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THYME
For Every Season

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TIPS

In the Kitchen – Three Ideas – by Marcy Lytle

We recently had a four day weekend with the family and three of our meals were served in three different ways, using three different vessels for the food. This month, I'm sharing those three ideas so you can try them if you wish! I'll include the dish idea as well as the recipe to go with. It's a great experience for the family, for friends, on your vacations or visits this summer as you sip and supper together in this season.

The bowl – I ordered this wonderful set of white dinner bowls from Amazon, so that our kids could take them home after our dinner, and have them to add to their dishes! Shallow bowls call for dinner in a bowl, and this night was a Spanish rice dish, which is super tasty and easy to make.

Ingredients:

White rice (I used Success Rice – boil in a bag – easy and delish)

- Ground sirloin
- Green olives
- Capers
- Roasted red peppers
- Red wine vinegar
- Avocado
- Romaine lettuce

Set the rice on the stove to boil, according to directions. In a large skillet, brown the meat and then add the peppers, olives and caper mixture. Slice the avocado, and the lettuce.

Arrange the rice in the bottom of the bowls, then top with the meat, salad and avocado. This combo is delightfully tasty and good!

Charcuterie Plates – I ordered a set of square bamboo plates from Amazon for this dinner that was so fun. We set out all of the charcuterie type foods in bowls or on trays, but not arranged...yet. The object is to have each person take their bamboo plate and make their own mini charcuterie plate using what you've set out. Then take pictures and ooh and ahh over each person's creation!

Ingredients:

- Smoked almonds
- Cheese cubes or slices
- Rolled up turkey/ham
- Large green olives, toothpicks
- Bunch of red seedless grapes
- Assorted crackers
- Raw veggies like broccoli and carrots
- Veggie dip

- Parsley or other herbs for garnish
- Tiny bowls for interest
- Flavored popcorn
- Pretzel mix
- Trail mix

Just invite the family to the table to pick and choose their food and garnish, then take pictures and enjoy your meal.

Jarcuterie – Have you heard of this? I purchased a set of small fruit jars, but you may have some in your home if you keep that sort of thing. You can choose snacks or dessert, and we chose dessert. We set out an array of small and tall sweets (that will fit in the jars) and invited the family to create their own jar of goodies. We refilled them, and put together a puzzle while we ate.

Ingredients:

- Tiny vanilla wafers
- Twizzlers
- Goldfish
- Dark chocolate covered almonds
- Sour squares
- Pirouelles
- Caramel popcorn
- Strawberries
- Dark chocolate squares
- Raisins
- Shortbread
- Ferrer Rochier

Just invite the fam to add and stack and create and eat!

https://www.amazon.com/ideas/amzn1.account.AFGMY23AF4JI2JNTTWLXIE3ZJVCQ/2UQOQY5CDAW0Q?type=explore&ref=idea_cp_vl_ov_d

Seven for You – Manis and Pedis

I am not a fan of either of these, but so many of my friends are! I sat for a manicure before my daughter's wedding and wasn't pleased, as I did not enjoy the experience at all. However, we are all so different, and I thought it would be fun to ask our panel of women to weigh in on their experiences and preferences when it comes to painting their nails! I was curious if they do paint them, and if they prefer to go to a salon, or if they like taking care of their nails themselves! Their answers are fun to read, offer us tips and insight, and reaffirm how the diversity of women everywhere – which makes this column so fun to read!

I don't do either. I don't get a pedi, mainly because my feet need the tough places (on my toes) for all the walking we do and if we play any tennis or other sports. And as for a mani, I just keep my finger nails short and trimmed. I think it's so fun to go to the salon, and my girls love manis and pedis, but my feet don't. - Melissa

My fingernails are very weak and thin. Many manicurists are too aggressive, so I choose to do my own manicures. I keep my nails painted with a strengthener and conditioner called Treat Love and Color. I use a tinted, light sheer color to fortify them and help them look clean and shiny. I do have pedicures done at a salon around the corner from my house. In the past, I chose bold colors. Recently, I have moved toward lighter colors so that when they are chipped or worn it is not as noticeable. (I love to go barefoot both inside and outside.) I also take in my own nail color so I can touch it up myself in between pedicures. – Shelley

I don't want other people working on my feet or my toes, and I'd rather use the money for manis and pedis on clothes shopping! So I opt to paint my nails myself. I use either a sparkly nail polish or a neutral color, because those two don't look horrible if chipped a bit. I'm not good at keeping up with the maintenance required! Sometimes, I let my nails "breathe" and don't paint them at all. I do wish it wasn't so time consuming to remove the old polish and paint on the new, and let it dry. Manis and pedis don't even sound fun to me, but I'm just weird like that... - Marcy

I love pedis, and I HATE manis because it seems too harsh for my nails. It causes them to split. Besides that, I don't like the feel of polish on my finger nails. It feels very heavy! However, I just got a pedi Saturday. I like short pedis, and lean towards nudes, pinks and corals. This time I got nude-ish color. It looks *okay*, but the girl did a great job. Tipped her really well. - Debbie

I get a pedicure just about every single month and I paint my nails about once a week! My best tip when getting a pedicure would be to get gel polish on your toes. This is because gel polish doesn't chip and by the end of the month will be grown out to a proper length to be done again! When it comes to painting my nails, I do them myself because they tend to not last as long as pedicures do and getting a manicure every two weeks definitely does not agree with my bank account! So what I find works best is Sally Hansen Miracle Gel polish with their top coat to pair. Each bottle is a tad pricy but this stuff is seriously magical! I'll do my nails about 30 minutes to an hour before I go to bed and they dry and look great by the morning! - Sofia

We live in the country, and I am always doing outside work, so I have never kept my fingernails painted. I do cut and file them nicely but at a shorter length. Now for my toenails, I like for them to be pedicured. I love to go to our local Rockstar Nails and Spa salon and have them trimmed, shaped, and painted. I prefer lighter pastel colors and natural tones but occasionally I have let my daughter and granddaughters talk me into a bold or bright color. And I love taking the girls in our family with me. It makes for such a fun outing! They always get both their toenails and fingernails done and we all agree that the best part of the experience is the massaging chairs we get to sit in. – Carole

Love manis and pedis. I don't get to get them regularly, so when I do, they are a treat. However, I never go without color on my toes. And to keep my feet soft, I use the PedEgg and finish with rubbing Aquaphor in my feet. My fingernails, I prefer the natural look and do not polish them much. I do not like the yellow look on my nails from wearing polish for long periods of time. I have started taking collagen, which has removed the roughness in my nails and leaves my hands looking younger. - Edith

The Dressing – Help for the Weary – by Marcy Lytle

For some, fashion is all that with a cherry on top, because we love it so much. For others, fashion is neither here nor there, because we just don't care. But I'd say that most women find themselves weary at times when shopping for certain pieces of clothing, like a dress for a special occasion, a swimsuit, shoes that are cute but still stylish, or even a bra or underwear or sleepwear! I know that as much as I love fashion, shopping and finding items that fit, look good, and feel good is sometimes a challenge.

I've found a few trick/tips/treasures that's I'm going to share, that maybe will help us all out. And if you have any to add, please comment at the bottom of the page!

Tuck or Knot – I once had a friend ask me why I partially tuck a shirt in at the waist. Let me tell you. A shirt that's too baggy adds pounds. Having it just hang loose (especially for those with larger breasts) just looks frumpy (is that a word?) So a one finger tuck in the middle or on the side of the pants, give a little shape and flare and pizzazz. Not a fan of the tuck? Tie your t-shirt in a knot, on the side!

Vest – I have several of these and snap them up when I find them. Maybe you have a t-shirt that is a bit too tight, or even your jeans are a bit snug. Adding a vest over that ensemble smooths and covers, and just makes the outfit!

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B078YBPTZT/?ref=idea_lv_dp_ov_d&tag=onamzmarcel05-20&linkCode=ic6&ascsubtag=amzn1.ideas.2TVKQTSKJZ8G6

Half tee – I've been promoting these for a while now, because they're genius! I often wear men's undershirts underneath blouses or tops that are cut too low, or the neck is cut too wide, to provide coverage. However, half tees do the same without the lower bulk of a tee. They are only long enough to cover your chest, and they come in SO MANY shapes with all different lengths of sleeves. These are also great to wear under spaghetti straps or sleeveless tops, if your arms give you grief.

<https://halftee.com/>

Swimsuits – I wish there was a swimsuit trend that fit to your knees. Can you agree? But there isn't. So instead of worrying over the way my legs and butt look in a suit, I opt to wear a pair of athletic shorts (I wear men's because they're longer) over whatever suit I buy, and I just swim in them. Not the knit kind, but the slick kind, that shed water. Black is always a good choice, with a drawstring waist!

Shorts – I just found these Royalty for Me high-waist Bermuda shorts recently that I love. They're stretchy and just long enough, and great for summer! I paired them with a gauze shirt in blue and white, a great color combo for the season!

<https://www.royaltyforme.com/category/missy/missybermudas>

Sleep bra, and body shapers – Both of these make me smile. The sleep bra by Hanes comfort flex (Target) is great. Comfy, fastens in the back, provides support, unlike sports bras

which give me claustrophobia when trying to put them on after a bath! Body shapers by Bali are my favorite to wear under all my clothing. The lace option is the best!

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0081TUKTI/?ref=idea_lv_dp_ov_d&tag=onamzmarcel05-20&linkCode=ic6&ascsubtag=amzn1.ideas.2TVKQTSKJZ8G6&th=1

Shoes – Let's face it. Heels aren't good for our feet! I still wear them, but for short periods of time. However, I've found some great shoes for summer that I'm wearing, one of which is from Amazon – recommended by someone else. They're super casual but go with all the summer outfits you wear to the park and outside. Check them out.

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B087D8H7NN/?ref=idea_lv_dp_ov_d&tag=onamzmarcel05-20&linkCode=ic6&ascsubtag=amzn1.ideas.2TVKQTSKJZ8G6

Three Moms – Time with Him

Mom of Three

If I'm being honest, date nights – going out – are few and far between. We were in a season for a long while where we really didn't want to leave the kids, because free nights were few, and we wanted to include them. Date nights are definitely important, but there is also a balance. For us, we do a good job of connecting on a daily basis – at night when the kids are asleep we chat and talk. Other times, we get a random night when kids are at a sports practice or with grandparents. This past season, while the kids were in school, my husband and I had lunch together because we both work at home! I do know that having time with him, dating him, is important. But only "date night" connections every so often is not enough, and we also have a budget, but day-to-day connections work as well. It's the day to day connections where we chat and spend time over coffee, or even a ride in the car to pick up the kids, that works for us! Our date nights don't have to be big or fancy or every week. They can be a simple lunch or a shopping excursion to pick out wood floors for the house!

When we do have a designated date night, we often stay in (to save money). We watch a show we enjoy together, and have dinner at home, and make it cozy. If we do go out, it's a coffee date for sure – and sometimes bowling! Our love language is coffee, and we sometimes play a game. We don't visit the theater a lot, because we watch enough shows at home. We like to go somewhere that we can talk and do something, or even just walk around!

Sometimes we plan our dates nights together, or sometimes we surprise each other – especially on birthdays.

So both – date nights out and daily connections – are a great balance for us! I've been so grateful for this season. Finding time with toddlers is hard, but now that the kids are in school we have more time. We also love to serve together, and call that connection, because we are super compatible that way!

Mom of Two

One of the blessings of working together is that we get to see each other every day. At first, we wondered if it would be too much time together. But it has been different and unique, and pretty awesome. Obviously, our days are jam-packed with patient care and business, but we often do for lunch, even if it's only five minutes!

At home, it's all about the kids. We also put work to rest, and focus on the kids and family, and not talk about work. After the kids are in bed, we do have that window to relax and connect. Many times, we just sit on the couch and rub each other's feet or shoulders, and not say a word. We talked all day! We watch television and just hang out.

I do believe it is important to also have "planned" time away with him, away from responsibilities. He's one of my top priorities! We love to go dinner together. We just got back from a 10-year wedding anniversary trip. One of our goals is to do a date night at least once a month, and

every few months have a night away. We have family and friends nearby, so they keep the kiddos. We are very thankful for that.

Day to day connections are found through little bits at work and in the evenings, and that quality time is planned either at home or away without the kids!

The last thing – the things we like to do are dinner, hiking, a car ride (and even include the kids while they nap in the car!), talk, etc.

Mom of Four

Official dates probably don't happen as much as we'd like. It's just the season of life we're in. We do take occasional nights out, maybe once every few months. Recently, my mother-in-law came up and my husband and I were able to go out to dinner. We love to explore a city nearby, a new restaurant, or even go shopping. We very rarely see movies. My husband is a big talker, so we usually catch up and/or explore! If we do go out for a date, it might be around a special occasion, or we just "need" alone time together.

We also have babysitters, which are great, and we use them. Our oldest is also starting to watch the other kids, when we go out nearby. This has been so nice.

Our daily and weekly moments are in the evenings, but our kids are now staying up later as they age. We do sometimes catch up for a little while, though, after the kids are in bed. We also talk during the kids' game and practices. My husband is so relational (I may be even less than he is!) and makes sure that we connect. He helps make it happen in the daily moments.

One thing we love – every summer my mother-in-law takes the kids for a mini camp. That's a whole week for me and my husband to focus on each other. And that's so fun!

More dates would be nice...

Tried and True – July Calendar for You – by Marcy Lytle

It's been a while since we published a calendar of ideas of fun things, food suggestions, activities, and more for you to print out and follow, just for fun. So why not do it for July? Below is a list of activities for this month, should you need inspiration. Hang the list on your fridge, pin it to a board, or just snap a screenshot and save it for future reference. I love lists of ideas, because they help me to let my brain rest for a bit. Enjoy!

July

1 – Make ice cream sandwiches for the 4th by placing softened ice cream between two cookies and then rolling the cookie in sprinkles, and freeze til you're ready to enjoy.

2 – Do you have something patriotic to wear on the 4th? Go buy matching (or not) tees for the family!

3 – Print out facts about freedom, to have to share with your group, or whoever you're with on the 4th.

4 – When's the last time you made a huge pitcher of lemonade? Today's the best day for it, along with your holiday fare of picnic food for all. Try a new topping for those hotdogs!

5 – Leave all the mess from the holiday and just relax with your feet up, and read a great new book! *Be the Gift* is a great choice, by Ann Voskamp.

6 – Check out the recipes on the TIPS page of *A Bundle of THYME* and try one of the ideas!

7 – Spend the evening planning your next trip away...even if it's just a weekend. Look at a local map and plan a road trip! Those are the best!

8 – Take in a movie at a theater you've not been to before, and enjoy a big tub of popcorn.

9 – Find a trail in your city that you've not walked, and pack up some water and trail mix, and go walking.

10 – Clean out one drawer, toss out the old, organize what's left...and smile.

11 – Invite someone to lunch, put it on the calendar, and decide now what you will wear.

12 – Read a story in *A Bundle of THYME* and leave the writer a nice comment, then SHARE

13 – Visit a couple of hotel lobbies and people-watch while enjoying a drink or snack. How fun is that?

14 – Think about Christmas in July — just a few goodies – a few snacks – crank up the AC – and watch a Christmas movie. Plan this and do within the next couple of weeks!

15 – Clean your car. Discard the trash, place an air freshener, actually vacuum the floors, and buy yourself a new something for the inside.

- 16 – Check your local drive-in movie calendar, pick one, and go. Invite a friend.
- 17 – Take time this evening to sit and pray and trust and gaze...at the beauty of the sunset from a restaurant patio while you dine...and give thanks.
- 18 – Search the internet for a good and new trail mix recipe or granola, and make it!
- 19 – Ask friends to meet you in the park for a picnic. It can be breakfast if daytime is too hot, or it can be after dark, around a fire pit.
- 20 – Bake a sweet treat and deliver it to a friend that could use a smile.
- 21 – Visit a local museum and stop for an ice cold treat afterwards.
- 22 – Take a country drive to a small town and walk the square. Visit a local diner for dinner.
- 23 – Pick a movie on Netflix, set up your TV room like a theater, make snacks, turn down the lights and “go to the movies!”
- 24 – Set up the sprinkler in the backyard (whether you have kids or not) and sit under the spray, sip on something cool, and laugh out loud.
- 25 – This is a good day (the 25th!) to have that Christmas in July that you planned. OR...go Christmas shopping and start now, so that you can spread out your spending!
- 26 – Look up local farmer’s markets near you and plan to visit. Purchase a cool cloth bag for shopping. Then plan some great meals with your purchases!
- 27 – Book a night away or an entire weekend. Look on the map, pick a city, find a few things to do there, and then reserve the place. Mark it on the calendar.
- 28 – Clean out your closet and get it prepared for fall...yes, fall. Toss out the old; make room, for the new. Donate. Then go out for dinner...because you’ll be tired.
- 29 – Just after dark, exit your house and sit outside, look at the stars, sip on your beverage of choice. Listen to the sounds of the night. Pray together. Dance to some tunes in the grass.
- 30 – Re-do one area of your house just by changing 3 things – like a new pillow, throw, lamp, item of décor, rug, candle, etc. – Shop for it or just repurpose or rearrange what you have!
- 31 – Make it a bar night – either a taco bar, ice cream bar, baked potato bar – or your own idea!



HOME

A Night to Remember – Backyard Games – by Marcy Lytle

We recently played some backyard games with the kiddos while away, and I thought it would be fun to incorporate those into a family devo time! There are always things to be learned and enjoyed about God, while we're also enjoying life. And our kids need to see and know that! And there's no time better than in the backyard on a summer night, when it's hot, there's lemonade and cookies nearby, and the evening breezes blow.

Preparation: Each activity below tells the prep involved, and the items needed. You could do one a week or all four in one night. And be sure to have lemonade and cookies (or other snacks) available to enjoy.

Water balloon volleyball: Just set up the badminton net, fill some water balloons, and grab a couple of beach towels. Two people stand on each side with a towel and one balloon and volley it across and the other two try to catch it in their towel and volley it back. Have a tub of balloons to keep using as you play.

After playing a bit, sit on the towels and share for a minute:

I Corinthians 12 talks about all the parts of our body and how each one is necessary. (Let the kids tell what each part plays in the body). In that game we just played, what if one person dropped their end of the towel? (The balloon popped). What if the two people moved different ways instead of together, to catch the balloon? (The balloon fell to the ground and popped). The only way the game continued - was for each group of two to work together with their towels and their feet, to catch and volley. It's the same in life. God gives us all a part and we are to work together for Him!

Tin Can Bowling: It doesn't take long to collect 10 cans from meals you've prepared during the month. Let the kids remove the paper (or not) and then provide spray paint and newspaper to color them! (Supervise, of course!) Set them up carnival style, grab one of the kids' small rubber balls, and let them see how many they can knock down, while the others cheer them on!

After a few rounds, talk about the cheering aspect of the game. Was it hard to cheer for someone that knocked down more cans than you did? How did it feel to win or lose?

I Thessalonians says to encourage each other, to build each other up. This means when one feels disappointed at not winning, we can say "Good job!" so we acknowledge their hard work. It doesn't help to make fun of a loser. And when one wins, we can equally say "Good job" as we give them a high-five.

Coffee filter flowers: You'll need the white round coffee filters, markers, pipe cleaners, spray bottle of water, a table to work on, and a vase. Let the kids scribble on the filters, then spray them with water to watch the colors bleed together. These don't take long to dry at all. After each person has colored three filters, stack them (after they dry). Fold the stack in half, then in half again, then back and forth like an accordion, just twice. Wrap the pipe cleaner around the point, and gently pull apart the petals. Place them all in a vase.

Revelation 7 says that when Christ returns there will be people of all colors and races and nations that stand before him, with us, who call him Lord. God loves all people of all colors, and so should we. Look how pretty these flowers of all colors look together in the vase. It would not be near as interesting or pretty if say...they were all brown...or all yellow. The variety of color makes the vase interesting and a great focal point of the table! God loves us all, and we are to love everyone as well!

Any outdoor summer activity, like catching fireflies, enjoying a popsicle, or even just watching the stars emerge as the sky darkens can be ways to engage our kids in the wonder of creation, His love, and ways to live and love others. Enjoy!

An Adage a Day - What's In an Age – by Carole Gilbert

I had one of those milestone birthdays this year. I keep telling myself age is a depiction of mind over matter. “If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.” This phrase, “Mind over matter,” means overcoming problems or obstacles with determination. It was first written in 1863 by Geologist Sir Charles Lyell in explaining the evolutionary growth in people's minds, and animals. It gives the depiction of prevailing over whatever we are going through. The way we view our age can become an obstacle or problem. Keep in mind, the Bible depicts “gray hair as a glorious crown,” Proverbs 16:31.

I may now be of a milestone age and not young enough for bikinis anymore, but another saying I have always heard is, “You’re only as old as you feel.” This old saying has been around for a long time. Its origin is unknown, but it has evolved into many variations, like “You’re as young as you feel,” and *As Young as You Feel*, which is the title of a 1951 film with Marilyn Monroe playing a small part. This saying in its many versions is quoted by lots of people including myself. I prefer the version, “You're as young as you feel.” I may not always look young when I see myself in the mirror, but I will keep in mind that I am not old, either.

I lead a Sunday school class of ladies aged 72-plus years old. We all feel that growing old is not an option, we are only growing older. Our class has officers, and we have a wonderful woman, Betty, as our President that starts us so diligently. She wears that glorious crown of gray with dignity. And she too just had a milestone birthday. She was a little concerned about passing the eye test for her driver’s license renewal. That is what she had on her mind as she turned 95! And that is not a typo! I can only imagine what I might be concerned with at 95 if I make it to that age!

I asked my ladies about getting older and if they had wise words to share. We all decided that we are of an age that we do not have to be concerned with blending into this world. We can do what we want, wear what we want, and say what we want, as long as it gives glory to God. Judy replied with the wise words, “If you don’t use it, you lose it.” And “I’m not fixing my hair at 6:30 to go walk the dogs.” Upon that Barb added, “You get up and get dressed in case someone calls.” Betty threw in, “But they never do.” Then Pat injected, “People like it when you don’t look so good, it makes them feel better.”

Our fierce leader, President Betty, finished out our discussion of wise words from the gloriously crowned, by saying, “I spend time doing my devotion every morning. It just takes a really, really long time.” These ladies inspire me, and I hope and pray I am inspiring like them when I am 72-plus years old!

If you have not gotten this far along in your life or maybe you are in your prime and not sure where you are going from there, set your heart on persevering in letting God mold you toward your older age and that glorious crown He has for you. Wherever you are in age, remember it is just mind over matter. Like I said before, if you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.

And to keep in conjunction with another old saying, "You're known by the company you keep," I love keeping company with these ladies! In closing, I would like to add that Betty did pass her eye exam and renewed her license. And I decided to live by mind over matter, keeping my mind as positive as these wonderful ladies...and not letting my age matter.

Chipped China - Keeper of My Treasure – by Jennifer Lytle

Tonight, I cleared out some clutter that had accumulated in my closet. I found several Mario figurines and trinkets. What were my son's treasures doing in the bottom of my closet?

Throughout the years, this scenario has repeated as I have gone throughout the house and picked up different areas. I have found an unattached arm of a soldier, or a tiny Battleship game piece, or the front cover of a beloved paperback book and thought, "*These things could go in the trash bin. They are inexpensive and replaceable.*" Sometimes, I have thought, "*Maybe I should save these until he can appreciate them.*" Often, what I simply do is re-organize them into their designated bins and carefully tuck the item back into place.

I'm not sure whether it's better to take care of my son's treasures each time I find them laying around or to put them away until he can better care for them himself. Am I doing a disservice to myself and him to continue to allow him to possess items he is unable to look after properly?

When I think about some of the still-unanswered prayers that I hold in my heart, I wonder if God is like myself in this scenario, except that He is perfect. He knows what I can and cannot properly take care of and He understands what I can and cannot manage. Maybe if He gave me some of the things I have asked for, I would let them lie around until they were broken. Maybe the lavished gifts would momentarily bring me happiness but later become a wall that kept me from running to Him to be my Jehovah Jireh.

I think about the father in Luke 15 who was asked by his son for an inheritance. The son quickly moved away from the family to enjoy his goods. After some time, he had nothing left and began to work feeding pigs. He was so hungry, he wanted to eat what the pigs were eating but no one would give him anything.

Surely, this father knew that his son would likely waste the inheritance. Quite possibly, the father from this story was aware that the son would even leave home quickly. The father in Luke 15 did not try any tactic to delay the request of his younger son. He affirmed the desire and, ultimately, it turned out for the son's good. Perhaps the son could have grown bitter if he was unable to leave the family home because his father refused the request. In this case, the son was given the freedom to have all that was his, immediately.

After it was all spent, the prodigal son made his way back home to ask for a servant's job. He knew the servants were fed and cared for well at home.

Are there unanswered prayers in your heart? Trust our Abba. This Papa is good. He knows just what we need and just what will bring us to our knees . . . so whether your treasure is physically something you can see, or something you simply hope for, His answer is always good. He is the keeper of our treasures.

Jesus, thank you for keeping my treasure. Thank you for holding my heart. Thank you for holding the heart of every member of my family. Keep their treasure and reveal it to them when they are able to acknowledge you as the giver of all good gifts.

I Don't Do Teens – Prep for the Exit – by Marcy Lytle

Kids grow up fast, don't they? When they're small, we think they'll never grow up and we will get our lives "back"...and then when they're about to exit our homes to go to college or get married, we can't believe that time has flown by so quickly. And then the emotions start to rise. I've talked to a few parents that are so ready and can't wait for their teens to leave, but most parents are really sad and dreading that fateful day. Is there a way to be prepared and experience the exit without falling apart? At least there are ways to be prepared, which I was not, but wish I had been.

Talk to other parents. Ask that mom how she dealt with the loneliness after her son's room was no longer filled with her son's things. Be open to share your feelings and ask for prayer and stay connected to others that have experienced these things before you. It helps to know that you're not alone in your fears and your feelings.

Think about the good. Plan for the first visit back home, or the first drive to see them. If that's too far away, then plan something else good to do and mark a few activities on your calendar. Maybe a road trip, a shopping excursion, or a weekend getaway can be penciled in for those first few months after your teen leaves. Having something to look forward to is helpful!

Try something new. When my son left, a few years after my daughter married, I was faced with these bedrooms that stared me in the face every day – screaming "Empty!" Right away, I began plans to re-do them with paint, a new bed, or wall décor, etc. If your child is away at college and coming back frequently, this is probably not a good idea. But if they're gone and married, go for it! Creativity chases the blues away.

Turn to him and Him. Don't shut out your spouse. I did for a bit, and I saw that he had a look that said, "I'm still here to love and be with." Focus on your marriage and the fun you can now have, as you start this new adventure without kids in the house at all times. Pray together, ask God for comfort, and turn toward – not away.

Treat him/her kindly. It doesn't help to sob and cling and relay to our kids our deepest fears, how we're going to be so lonely, and make them feel bad right along with us. They're sure to have a bit of fear as well, and they may call at night saying they're lonely or miss us, and we'll hang up and cry buckets of tears. And it's okay for them to know we'll miss them, but don't send them off with harsh words or unkind looks or heartbreak on your sleeves. Once they're out of sight; then cry away. Crying helps. Tell them you miss them and you love them. And welcome them any time they drive up.

I thought having my kids move out was one of the hardest experiences as a parent. A good portion of your life is over as a parent – daily cooking and cleaning and caring for this individual. And they they're gone. The heartache hurt worse than anything, and it was not pleasant. But all of the above things are little suggestions that help. Time keeps rolling, and life keeps going, and it won't be that long before they show up, and you're happy to tell them bye because your house was wrecked, and your new life was altered. But you'll be standing at the door awaiting the next visit, without tears, but only waves of joy at the adults that are still your kids.

Practical Parenting – At the Table – by Marcy Lytle

I've noticed that quite often kids don't get talked to at the dinner table when there's a bunch of adults seated. Usually, the conversation is among the adults, and the kids are either left out, only talked to when they're misbehaving, or occasionally snickered at if they're funny. Oh sure, it's good that adults have the chance to visit, but having the kids enter our conversations is one of the most fun things...ever.

We go every year with our family on a trip and each night we have dinner conversations that include the kids. Not only are their answers and participation so fun and hilarious, the kids seem to love the activity and the fact that they're included at the table!

Jokes: Just search the internet for printable jokes for kids, print them out and cut them apart, and have them in a jar. This could be a once a week activity, say on Friday pizza night. Just pass the jar around and let each person read a joke, while everyone laughs. If one kid is too little to read, you can whisper the joke and let him say it out loud. This activity is fun, because often the kids (and adults) like to guess the joke's answer before it is read!

Getting to know you: Tell each person that they have to ask a question of the person two seats over, in order to get to know them better. They might ask, "What was your favorite game as a kid?" to an adult. An adult might ask a kid, "What's your favorite summer activity?" They can even be deeper questions about friendship, love, and family. The kids get to think up questions, and adults get to gain insight on each other and the entire family!

Under the plate convo starters: Search the internet for family conversation starters (printable) and often they will show up on a page in cute little squares you can then cut out and place one under each plate. These are so fun, because they range from questions about animals, trips, colors, and more. If one particular question doesn't fit your family, just discard it. The kids enjoy looking under their plate to find their starter.

These are just three ways to include the kids in conversations at the table, instead of the adults talking over the kids. Maybe, if they're included in the dinner conversation, they'll sit still and enjoy the meal as a family instead of whining and fidgeting and throwing food. Then when they're finished, they can exit the table and the adults can linger a bit longer to talk a bit more.

We really enjoyed these activities because kids are funny! And it's great to gain insight into their little minds and worlds just by family conversations at the table.

Tiny Living – Summertime 2021 – by Leyane Enterline

Four fishing poles
Three shot guns (unloaded)
Two bow and arrows and...
A lasso!

And where might you find these items? In our tiny home, of course! I never considered us hillbillies, but now when I look around I might say that's just what we are! We live in a trailer in the woods and the kids toys are just not normal, city kid toys. Fishing, hunting, baseball, and anything outdoors are our boys' passions!

We have a target set up on a hay bale for the bow and arrow practice and of course to try out their lassoing skills. One day, a baby cow across the street escaped, and my kiddos were out there with their lasso ready to wrangle that thing back in! Backwoods, country, or just being boys? I don't know! But the outdoors sure does keep these guys busy!

With the heat coming on though, the boys want to come inside more. However, it's just to look up what lure they can make next, or what new fishing or baseball gear they'd like to add to a wish list.

Fishing and baseball are definitely the focus right now. The boys go out every day and practice their hitting and throwing in the morning before it gets too hot. Then, we usually have a fishing buddy that comes in the afternoon to head to my parents for a bit, before some type of baseball activity in the evening.

With all the rain here in Texas, the lake has come up a lot! Praise the Lord, my grandpa's dock is back in the water and ready to roll for all the crappie fishing! It's a win-win for the generation of the Clearman guys. It's all they talk about and it's an activity they all get to enjoy together!

Tiny living has definitely got me, the mom, going crazy at times, but I try and look at all the positives and what we do have. We have the land where the boys roam and play, parents close by and on the water where the boys can fish and explore, and a small space for all of us that is less to clean! (Just a little jam-packed!)

Thankfully, with only two kids in tow, the top bunks have become the toy storage space, and for now that will do...for the summer of 2021.



YOU

Healthy Habits – Where You Sleep – by Marcy Lytle

Have you ever considered that your bed, where you spend perhaps a third of your day, is the most unhealthiest of places in your home? It could be. This monthly column always focuses on one area of health, and this month it's our bed! There are all sorts of scientific articles about getting a good night's sleep, but this isn't that kind of story. It's just practical and simple:

Make your bed – I know, this is debatable, because lots of folks leave their beds unmade. I'm not one of those. I think making a bed says all kinds of things about order and creates a bed that's inviting once night falls again. It needs to be done first thing, or yes – it will be easier to leave undone. Making the bed is one of those things, those disciplines, that makes the day start out aligned and going in the right direction.

Enjoy good sheets – We recently purchased a set of sheets by Threshold from Target. They fit great (loose and baggy sheets feel awful!), they don't wrinkle (wrinkled edges are annoying), and they come in pretty patterns! You don't have to spend a fortune for good sheets, just find a brand and stick with it. And have at least two sets for changing out; and make them inviting and coordinated with your comforter! Good sheets make you smile as you drift off to sleep.

Shop for a pillow – I read that there are pillows for all sorts of sleepers – whether you sleep on your side or back, etc. However, I'm thinking most of us sleep all sorts of ways! Some prefer soft thin pillows and others full and firm. If your pillow constantly wakes you up at night because it's too flat or too lumpy or too firm, then toss it and get another! There's no reason to not lay in comfort so that you can truly rest.

Hug a while – I know, this isn't part of the actual bed, but did you know that if you hug your spouse before going to sleep, it settles your soul? Seriously, rather than just plopping into bed and turning over to sleep, we can spend time hugging and snuggling. Hugging boosts our serotonin levels and lifts our moods, which ensures a better sleep. It also says to him "You're important, and I love you" and settles you both from a long, hard day.

Decorate it pretty – There might be "discussions" at home about the number of pillows on a bed, so I hear. But take time to decorate your bed with a pretty comfortable and at least a few throw pillows, and maybe even a throw across the corner! Yes, it takes time to arrange it all and remove it at night, but the number of times you'll walk past your room and smile a day is worth the arrangement. Don't close your bedroom door during the day because of a mess – that just makes your room musty and stinky. Open it up, make it pretty, and smile. Smiling is good for your health, too!

Keep things Neat – Not just the bed, but the entire bedroom, needs to be presentable and nice. It often is the last room in the house that gets our attention, because it's private and visitors don't enter. But you do. And it's important to have that resting room look appealing and inviting. Clear the desks, put away the clothes, dust those shelves, clean up the clutter, and do it daily with the same rigor that you clean your kitchen sink. Dirty dishes are unsightly and uninviting, and so is a messy bedroom. Keeping it neat will also keep you sane and excited to enter at the end of the day.

On the nightstand – Is there a devotional near your bed? Just those one-page devo books are a great bedtime piece, maybe under a candle, by your lamp. Take it out and read to each other a good reminder of His love and faithfulness before you close your eyes. This truth, sinking into your psyche, before you drift off to sleep can help alleviate the backpack of worries you're carrying while lying there on your pillow. Share his Word with each other, and truly rest...

Life in a Nutshell – Hope and Hydrangeas – by Jill Montz

I have always loved hydrangeas, but they have not always had the same feelings in regards to me. They basically have chosen to die a withering death rather than cohabitate at my house. It's tragic really. And it has broken my heart and my plant budget every year.

For the past 15 springs or so I have spent hours reading internet posts on how best to plant and care for hydrangeas. I studied the cards attached to the plants at our local nursery and even spoke with the expert on staff at length in regards to the best location and soil for hydrangeas to grow in. Each time I loaded the beautiful plants with tiny green buds into the back of my car I had hope they would take root and grow and bloom where I planted them.

Some years they died within a week; breaking my heart with a quick and sudden blow. Other years they lasted a month or more giving me hope that soon was dashed as the leaves turned brown and drooped. No matter where I put them in my yard, no matter how much fertilizer, water, and love I gave them, no matter how many times I chased the expert down at the nursery to probe his mind about what was happening, hydrangeas just didn't love me the way I loved them.

One day a few years back the nursery expert simply patted my shoulder and said some varieties just don't do well for some people. He suggested other plants to try that he assured me would be just as lovely and colorful as the hydrangeas and he quickly added, as he walked away, that another staff employee would be happy to help me select and load whatever I decided to go with.

I did give up on hydrangeas for a couple of years. I would lovingly look at them as I strolled through the nursery each spring and summer and sometimes I would gently touch their delicate petals, but I never put one in my cart. I had to accept that I just wasn't able to grow them. I did well with other plants and I enjoyed their beauty but still my heart longed for a hydrangea.

Growing up in agriculture and especially in the pecan industry I know certain plants like different climates and soil. While there are over 1,000 different varieties of pecans in the United States, pecans grow mostly in the southern states where it is warmer and not all states grow all the same varieties. For example, certain varieties of pecans like the Desirable grow better in Georgia than they do in Texas. Not that Desirable pecan trees can't grow and produce pecans in Texas, but they are more popular and tend to do well in Georgia.

At our farms, the pecan that does the best for us is the Pawnee. Just down the road a few miles we have friends who have more success with the Cheyenne. Perhaps the soil is a little different. Perhaps the ground drains better there. Perhaps the farmer just has a knack for the Cheyenne. It's sometimes hard to tell.

Hydrangeas are not the only things I have loved and worked hard at and yet still failed to succeed with. I have attempted dozens of painting classes of all kinds and each project has barely made it home before it hit the large green dumpster outside my house. I have tried cooking on many occasions only to hear from those who were supposed to eat it and my smoke detectors that cooking is not what I am best at. I have attempted many sporting endeavors only to find I am a better spectator than participant. Regardless of the hours I spent practicing, studying, or perfecting my skill, I highly doubted I would ever become an expert at any of these and probably not even remotely good. Some things in life are like the hydrangea, they are just better suited for others.

Or so I thought.

When I moved to my house in Iowa Park three years ago it was a hot July weekend. (Who moves in July in Texas? Not my best idea but we all survived.) Once I got my house set up inside I set to work on the landscape outside. The house had lots of shrubs and very little flowers out front. As I pruned and hedged the shrubs into submission I discovered the roots were so intertwined and deep I would not be able to put much in the ground in those flower beds. So I added a few pots, then a few more, then a couple dozen more. Today I have probably 50 or so pots scattered around the front of my house overflowing with colorful flowers.

And just as you approach my front door on the left you will see a beautiful, thriving and blooming hydrangea! It's gorgeous!

Three years ago in July my local nursery was having a plant sale and I just couldn't walk past the hydrangeas one more time without picking one out. Even though several friends and plant experts told me hydrangeas would do better in the ground than in a pot, I didn't have that option. So I threw caution to the wind, chose not to dwell on past failures and potted that hydrangea with the same hope and care I had a dozen times before. And you know what...it worked!

For whatever reason, this time, this location, this pot, this plant loved me. It has thrived through Texas summers, late spring freezes, and even the crazy cold we had last February. I smile every time I see it! I have tried to show its picture to the nursery expert but I haven't seen him around the last few times I have been in. He seems to be taking more vacations these days. Good for him!

This hydrangea reminds me that sometimes you just have to try one more time. Sometimes you just have to have faith that the "next time" will be the best time. I still doubt I will ever make the Olympics in any sport or have my own show on the Food Channel or even draw a straight line with a ruler but I might get BETTER at those things! And who knows, one day I might not embarrass my kid at a sporting event or I might cook something edible or I might even hang up a painting or two (even if it is just in the garage).

I know some things in life will never work out (I gave up my dreams of singing a long time ago...I barely even hum in church now) but some things just might when you least expect it. And those days are the days that keep hope..and hydrangeas...alive!

Life Right Now – Not Too Much – by Hannah Bouck

Have you ever known God loves and sees you and doubted it in the same breath? Well, then welcome to the show that is my brain. I'm sure we'll be great friends!

So, if you didn't catch that, I doubt a lot and I have always believed that my doubting was wrong. But lately, I've learned that doubting or asking questions... is okay. It's not wrong and it doesn't mean that I'm lacking in faith. It actually means that I'm looking for answers and asking for understanding from the safest One I know.

*Take note that many times,
my questions aren't answered in the way
or time that I hope they will be,
but that is where my faith comes in.*

There are times, even in the midst of my questions, that God's love shows up for me in tangible ways. Most recently, one tangible way was when I unexpectedly got to see two of my best friends (who were also my bridesmaids), days apart, after not getting to see them for almost a year. There's a lot of behind the scenes unnoted here, but I definitely felt all the emotions come to the surface of one who misses her friends/core people. But geez! My heart was fuller than it's been in a while.

Yes, the time together was brief. And I cried when I had to say good-bye, because my love for these ladies runs deep. However, I also knew in that same moment that just the fact that they are even in my life shows He loves me deeper still. All my doubts faded for a time, and I felt tangibly loved and known.

*My questions aren't too much for Him.
I'm not too much for Him.
I'm seen by Him.*

You or your questions aren't too much for Him.
He sees you and loves you deeply, as well...

Holding you close,

Strengthening Your Core – The Dance – by Marcy Lytle

We watched a really great heartwarming movie called *Finding You* recently, about a young violinist who travels to Ireland to find her passion for playing. One particular scene stood out to me, as we left the theater. This young woman began dating an actor, famous for his films in Ireland. The young woman also had a friend that was often passed over by boys, and she felt less-than, put down, and unattractive – as she could never get a guy.

Fast forward in the film to a small town festival where the guys ask the girls to the dance. The young woman and her actor boyfriend show up and everyone, of course, knows who this actor is and finds it thrilling to have him at their festival. He knows of the other girl's insecurities and he takes a turn with her, causing her to gasp when he takes her hand for a round on the dance floor. It was heartwarming to see this man of status look out and see this lonely girl, and invite her to dance.

But then, when the actor went back to the young woman he came with, that's the scene that stuck with me. All of the guys that didn't even notice that girl the actor had just danced with suddenly came to her side and offered their hand. They had seen the actor, the man of status, take her around the floor – and now they noticed her over to the side as someone that must be important. About five guys immediately showed up, and she again gasped, as she then had to decide who to pick for a dance!

My husband and I talked about this when we got home, and we both agreed how sad it was that these guys only noticed the girl after she'd been on display with the actor. Before that, she was just a wallflower. But then again, we agreed that it was cool that once the girl was adored by a man of status, that adoration lifted her to a place of prominence and importance.

Then I realized that when we are experiencing a round of dancing with Jesus (i.e. sitting in his presence and rising to our feet in love and worship), this too makes us attractive to the masses. We have a sort of "glow" about us after we spend time holding his hand and experiencing his goodness and reveling in his love. Those that may not have noticed us before suddenly become aware that we're different and they're attracted – not to us – but to that which is making us shine.

That girl dreamed of a guy asking her to dance and it had never happened. And once, just once was all it took, the guy of her dreams took her hand – she suddenly felt approved of, cared for, and delighted to move her feet and smile. It was that movement and that reaction that caused the guys watching to open their eyes to this new prospect of beauty among them.

I keep thinking about that scene. I often think about my own relationship with the masses, with God, with my own thoughts, and I don't want to stand against the wall in the world. I want to enter the world, after having had a private and intimate dance with Jesus. And instead of having the world want to dance with me, I want to point them to him – so they too can dance and be swept off their feet in wonder and adoration.

Sometimes, certain scenes of movies stick with me. And that one certainly has. I bet that girl in the story will never be the same and that the one dance where she was chosen, picked and

taken will change her confidence level for a lifetime. Little did the actor know what he was doing when he noticed her against the wall and invited her to dance.

If you don't feel noticed or picked or loved, just look up and see his eyes across the room as he's approaching you. Jesus loves you and desires you and is always extending his hand for a round on the dance floor. It may look like falling against his chest as he slowly moves and heals and restores. Or it may look like leaping and twirling and stomping as joy wells up in his presence.

And then when the dance is over, be prepared for the approaching "others" that want to know what it is that made you dance...and you can then point to Him.

Under Pressure - Another Dream – by Debbie Haynes

The story this month starts out with the same king again, and this time he's doing pretty well. King Nebuchadnezzar (King Neb) relays a story to his people and starts out by giving praise to God for his wonders, his kingdom and his dominion. He tells them how he had a troubling dream and how Daniel was the only one able to interpret the dream. The dream was a dire warning and a command for the king to "break off" sin and to instead show mercy to the poor. The words of the dream came to pass, it was a hard time for King Neb, and at the end of that hard time he lifted his eyes to heaven and praised the most High.

This king was stubborn and hard-headed. He had a head-knowledge, but not a heart-knowledge, of God. This means he knew "about" God but didn't really know God. King Neb was stripped of his sound mind, his dignity, his kingdom and his family for seven years! After that time, he finally acknowledged God and had a change of heart. It took this position of debasement and quietness to get King Neb's attention. It took losing the trappings of his former life to recognize God's provision.

Why does God do this to men to teach us lessons, and what other stories are like this?

God gave Noah instructions to build an ark in the middle of a drought.

God gave Zechariah the gift of being mute!

God gave Jonah an uncomfortable lodging place, in the belly of a fish.

God gave Job trial after trial...and loss after loss.

These men were all forced to be STILL to see, know and consider and acknowledge God. Isaiah 41:20 says we need to know and consider and understand that the hand of the Lord has done this.

Done what?

God stops the normal processes we create or those created around us in order to reveal and remove corruption in our lives or in the lives of those around us. His plan includes exploding his body to have freedom, delivering those most innocent, and preserving those that belong to him so that we are pure and without shame.

We can pray for our leaders, and for ourselves, that we will hear and recognize God's voice and give him honor at all times, trusting that what He says and does is best. We can be still and know that He is God, rather than just read about it in His word. And we can do all of this gladly, instead of remaining stubborn and causing years of sorrow due to that stubbornness.

Another dream, another warning, and another lesson...to give honor and glory to the one true God who is in us, for us, and with us forever!



MARRIAGE

After 40 Years – Time Away – by Marcy Lytle

We recently returned from a four-day vacation with our grown kids and their littles. It's a yearly tradition to all meet up at a huge house and stay for several days, to play and be together. It's one of the HUGE joys of family, and I always end up arriving back home a bit sad but so very thankful that we were able to go, once again.

One thing I've noted as we've taken these trips is that I also get to observe my husband in a different setting than the everyday home/work setting that consumes most of our existence. I have the privilege of watching him serve his family.

He gladly spends time outside the place where we stay, setting up a badminton net, creating games for the kids, and then cleaning all of that up again once the long weekend is over. I really think he is the most handsome when he's serving others. It's who he is – a servant hearted man – and when he's living in that identity he shines. And I love it when I see it, catch a glimpse of it, and pause to notice.

He also plays with the kiddos and gives them big hugs. Our oldest grandson has the sweetest hugs and warmest hands, much like my husband. So when the two of them hug each other, it's quite breathtaking. I often wonder if that grandson has the best of his own dad and his Mister, the heart of faith and love and a servant's heart as well. It seems that he does.

Jon does another thing that makes my heart sing. He knows that I can't stand an unmade bed, even if we are on vacation away. Since we usually stay in a big farmhouse where there is no daily housekeeping, he gets up and makes up our bed for the day. It's a little gesture, but it's one of love, and it's one that makes me feel honored and special. Maybe I'm too picky, but he gladly serves others...and me.

Sure, there are a few tense moments sometimes where we snap at each other or feel frustrated, even on vacations away. But for the most part, both of us need the time away from just being together to being with our kids and their kids, to observe each other in a different light. It's a light that shines bright, as we both give thanks for these amazing gifts that God gave – ones we didn't even know we wanted – the gift of kids and their kids.

We don't sleep all that well on other beds, we work hard to provide fun and food and family time, and we're often tired when we get back home. But it's the good kind of tired, if you can relate. It's the kind of tired that makes one smile when the head hits the pillow after the time is over, and everyone is back home in their own homes and their own beds. It feels as if we've made an investment of the best kind, with the greatest return. And it feels like we've connected in a way as a couple that we cannot do, when we're just here – us two.

We've got bags and bins and boxes to unpack and put away until the next family gathering and getaway. And I always feel sad, deeply sad, when it's all over because I love being with my family SO MUCH.

Whether we have grandkids or kids or extended family, we all have people in our lives. And we can all make time to get away and observe each other in a different place with different surroundings to visualize that light that shines through a different prism on the ones we love.

When we return home, I feel so grateful for this man that loves our life together as much as I do. And I cannot wait until we get away again soon, because time away is not only necessary for rest, but for marriages to thrive, as well.

Date Night Fun – Movie Time – by Marcy Lytle

We go to the movies so much, as it's the one place I can escape and not feel compelled to clean or organize, but rather sit and relax and be escorted away to another story, another time, another place. It's definitely not a conversational place for couples to connect, but watching a movie together can bring romance, fun, and conversation when the credits roll, and even during the movie itself. July is a hot month, and it might be that movie time will be just the "ticket" to date night fun for all. Here are five ways to change up the way you watch movies, so that you can call it a date night for sure!

The Setting – If you're watching a movie at home, create a setting that's like a mini theater. Use small tables or trays for your goodies of popcorn and candy, and prop up your legs on stools. Include a blanket and turn the AC to a cooler temp, so snuggles happen. Darken the room completely, and then watch the movie. (Be sure you choose the movie ahead of time so the anticipation is there before your date.)

The Food – Consider having a meal during your movie, instead of popcorn and candy. Perhaps copy one of your favorite meals from a theater that serves food. Nachos, or tater tots, loaded with toppings is one choice. A nice black bean burger and fries might be another. Peruse a theater's menu and pick a fave. Maybe include milkshakes, too. Part of the date will be preparing the food, before you sit down to watch the movie. Be sure to include fun plates/napkins too (Dollar Tree has both!)

The Experience – During the winter, my husband moved the TV to the back of the car and used an extension cord to plug it in. We watched Casablanca while snow was falling out the back window – it was truly an experience! It's probably not snowing in July for any of us, but we can watch the movie in a different way to make it an experience to remember. Move the TV to the patio after dark, make s'mores and watch the show. Lay out a blanket on the floor with a picnic basket, and watch the movie as if you were in the park. Light at least 10 candles or tealights, dress up in vintage clothing, and watch an old movie while sipping tea and enjoying shortbread. The possibilities are there – just make it happen!

The Story – Find a film that's unique and different from the norm that you watch. Maybe a foreign film or a documentary, if you're not used to either of those, will work. Watch the movie, and then talk about the film and search for information on the actors and the origin of the story, and the places mentioned in the story. This idea is good for a double date, with another couple, so that the conversations are plentiful and interesting, and the coffee is hot while you visit. Go ahead. Invite them over now...

The fun – We recently had a jarcuterie bar where we set out all sorts of snacks (tiny ones, like mini vanilla wafers, chocolate covered nuts, etc. and tall ones, like twizzlers and pretzels). We used small fruit jars (you can order them from Amazon) and we all created our own jar of goodies. This would be a great and fun idea for movie night with several friends. Provide different Italian sodas, as well, and coffee. Invite them to graze and refill as they want, while you all watch a series of short films (choose several that are no more than 30 minutes each).

For Better or Worse – Be the Change – by Kaelin Scott

I often hear a common complaint among women – they want their husbands to change.

Maybe he's neglectful, or lazy, or he says hurtful things. Whatever the issue, the question remains: How can I make him change?

The answer is simple. We can't.

There's something I tell my five-year-old when she gets upset because her little brother won't cooperate with her ideas: The only person she can control is herself.

And the same is true for me and you. We can't change our husbands – only God can do that. But we can choose to change our own attitudes and behaviors. We can't control their choices, their words, or their habits. All we can do is focus on ourselves.

And let me tell you something else. Nagging is pretty much a surefire way to guarantee he *doesn't* change. If anything, it will make matters worse. Nobody wants to be nitpicked over and over again. I know I don't.

If you want a positive change in your husband, start with a positive change of your own. Sometimes life has a domino effect, a chain reaction. One good thing may just lead to another. And if it doesn't, at least you'll have your own progress to show for it.

The best way to encourage our husbands is to love him like Jesus does. In Matthew 7:5, Jesus tells us to remove the plank from our own eye before worrying about the speck in someone else's. As aggravating as it might be, that includes our husbands. Instead of focusing on the things they do to irritate us, we're called to become better wives. Maybe we consider ourselves to be good wives already. That's great! But there is always room for improvement.

And perhaps when he sees us changing, he'll want to change as well (although, that shouldn't be our only motivation.) We should genuinely want to become more like Jesus.

Marriage can be difficult, and it can definitely be hard spending infinite amounts of time with someone. Feelings are bound to be hurt. Annoying things are bound to be done. Disagreements are bound to be had. But the beauty is that we can always grow. We can always forgive. We can always love. And that's because love is a choice - one that must be made every day.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi,

“If we could change ourselves,
the tendencies in the world would also change.
As a man changes his own nature,
so does the attitude of the world change towards him.
We need not wait to see what others do.”

In This Together – To Tell the Truth – by Bekah Holland

If I was a betting woman (which I'm not because I have never won a single prize, contest or slot machine attempt in all my life...know your strengths, people) I would bet that you can barely open up social media these days without seeing an article about women, especially moms, being tired. And I don't mean the normal I ran around sweeping up cheerios and breaking up fights around whose turn it is to use the remote. I mean like kicked in the face-never ending lists-dirty floors-overflowing sinks-drowning in laundry-crying in the closet kind of tired. And it's true. We are running on empty. Trying to be everything to everyone while contributing to society and hopefully not raising serial killers is exhausting.

I have a pretty continuous loop running through my head about how to get my kids and my husband more involved. And up until lately, I'd just given up. Because it was just as much (or more) work for me to figure out exactly what I need them to do and then ask 27 billion times for them to do it, and watch the dishes reach a staggering height, trying not to cave in, than if I just keep running around on empty doing to all myself. And it's not just the upkeep and cleaning and feeding and cooking and laundry (that I swear grows exponentially). It's also the running hamster wheel of the kids' doctor appointments, who's up for vaccinations this year, and how much am I going to have to bribe them to not go full on hulk out of fearful anticipation. And orthodontist appointments, dental cleanings, are we out of cereal, what am I going to cook or am I going just keeping giving Door Dash all my money, whose toothbrushes need replacing and when was the last time anyone ate an actual vegetable. I'd need a much larger column to even touch on all the things we have on our minds every second of every day.

So the last time my husband asked me, "What do you need? How can I help?" I decided to *tell him the truth*. Not about what I needed help with, but that it's actually more stressful to think of and divvy out tasks. That it adds another plate to the mile high stack I'm barely keeping from crashing down around us. So you know what he did? He started looking for things that I've left undone for ages. Things he knows matter to me, but that have had to take a backseat to higher priority items, because you know, kids are kind of demanding about that whole having food to stay alive thing. So pictures that had been leaning against walls for a month (two years) were magically hung. The front porch was washed off. Towels that had taken up a semi-permanent residence on our dining table were put up. And the list went on.

When I stopped trying to protect him from the stresses I was trying (failing) to manage, he showed up. He tried to look at things through my eyes. And it's exactly what I needed. Now he understands better, because I was honest instead of carrying on in my (typically failed) super hero fashion.

I'm a protector by nature. I try to shelter my people from things that hurt, or are hard or painful, and I'll still do it, because it's part of how God made me to be. But I also need to remember that sometimes, I need protecting too. I need to be seen and sheltered so I can fill up my own tank. Running on empty for too long isn't just damaging to me, it can damage the people I love, too. Because if I don't pay close enough attention, I can allow my protector/helper/nurturer nature to start tip toeing into something that looks a lot like resentment. And that is an avalanche I try to avoid at all cost.

Each day, I'm working to find something that gives me rest. And my husband is looking for more ways to take things off of my leaning tower of responsibilities by just doing them. And little by little, my cup overflows...

“Let her rest, for when she wakes she will move mountains.”



ENCOURAGEMENT

Firmly Planted - A Surprise Gift – Dina Cavazos

The cool wet weather we had through May has been a gardener's dream—green lushness and flowers all around is heavenly. But enough is enough. It's time for some sunshine, because plants (and people) need that too. Planting is pretty much over until next Fall when I'll see how everything has filled in and decide where I can tuck in something else, but it ended with a grand finale-- a surprise gift from God, or so I choose to believe.

For some time I've been admiring smoke trees. American Smoke Tree and Purple Smoke Tree are two varieties I'm aware of, but haven't yet researched the differences. All I know is that their billowy plumes immediately catch my attention. When in bloom, they appear to be in a cloud of smoke, thus their name. A little while back, I decided I definitely wanted one. I started looking, but they aren't that common and can be hard to find. I decided to wait for Fall when nurseries get more trees because it's the best time to plant them. But there is a verse....*The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps (Prov. 16:9)*

Just a week ago, I saw a post from someone wanting to trade plants to replace what he lost in the freeze. He listed the plants he wanted to trade. Can you imagine how my heart leaped when I saw *two* smoke trees listed?! I sent him some of what I had to trade (not really what he was looking for) and invited him over to see. He brought the two smoke trees and found a couple of things he wanted and we made the exchange. He said it was worth the smoke trees just to see the prayer garden. Hearts and smiley faces!

These were Purple Smoke Trees, which is really what I wanted because of the purple leaf color. He had gotten them from an herbalist who had had them in pots for *years*...would this stunt them? How would they do? It's certainly worth a shot. They were less than two feet tall and the pots didn't have a lot of dirt in them. They weren't root bound as I expected and were fairly easy to plant—I say fairly because my soil is pretty much rocks held together by clay. I take out a container of rocks for every plant and have to amend the soil. But since the pots were small I didn't have to dig a large hole. This really was perfect! So like God, the giver of every perfect gift.

I can't wait to watch them grow. I have a feeling they're going to take off like rockets, now that they're in the ground, released after years in their pot prison. They must be tough little guys because they look quite healthy for all that neglect! You can't see them in all their smoky glory in the picture—it will take awhile for them to mature and develop to their full potential and splendor. I imagine God has a purpose for them—to be the Royal Purple brigade in His garden! And I'm filled with thankfulness and awe that my Lord knows my heart and directs my steps even in small, seemingly insignificant, details.

Moving Forward - Safe – by Pam Charro

In Matthew 18:3, Jesus says, "Truly, I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

There is a lot to ponder here. How am I currently not like a little child?

I have often heard adults idealize childhood. They say things like, "I would love to be a kid again. No bills to pay, nothing to really stress about, not a care in the world." But the truth is, being a child is not always easy. Children have very little control over their environment. They fall down and get hurt. They get picked on by other kids. They long to fit in and measure up. They depend almost complete on fallible adults who often neglect and mistreat them. And, usually, there is very little that they can do about it.

So why would Jesus tell us to change and become like one? I think part of the reason is that children feel safe until they learn otherwise. It isn't because life is perfect and they never get hurt. If you have children, you have watched them fall down and get right back up and charge out there without hesitation.

They are too busy going toward something to worry about what just happened.

I can't help thinking that's how Jesus wants us to live as adults. And one of the keys is, when a child gets hurt, the first thing he does is run to Mommy or Daddy for comfort and assurance. Because once he receives that, he's okay again, as though the incident never even occurred. He knows he will be all right.

I am pursuing this childlike view of life now. I am learning to receive God as the Father-haven he longs to be for me so that I can get out there and charge at life, even though I live in a world where I will sometimes get hurt. There is too much to be excited about and look forward to for me to be immobilized by fear.

Because being a beloved child of God means that I am safe.

Rooted in Love - Being Different – by Kaelin Scott

My oldest child will be starting kindergarten in the fall (totally not bawling my eyes out), and we are going to homeschool. This is something God has been placing on my heart for several years now, and I'm really excited about it. Since we live on a ranch, it fits in well with our lifestyle, and it will give us extra memories to make together. Plus, I'll get to teach my kids about Jesus every day, which is most important of all. It'll be a challenge, especially since I also have a toddler, but I'm looking forward to this journey.

As excited as I am about it, though, there is also a little bit of sadness. Seeing all my daughter's friends register for kindergarten, I can't help but feel left out. It's hard not to focus on what we'll miss out on by choosing to homeschool. Being different is hard, and that's something I wasn't fully prepared for when we decided to do this.

But there's a lesson for me in this, and it's one I want to pass on to my kids.

Sometimes God calls us to be different, and that's okay. We aren't always supposed to be like everybody else; sometimes we're meant to stand out. During certain seasons in life, it feels like we're swimming upstream, but that doesn't mean we're doing the wrong thing. It's just different. It's scary and hard and, yes, lonely at times. But following God's call in our lives is so much more important than fitting in. Our goal is to please Him with our lives, not make anybody else happy or adhere to what's "normal." When He places a call on our hearts, it's up to us to follow it. Even if that means being different.

And you know, maybe being different will be good for us. We'll get to explore the world in our own special way, together as a family. We'll get to see how God fits into everything and talk about Him as we study math and reading and science. I'll get to spend extra time with my kids as they grow before my eyes. We might get left out of some things, and we may even face some criticism, and that might hurt at times. But it won't steal our joy, because we know that God is with us.

If you're struggling with feeling different – or maybe left out – know that you're not alone. Everyone feels that way sometimes, kids and adults alike. But no matter what we face in this life, we are never truly alone. Listen to God's voice and follow it, then leave the rest up to Him. He will provide everything you need, and probably a little bit more because He's awesome like that. Don't be afraid to stand out. Don't be afraid to be different. Keep your eyes on Jesus and march to the beat of His drum.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:2

Simple Truths – Everything – by Marcy Lytle

Everything. I'm learning to take everything to Him in prayer.

One of the little "everything's" I take to him in prayer is shopping. When I need a certain item or I'm looking for a discount, I just simply ask Him to go with me while I look. I love that he cares about the matters that are fun and necessary. I think it's so easy to pray for the needs in life, but he's already promised those to us. So why not invite him along on our next shopping excursion? I've been so blown away by turning the corner and – there it is – the item I need (and at a discount!)

One thing I'm learning to do is to lay everything that concerns my future at his feet. Sometimes, my mind can become overwhelmed with what if this – or what if that. What if we haven't saved enough, or my kids' cars break down, or we experience a health crisis, or all of the things this world brings to stir up fear. And it feels so good to take this to God and ask him to help me listen, obey and walk in what I need to do daily, and no more. I can't solve the future by worrying about it all today.

One personal frustration is my own shortcomings that I deal with on a daily basis. I try to do better, I try to have a good attitude, I try to be kind...but then the tiredness or the rudeness or the short fuse appears...and I fail. He doesn't mind me falling into my desk chair, placing my head in my hands, and asking him to forgive. And guess what? He's so gracious and kind and loving, just because I took that to Him to solve.

*He knows our weaknesses and he asks us to just admit them,
and then He swoops in and holds us and gently lifts us on our way again.*

I love that about Him.

The point I'm driving here is that nothing is off limits to him. After all, he knows us – he formed us – he's with us – and he cares for us! It's easy to become accustomed to only praying the "big prayers" for the nations, our families, those who are sick, those who need Jesus, etc. and those are so important. But it's the daily "everything's" that end up breaking our backs and causing us to end the day tired and worn out and without joy.

There are some days when I wake up with a full mind of a bunch of little things, and I think that's common among women. Moms, wives, workers, givers, and all the hats we wear include lots of details and lists that seem to get longer by the minute. And when we pause to transfer all of those little weights onto his shoulders, one thing at a time, every single thing as it pops up and stares us in the face, we walk lighter. Our days are filled with less stress, and we end up going to bed full instead of empty.

I seriously note a HUGE difference from the days when I've hurried through everything that a day brings on my own, trying to juggle all the balls, to the days when I constantly just bow my head and simply pray, "Father, I need you here at this moment." I visualize turning over *the*

everythings to the God that loves me more than I can even imagine, and then I breathe a sigh of relief.

I'm in the process of doing this right now, because today is too full, my worries are too many, and I'm overwhelmed...but more overwhelmed at his goodness and mercy. If he cares for the flowers in the field, knows the number of hairs on my head, then I know He cares about EVERYTHING else as well.

Unearthly Thing - Dependence Day – by Angela Dolbear

I love big, way-up-in-the-sky fireworks. The bigger and more multi-colored the better.

My family used to go camping in our RV on Mission Bay, near San Diego, CA, almost every Fourth of July. I would rollerblade around the RV Park (I was in my 20's!), go sailing with my brother in his tiny sail boat, and then in the evening, we would watch the spectacular fireworks at Sea World, which was just across the bay. The fireworks reflecting on the ocean was so beautiful.

All to celebrate freedom.

George Washington described freedom as, "Liberty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth."

I never thought much about freedom back then. My life was consumed with college, and what my future held. I was a new believer in Christ, so my only take on freedom revolved around what I learned in my American history classes.

But I'm thinking about true freedom...not just freedom from British rule.

As a child of God, the more I learn to depend on God, the more I learn about actual freedom. Deep dependence brings a broader scope of freedom.

God's promises teach me about my true freedom. Knowing these promises by heart makes freedom more tangible, so I can live and breathe my freedom daily. They also help me keep a peaceful perspective about the blessings and burdens of everyday life.

God's promises to His people are abundantly abundant! Various internet sights list the number of promises in the Bible from 3,500 to over 8,000. Regardless of the actual number, God's promises are in the thousands. *Thousands*. That's a lot.

And that's a lot of attention and interaction between the Creator of the Universe and you. And me.

So out of the thousands of promises, here are seven of my favorite freedoms we have in God:

- **Freedom from confusion** = my identity is in Christ. John 8:32 -- "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
- **Freedom from guilt** = Christ paid for all my sin, I am forgiven and free. Romans 8:2 – "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."
- **Freedom from hopelessness** (and eternity in hell—that's a big one!) = Again, Christ paid for all my sin, I am forgiven and free. Hebrews 2:14-15 (Amplified) – "Therefore, since [these His] children share in flesh and blood [the physical nature of mankind], He Himself in a similar manner also shared in the same [physical nature, but without sin], so that through [experiencing] death He might make powerless (ineffective, impotent) him who had the power of death—that is, the devil—and [that He] might free all those who through [the haunting] fear of death were held in slavery throughout their lives."
- **Freedom from fear** = Psalm 118:5 (Amplified), "Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free."

- **Freedom from loneliness** = God is always with me, He will never ever, ever leave me or forsake me. He spoke those exact words to me after I had a stroke in March 2018. (Please see [Hebrews 13:5](#)).
- **Freedom from purposelessness** = God has a plan for me, and it's good! Isaiah 61:1 -- "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners."
- **Freedom from failure** = John 8:36 -- "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (Praise You, Lord.)

These are just a few of the thousands of promises God has for us, but these seven freedoms fill me up to overflow with gratitude. They inspire me to press into learning and taking hold of all that God has for me.

I included a picture of a Joshua Tree that I took in Joshua Tree National Park, in the Mojave Desert, in Southern California. Joshua Tree is one of my all-time favorite places because of its stark yet serene beauty. Joshua Trees are slow-growing in their fiercely harsh environment -- like me, as I learn about God's freedom for me. (Fun Fact: The band U2 named their album *The Joshua Tree*, one of the best albums of all-time, after the tree, since it seemed to them like a symbol of faith and hope in the midst of dryness.)

I don't think I will be able to fully realize all God's promises during my days here on earth, and what real freedom looks and feels like. I depend on Him to guide me through this journey, and through every day.

I believe we will know all He has for us, on the day of Redemption, when we are set free from the confines of humanity. We will know, when we see Jesus, face to face. How glorious! And free.

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, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction, with an aim toward spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, while hopefully inspiring readers to laugh and/or cry. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, Tennessee. Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - All the Things – by Marcy Lytle

Aren't you sometimes curious why she wears that, or he walks that way, or they live there, or those folks eat that, or all the things? I think people are interesting creatures, with all of their quirks and individuality. And yet, most of our culture tries to copy and be like someone else! One of the perks of aging, I suppose, is feeling comfortable in what we've chosen to do and going with it, whether anyone else does or not.

So, to start us off, I'm going to share all the things others find odd about me, and maybe you will, too. But I'm hoping it will free you up to embrace your oddities and be you, and smile and keep your head high. After all, not much to see below our feet except dirt...and so much to see above...like stars.

Here I go!

- I cut my own hair because I used to come home from the salon and hate the cut, and do it over. So now I just do it!
- I don't go to nail salons because I hate spending the money and time, when I'd rather spend it on clothes and other things.
- I drink water 95% of the time because somehow I think it's a cure-all for so many things!
- I often skip just to lighten my load, because it's fun, and I'm happy that I still can.
- I love following the weather forecasts because it's fascinating, except when it's over 100 degrees. That's depressing.
- I despise coffee because it tastes like dirty water to me. Don't like flavored or sparkling water, either.
- I keep my windows closed at all times, because once a lizard got in behind a screen and we smashed him in half (by accident) when we closed the window. Don't want creatures in the house.
- I feel 100% better if I get in a long walk each day. I'm in a better mood, totally. My husband knows this.
- I don't understand why anyone would eat inside when the option to eat outside is available.
- I must have a bath before bed, and he feels the same, or we aren't allowed to touch the sheets.
- I don't drink wine or beer, but if you do that's fine. I just find the taste repulsive, and again – I'd rather spend my dollars elsewhere.
- I don't like pie or cake. Not tempted by either. But homemade chocolate cookies only appear once or twice a year in my kitchen, because those I love.
- I can't stand jokes of any kind about women or marriage or men. I'll walk away if one is said.
- I struggle with fear, like random intrusive thoughts, and I daily have to lay those down at His feet.
- I've never had an operation or a broken bone, and if you do – don't call me – I'll faint beside you in the room.

- I get offended easily, but I'm working on that. And I hope I always keep working on that which holds me back from peace and rest.
- I roll my towels, I roll my clothes, and I have rolls on my tummy. But I don't like cinnamon rolls.
- I enjoy the discount stores like Marshall and Ross way better than the big department stores. It's like a treasure hunt for me, and I usually find a real deal.
- I might hear a new song that prompts me to dance in the kitchen. You should try it.
- I am sarcastic and rude when I'm tired or haven't felt the breeze outside. I try to recognize this and rest or exit the house, before I speak.
- I have so many more quirks, I could probably write another hour, but I'll stop here and say...

All of the little oddities and eccentricities and quirks that make you unique and amazing are worth celebrating. Don't be ashamed to be unlike the crowd when you wear a "color" that's noticeable and eye-catching. If your oddities are offensive, ask Him to help you and he will. But if your uniqueness is who you are, then smile and enjoy today and skip, hop, wiggle or giggle your way through the house in your bare feet or heels...whatever makes you, you.

FRESH THYME – Everything – by Marcy Lytle

Do you pray about everything or just the big things? Since he tells us to give thanks in everything (good or bad), I'm thinking he'd love it if we pray about everything. Take it all to him in prayer. Prayer isn't just unloading the worst on his shoulders, it's conversation, acknowledgement, praise, adoration, petition, etc. In other words, it's relationship.

Pray about that dress you need to find for a wedding.

Thank him when it's there, it's on sale, and it's yours!

Pray about the friend that seems to be making bad choices.

Leave that worry in His hands and in His time.

Pray about those lost keys that seem to be nowhere.

If they're not found, and you have to get new keys made, give thanks anyway.

Pray about that lovely sunset that causes you to pause, and praise Him for the beauty.

Likewise, smile up at Him when that same sun peeks in your window the next morning.

Pray about your day that was too full and too sad and too long.

Rest against his chest, as you breathe and lay your burdens at his feet.

Pray about that job your kid just got, the one you prayed he'd get, and now he did!

Dance in the kitchen in response to his provision over you and yours.

Pray when you messed up, gossiped about that, or said that unkind word.

Receive his forgiveness and give thanks for his mercy, and listen for his gracious words spoken to you.

Pray about your uneasy feelings, your worry about tomorrow, and your sorrow over that.

Know, know, know that He cares and is at work on your behalf, for you and not against you.

You see, prayer is everything. It's how we connect with the God that made us, the Savior that loves us, and the Spirit that is with us at all times. There's not a prayer too small or too big or too silly or too long that he doesn't welcome when we couple it with faith in who He is – bigger than all of our worries and fears.

His promises are true, that he will listen, hear, and act. It may not be like tell Him too, but it will be like He knows to do, to work all things together for good.

Go ahead. Pray now. About everything.

FRESH THYME - Good Intentions

Is it really the thought that counts? People say that when a friend says I meant to call you the other day but I got busy. Is it really the thought that we want, or do we want a follow-through with the intentions? Marriages, parent/child relationships, jobs, and more will never last with just good intentions, will they? An intention is something aimed or planned for, but it's not always acted upon. Here's a list of life's little things that need a plan, a date, and an occurrence, not just an intention:

Acts of kindness. These are great to think about and wish we'd have time to do, but what if we marked them on our calendars? Sure, it's great to be spontaneous with these, but being purposeful can work, too! Mark on your July calendar a time to bake cookies for them, a date to visit an older neighbor, and a night to invite neighbors into your yard for a visit.

Thanksgiving. It's great to give thanks when we feel like it or remember it, but what if we were intentional to give thanks together over a meal for something from the day, at least once a week? Or perhaps we could journal our thanks or write it on a chalkboard in a room, on a wall! Intentional thanks might encourage us all!

Dates with him. If we sit and wait and whine at him to ask us, we will miss the opportunity to ask him. Plan a date night, be intentional to ask him out, place the date on the calendar, and make the fun begin. Search out a new coffee shop or trail, and make that date, night or day or morning, happen.

Cleaning that closet. Set aside a date this month to focus on that one closet or drawer or room that needs an overhaul. Ask for someone to help you. Gather the bins or boxes you need, or purchase that new item that will help you organize well. And then also include something fun on the calendar to do after your hard work is through, like a movie in a cool theater!

Words of affirmation. Maybe we think kind thoughts about something that person did or said and it makes us smile, but we never actually tell them. Set aside some time each week to just email or call or text words of affirmation to someone you love. It will make their day!

Reading that book. I take books with me to read all the time, but often never open them because I get sidetracked or do something else. But I need to slow down and read and pause and escape. Intentionally setting aside time to read might be a good thing for me...and you!

Exercising. Some people love to workout, others hate it. Some would rather sit on the sofa and chill because work days are long. And others might like the thought of moving, but it just doesn't happen on a regular basis. I get it. But maybe our goals are too lofty or we think we have to join a gym, or wear the right clothing, etc. Having the intention of walking maybe 3-4 days a week, or running, or following a YouTube dance video might be easier. Mark it on the calendar, and do it. Don't go for muscles and beauty, go for fitness and fun.

What else do you have good intentions for, but it just doesn't happen? There are so many areas we can improve on, but it just starts with one thing, doing it and feeling good about it, and

then other things follow suit. Start with the first one and do something nice for someone. Heck, print out this sheet and just follow it daily, by choosing one. That might work great!

FRESH THYME – That Blah Feeling – by Marcy Lytle

I was chatting with a friend today and we realized we both feel the same exact feeling after returning from a vacation or time away. We feel sort of blah, sick to our stomachs, and just so sad that the fun time is over and we're back to routine. I know that some folks like to return home, don't really enjoy staying away, but then there are those like me and my friend. Even though we're grateful for all things fun, when it's over it takes a day or two to shake the blahs away.

There are a few other instances where I feel blah, as well. There are days when work is so intense that I'm at home all day on the laptop and I feel as though I'm going to scream if I don't get out of the house. So if nothing is planned, there is nowhere to go, the blah feeling sets in and I step outside to try to shake it loose from my body and soul.

Feeling blah means to feel unmotivated, without purpose, bored, dull, or unexcited. And I'm here to admit that I don't like feeling blah. I'm sure there are some of you reading that don't deal with these feelings, because you are the contented type to sit and relax and chill, more than go, go, go. But I'm not made that way. And I'm learning that it's okay.

Another time I feel blah is when I have a list of things to do, chores to take care of, errands to run, but I don't want to do them. I have a new book to open and read and escape into a story, but I just can't turn to the first page. I can only sit for so long and watch television, lay back and rest, or chill at home or even in the backyard, looking at the beauty of nature. I love all of that, but I then become very blasé about even all of those wonderful blessings!

So is feeling blah and blasé and bored and dull with life, when there is really no reason to feel so, a bad thing? It's a real thing, I know that much. And gratefulness, stating my thanksgivings, does help. But here are a few practical things I've found to chase away the blahs, so that they don't lead to depression and despair...

- Have something planned after the fun ends. Maybe another trip, a shopping excursion, a visit with a friend, a date night out...something on the calendar.
- Step outside into the sunshine and take a walk. It's amazing how the sun on my face, the sweat on my brow, and the movement in my body all chase away the blahs and give me energy and make me smile.
- Journal the trip or the experience. Recalling what took place, the places you went and saw, and the food you ate – it's fun to categorize it all and place it there on paper, on the screen, and into your memory forever so that you can then move on.
- Take time. It's usually 24 hours or less that I feel blah and then I start to feel better. I know that time helps, and the shock of being back into the norm takes a while to sink in. I just have to keep telling myself this, and it helps.
- Tell yourself it's okay. Even if your list of to-dos is long and you feel bad about yourself because you feel blah, and others tell you to be thankful and suck it up, cut yourself some slack. You are who you are. I've been this way since I was a child, and I guess it's part of my makeup, to have energy to go and go, and then crash and burn.

I don't know, but feeling blah is real to some of us, maybe to all of us, in different seasons. It can turn into a no-care attitude and even depression if left to linger at the tables of our mind, but usually with a few ideas like listed above, the blahs roll away like clouds when the wind blows. They may show up again in a few days, but the wind always comes right behind them and the sun shines again.

So, where are you headed next to have some fun?