

Halting the nearly finished tamping, I gathered the flat natural rock I had stacked in a corner of the garden. These were intended for future use in a sitting area, but I called them into service for this newly inspired idea. Along with the flat rocks, I gathered the assortment of stones I had left from other projects. These would fill the spaces between, creating a mosaic. As I laid them out, using their unique features to create a design, it was clear I needed more. One can randomly place stones together, or one can be intentional about it, depending on the look you want (or your level of insanity.)

I scoured the garden for any spare rock that would complete the design. I looked on Marketplace and asked neighbors (because I only needed a few pieces!), but still had to go to the nearby landscape supplier. Stone is sold by the ton or by the pound. For my small projects, I buy stone by the pound. This allows me to be selective and buy the shapes, sizes, and colors I need. I loaded a wagon with an assortment of flat rock, and a bag of larger smooth, colored stones to supplement what I already had.

With more options, I began an experimental layout using different sizes of stones in between the large flat ones. The design looked somewhat like a sun with long “rays” coming from the center, but the “filler” stones in between the “rays” didn’t look right. To my mind’s eye, they needed to be smaller—pebble size, which I didn’t have. So began the quest for small beach pebbles.

A few years ago it wasn’t hard to find pebble-size beach—nearby landscape suppliers had it; but after making numerous phone calls, I realized things have changed. I finally found some past Oak Hill, almost an hour from where I live. I left early, after morning traffic. With all the construction, new roads, and unfamiliar territory...this is when I’m especially grateful for the technology of navigation! When I arrived, I was glad I could speak Spanish, as almost everyone did. I don’t know what we’d do without the labor force of the Hispanic community—it’s hard to find more hard-working, capable people in this, and many other fields. The yard was full of trucks picking up supplies for the day.

When I got home, I felt I’d been “to the ends of the earth.” Two hours to pick up a box of stones for a small experimental project. Granted, one that I was invested in and committed to finishing. As he often does, God reminded me that he’s invested in and committed to me. If I’m willing to

# To the Ends of the Earth-Jan 2026

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search high and low, drive two hours through Austin traffic, carefully choose just the right materials, for this insignificant stone mosaic, how much more is God willing to go “to the ends of the earth” for me? I am his workmanship, and he’s committed to providing all that I need to become his made-in-his-image mosaic. This was a very comforting, reassuring thought, because I often feel very far from that.

Finally, I could begin to assemble the mosaic. I have very little experience with concrete and mortar, and, like everything else, it requires practice to understand the ins and outs of a thing. I learned a lot: like small pebbles don’t work well because they need to be at least halfway buried in order to stick; like you need to keep the mortar wet while working or it will dry too fast and not set; like remember to check slant so water will run off instead of pooling on the stone; like being on your knees for hours is *hard!* Like creating a beautiful stone mosaic is *not easy!*

It started raining just before I finished, so I had to stop and haven’t had a chance to get back to it as of the picture taken for this story. I will have to re-do the section of small pebbles since most of them fell out, and I still need to add larger rocks on some of the edge, and granite all around. Now that I know more, I’m considering making a nicer one using my hard-won knowledge...because one thing always leads to another.

## **Moving Forward – Letting Go – by Pam Charro**

I've been aware of a deep sadness lately, and it's been tough to figure out exactly why. It wasn't until I heard the sermon at church last Sunday that I started to understand the reason. The pastor was talking about letting go, particularly in Luke 9:24, when Jesus says,

"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it,  
but whoever loses his life for the sake of Me and the gospel will save it."

I didn't take my initial conversion to Christianity lightly. I studied the Bible for 5 1/2 months first, wanting to make sure this was really the truth I'd spent my entire 24 years searching for. I knew well of the scriptures on my need to surrender, and I didn't really want to do it. I counted the cost before deciding to follow Christ, but it didn't really occur to me that I would have to keep surrendering over and over. No matter what. Otherwise, a thin, icy wall would begin to divide my heart from His, and I would have a hard time making eye contact with Him during our morning meetings (yes, that may have happened once or twice).

Despite having been through all of that, this feels different. I don't think I'm doubting or resenting Him. I'm just ... sad. It's so hard sometimes when I know that I'm about to go through several life changes, and I can see what I'm losing, but not what I will gain. After having been a Mom for over 31 years, my youngest will be graduating from high school soon, and I won't be living with any of my children anymore. I believe it will then be time for me to move away after my daughter graduates, either to live nearer to my other children, or to move in with my Mom to take care of her. When I look in the mirror, I see an older woman every day; I'm blessed, but it's become obvious that I'm approaching the final third of my life here on earth. I haven't even had a date in over a year, and facing so much of the unfamiliar would seem a lot less daunting if I had the support of a partner. It's a lot of loneliness and letting go, and I sometimes feel empty thinking about it. And even a little scared. And that's okay.

Grieving isn't sinful or based on lack of trust.  
It's simply being honest,  
and God appreciates that.

I know that God is good, and He will have new good for me in my next season, and whatever hardships lie ahead will build me into the woman I was created to be. I don't want to miss any of what will be next, but I'm also going to watch the next 18 months with my eyes wide open, taking in every moment until my youngest flies the nest and enjoying dear friends and family until my next new adventure begins. God will be with me through all of it, and I'll process it with him. With tears of both sadness and joy.

## **Under Pressure – The House Lift – by Marcy Lytle**

We're trying hard to decide about something. We have these cracks in our walls that have been there for years. They used to appear in summer and then close up in fall, when rains came down. But for the past few years, the cracks have widened and become more numerous, and our fear was that our foundation was cracked! Finally, we had an estimator come look at the house, and thank goodness – the foundation is intact. The house just needs a lift on the back end.

Maybe that sounds like a small thing, but it's not! It's still expensive, and we wonder if it will permanently fix the problem, or if the cracks will return. I wonder if our windows might shift and crack with the lift. And most of all, we both wonder if forking out the thousands of dollars is worth this house-lift. I mean, the cracks ARE unsightly, but we've learned to live with them...sort of.

We have toyed over the idea all throughout the holidays, and here it is January – a time for all things new – and we still haven't made a decision!

Of course, all of these cracks and the idea of a lift has started my mind thinking...

I too have cracks in my faith, in my emotions, in my stamina...all the things...for all the same reasons as my house! I've sat in one spot, rains and storms have come and gone, the heat has beaten fiercely, there have been times of drought, etc. The cracks sometimes close up, when joy seeps in and fills them. But other times, they open wider, when I'm tired and exhausted from well...living. And while I've prayed many time for my cracks to heal up once and for all, they still appear from time to time!

If we pay the money to have our foundation lifted, my thoughts run to the joy that might be mine when I look at my clean walls...without cracks. I might not be embarrassed to have guests over, and I might not stare at the branch-like cracks while I'm watching a show anymore – because they'll be gone! That sounds lovely. But tearing up our yard, lifting the house, then having to repaint and move furniture – well that's daunting. And what if the lift doesn't even work? Well, that would be devastating!

By now, there are some of you reading and thinking, "What is wrong with you? Get the work done!"

Maybe others are like me and have questions and think, "Yeah, that's a big deal. Think it over more..."

Back to my personal cracks and unsightly scars of living life for 68 years in this weather-beaten world of ours...sometimes those cracks serve as humble reminders of my flaws and my need of a Savior. Sometimes, I think the cracks in my walls at home remind me that things don't have to be perfect in order to have guests over and serve. And I haven't had the experience of God just wiping away all my flaws and cracks, anyway. He forgives my sins, YES, but those weaknesses I have – they serve to strengthen my reliance on Him and relate to others who are broken, just like me!

I don't know what we will do about our walls. I'm relieved that our foundation is secure, but I'm frustrated that our backend is sinking a bit. And the cracks tell the story.

So, help a girl out here. What do you think? Should we fork out the thousands and lift our walls, have them repainted and push through the inconvenience of the time to repair? Or should we just

fill in the cracks and hope for rain, and enjoy the cool “art” that they provide in those rooms on the back end?

And those cracks in my own heart? He fills them every single morning, and new ones appear every single day, and this heart still sings and beats strong and well. Jesus does heal the broken heart, but the broken heart is what finds its solace in Him alone.

## **Unearthly Thing - Trusting God's Timing—Big Time – by Angela Dolbear**

Last year, 2025, was the year of trusting God. I can happily report that I have learned a much deeper trust in God this year, but I still have a long way to go to total trust. So after a glance back at last year, I turn my eyes forward to 2026. I will continue to press in on trusting God, but with a deeper gaze. I need to learn to trust God's timing—big time.

God's timing is everything. I never gave it that much thought until I started sensing God holding me back from rushing to finish my book proposal and send it off to the agency I hope will represent my new novel.

Since I have been home from the writer's conference at the end of October, I have been pushing myself to learn how to write an excellent book proposal, finish it, and send it to the agent I met with at the conference. The struggle to accomplish this task became more difficult every day.

At first, I thought I was just being lazy. I battle with procrastination. But the words failed to flow when I forced myself to sit down and write, even after asking God to help. I started to think something was wrong. God always helps me write. When this ever-present help didn't come, I began to pray about timing.

This was really hard for me. I wanted this book proposal done immediately and emailed to the agent NOW! I was excited to have direction in my publishing career, so I was all, "full steam ahead!" But this was not part of God's plan.

I pushed aside my frustration because I know, from experience, that it is a useless emotion and a clear indicator that I have moved outside God's direction. During my morning prayer time, I started to ask God about His timing.

I heard that familiar still small voice in my spirit say, "after the first of the year." But my stubbornness took over and murmured, "nah...that can't be right!" And I resumed trudging forward.

It got harder and harder to sit down and work on the proposal. I learned new things, like how to set up my author platform and plan a social media posting schedule. But I experienced divine silence when it came to writing the proposal.

"Maybe it's a spiritual attack," I mused. But it didn't seem like that distracting fog that suddenly comes on during a bout with the enemy of my soul. The kind where I pray for protection and help, and it clears away.

It was time to lay down my will and surrender. And without panicking that I will never finish this project (a BIG fear). I asked God about His timing for the proposal, and I heard the exact phrase as before: "after the first of the year."

UGH. Okay. I trust You, Lord. (*Do I? I absolutely must.*)

I turned my focus to some household projects, and then Thanksgiving came and went. As I write this, the Christmas season has begun. I put my tree up and some decorations outside and throughout the house. The book proposal is always looming in the back of my mind, though.

I've decided that when it inhabits my thoughts, I would imagine putting it and the whole of my publishing career into God's mighty hands. All of it. For His glory and Kingdom. So it all has to be according to His timing.

After all, the whole Universe is in His hands. There's also the fact that God is outside of time, in eternity. He knows the end from the beginning.

It's easier for me to trust Him with this big picture in mind. I don't always remember it. But I know God will help me. He always does.

When the first of the year comes, I know He will help me finish the proposal, and it will be everything it's supposed to be. He will be with me, in His timing. Big time. He's good like that.

Blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her latest release, The Mid-Century Breakfast Club, is the fourth book in The Garden Tales series. Her novels are available on [Amazon](#) in paperback, Kindle, and audiobook formats. Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, and writing and recording music in her studio in Nashville, TN—listen to her latest album [STORMS](#) on your favorite music streaming service. Please drop by and sign up for news, read the latest stories, and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>.*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME - Be the One – by Marcy Lytle**

Have you ever been in a group where the conversation turns toward so much negativity about all that is wrong with the government, people in the church, our medical system, the weather, and well...just everything? I have. I leave that conversation and return home with a heavy heart and totally dismayed. What good did it do to be a part of that narrative? None.

This year, I want to be the one who inserts, changes, steps out, and moves towards the light in little ways that matter. Will you join me?

1. Be the one that calls that friend and invites her over, even if she never reciprocates.
2. Be the one that sits quietly amid the noise and listens to His voice, and obeys.
3. Be the one that comments to a friend, with a genuine compliment!
4. Be the one that loves her husband in all that she does and says.
5. Be the one that prays for her children, and trusts them to the God who made them.
6. Be the one that lights up the room when she arrives, with a smile and hope.
7. Be the one that retreats and draws boundaries when pressures mount.
8. Be the one that turns to the Word for guidance, first.
9. Be the one that enjoys her home, in all of its states of cleanliness and messiness.
10. Be the one that stops to pinch the rosemary or basil, and takes in its glorious scent.
11. Be the one that shops and buys for her family, without guilt.
12. Be the one that offers praise to Him, on the worst of days.
13. Be the one that dances across her kitchen floor to music that lifts up His name.
14. Be the one that grants her friends space without judgment.
15. Be the one that changes the conversation when the words have gone sour.
16. Be the one that trusts her God, because she knows his character.
17. Be the one that breaks into pieces and cries hard tears, to the one who sees and hears.
18. Be the one that opens her hands and holds all things loosely, trusting God provides.
19. Be the one that prays and sees answers, and notes and give thanks.
20. Be the one that tries that new recipe and tastes that new dish.
21. Be the one that buys the notebooks and pens and fills them and writes.
22. Be the one that gets up at night and prays for a friend in need.
23. Be the one that texts that friend that comes to mind, with words of hope.
24. Be the one that looks up in the sky and observes His faithfulness daily.
25. Be the one that suffers in pain, knowing nothing is in vain, but all is for gain.
26. Be the one that prays for her husband and watches God answer.
27. Be the one that breathes in and breathes out, as she exercises her body.
28. Be the one that share what she has, joyfully, and freely.
29. Be the one that enjoys adventure and plans for it often.
30. Be the one that dresses with confidence, in her own style and own way.
31. Be the one that lights up the room, because the Light of the World is her joy.

## **FRESH THYME – Happy New Year! – by Marcy Lytle**

Is anticipation of a fun event better than the actual event itself? I don't know if it's better, but sometimes it can be!

Anticipation of the Christmas day events can be so fun with decorating, preparing dishes, setting the holiday table and wrapping gifts. Anticipation often happens over several days and weeks, and even months, so the expectation is there that all will turn out like we envision in our heads. And I'd say it very rarely turns out that well. Someone says something or another person does something, and there's a mark on this pretty picture we have in our heads.

Anticipation of date night with him can also be fun, if you've purchased tickets to a fun event, or planned a night out full of food and wonder. Even thinking about what to wear can be so fun, as you get ready and plan your outfit. Then the reality of date night hits when there's a disappointing comment, or the event wasn't all that great, or the line at the restaurant took too long. Hopes and dreams weren't fulfilled...at all. Or maybe date night was completely ruined with one of those pop-up arguments.

Anticipation of this new year isn't any different. Once Christmas is over, we start the plans for NY's eve, we have a birthday in January so I start thinking of that, and I gather my lists. Oh, those lists. They're made and they're full of anticipation, aren't they? I even purchased the cutest list notebook that came with a gold pen, and I'm having the best time filling it in with 2026 expectations! There's even a trip written down in that notepad!

The problem with placing so much expectation and anticipating the future – well it's no problem at all, really! Did you expect me to say that? I was surprised, myself. I have found that anticipation is a part of living that we all experience, and sometimes life can knock the wind out of excitement to come when hard things come. If a death occurs, or plans were crashed, or nothing turned out, we tend to then "protect" ourselves from getting excited ever again...

But that's not cool, or good, or healthy. But how do we bring back that anticipation, that excitement now that a new year is here...if last year was sorrowful and hard?

- Pray. Ask God to heal your wounds and give you hope for a new year.
- Forgive. If someone disappointed you last year, ask God to help you forgive them and release yourself from the heartache.
- Smile. Purposefully make yourself smile as you go to sleep and then awake, at the goodness of God in your life. You know...count your blessings.
- Encourage yourself. Grab a new devotional, attend a study group, read a new book, start something new that feeds your soul.
- Release. Start the new year with anticipation but release those who are a part of your plans to be separate from your enjoyment. Purpose to enjoy life, anyway.
- Write. Get that new journal, buy a pretty pen, fill the book full of ideas and fun and giving and learning and growing and going. Keep it with you, to write and fill in and check off. It's absolutely fun.

The above ideas are not always easy to do. So I will be praying for each of you this new year that your heart will be full of anticipation and hope, excitement for what is to come, and the ability to enjoy it all even if it's covered or sprinkled sometimes with dirt and muck. Anticipation is part of living the good life, even when darkness tries to cover it up.

Will it be a happy new year? Let's anticipate and expect one, looking for the sun...because it's always there.

Psalm 5:3:

"In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice;  
in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly"

## **FRESH THYME - It Didn't Come – by Marcy Lytle**

I've sat and listened to inspirational speakers talk about hope, especially like they do at Christmas time. They mention the pains of childbirth and how once the child is here, hope is fulfilled, the pain was worth it, the baby is joy. They mention the thrill of family arriving, the hope of a new day, all the things that bring joy when hope is fulfilled in this life. Sometimes, they recall a prayer that has been answered, and often it's one for healing, when a loved one who was ill is now well, and all rejoice! And of course, we talk of the hope of Jesus and how that's everything...and it is.

But recently, I sat listening and wondered about those around me who didn't have their hopes fulfilled, but instead their dreams were dashed. A friend was expecting a "miracle baby" people called it, only the baby didn't make it to full-term. They didn't get what they were hoping for, and the pain was unbearable.

I have family that watched their dad/husband take on pancreatic cancer and they prayed it wouldn't be true, they hoped for healing, and then in a few short weeks he was gone. Hope waned, sadness overtook, and disbelief settled in. Their hope was gone in having that prayer answered.

That's just two examples of a multitude of stories, including ones we hear on the news, of devastation and loss, horrible circumstances and diseases, where people have hoped and prayed and what they hoped for didn't come.

And yet, these same people are in the rooms where the inspirational speakers are talking about how hope is fulfilled, and we should give thanks when it is.

Then...one thing I read reminded me that there was 400 years of silence right before Jesus appeared on the earth, and I'm certain that people's hope in a Messiah was dashed, they soon forgot he was coming, and maybe some had lost hope in that, too. And yet, he came, like we just celebrated last month.

I've too hoped for things that didn't come. I hoped we wouldn't lose our home decades ago, but we did, and started all over. I have prayed and hoped, and joined others in hoping, for healing, provision, and even salvation for friends and family...and it's just not happening, the outcome isn't visible, and I can't see that my hopes will be fulfilled.

Is it depressing to sit in a talk about how babies bring hope, when your baby died? Yes. Is it so very sad and hard to hear about a miraculous healing where people say they were blessed by their faith, when we had faith and our loved one didn't make it? Yes. Is it hard to maintain hope when life is passing by and what we hope for isn't coming? Yes.

The best thing I've learned and am still learning is that our hope has to be grounded in the character of the one in whom we hope, the Lord. Either he's just, he's righteous and he's merciful...or he's not. Either he cares, he listens, he heals and provides...or he doesn't. And when we settle this ambiguity in our hearts and minds that he's a good God and that's a solid truth, our hope then shifts.

We then place our hope in God, the lover of our souls, and not in what we hope to happen here or there. In other words, when we awake in the morning and see the sun arrive through the blinds as we pull that string or pull back that curtain, we don't fret that it won't suddenly disappear. It's always there. God placed it in creation as a reminder.

Where does your hope lie? On any given day, my hope is that things work out, go my way, and that me and mine are safe and well. But truly, those things are temporal here on earth, and he's eternal. That's part of his character. This eternal God who's present in my every moment here and now, and in every moment there and then. And he's trustworthy, always.

Even when death shows up, disappointments are too long to list, and everything we hope for doesn't come. Our hope is in God, the one who made us, sustains us, and surrounds us in the world in which we live.

And even when we're in the middle of a room of those who are rejoicing because their hopes were fulfilled and ours weren't, we can rejoice with them, grieve and cry for our losses, and say to ourselves, "Why so downcast, oh my soul? Put your hope in God." For he alone is the lover of our souls.

## **FRESH THYME - The Card – by Marcy Lytle**

I have a friend who's currently going through one of the worst things life has to throw at us – the decline of her husband's health and mind. She's quite amazing to watch, as she often reminds the rest of us that she's good vertically with God, even though horizontally with her sweet spouse it's unbearably hard. And this is true of so many people, at some point in life. It's just plain hard, and it's time-consuming to care for someone, while your own emotions are wrecked.

But guess what else this friend does? She sends cards in the mail. Yes, the kind you have to address and write in, and place a stamp on. They're thoughtfully written in, they're so pretty, and they brighten my day when I receive one, several times during the year. She does this for many people, and what a gift that is! I barely get cards of any kind from people anymore!

I was thinking and praying for her this week, as she had yet another challenge to face at home...and then the card arrived in the mail, and I marveled. I was amazed that this woman took time to think of us, when her life was right in front her daily, hard as hard can be. She has found a ministry all her own that she can do, while she's fighting a hard battle at home.

It made me purpose this coming year to find my card, my purpose, my giving, that can be done in the moments in which I live with my own challenges, ones I share and those I don't share. And while life is hard and unspeakable for so many throughout the year, for all sorts of different reasons, we too can find a way to give back. And my goodness, the power of a small card arriving in the mail has been the biggest blessing...so I hope my friend is blessed right back!

Here are some ideas of things we can do when we can barely breathe:

Write a card and slip on the mail, like my friend does.

Text a friend an encouraging note, one that says you're praying for her.

Heard a good song lately? Share it with a friend.

Bake something while your mind is reeling, and share it with a neighbor.

After you've cried your eyes out, offer praise and thanksgiving. It will bless Him and you.

Read a good book lately? Leave it on the doorstep of a friend, with a note.

Maybe you're running to the store for supplies. Just smile and ask the clerk how you can pray for her.

Feeling completely depressed and hopeless? Go to the Word. Share one verse with someone in a hopeless situation like you.

About to lose your mind? Go outside and snap a few photos of God's creation, even in the winter, and share on social media.

Shut your eyes and sit still and let Him love on you. Then text your kids how much you love them, and expect nothing in return.

I adore the cards I get in the mail from this friend. It's a lost art, mailing cards with handwritten notes. But it's a treasure that can be picked up and given, at any time...