



A BUNDLE OF
THYME
For Every Season

Online Women's Magazine | thymemag.com

April 2023



TIPS

The Dressing – Perfect Season – by Marcy Lytle

Spring can be perfection in some places, from wildflowers to warm temps for picnics, walks outside and all the pretty colors on our plates as we choose salads for lunch...and the pretty hues of the season. Most of us have grown tired for now of the grays and browns and blacks, and we're ready for colors that are bright and cheery...just like the season where all things are budding and blooming!

Butterflies – I got this vest sweater at the end of the winter season strictly because of the butterflies. I even have a butterfly pin to wear this season. So look for something whimsical with something from nature that you love, as well.

Blue stripes – Two different button downs for those days when it's cool in the morning and warm in the afternoon. Wear the sleeves down and then roll them up. Tuck the shirt part way, or completely. Dress it up or down. A good stripe button up is a staple for spring.

Neons and Poppies – I found jane.com this season and really like their tops. One that arrived was a sort of neon apricot color and the other is fabric full of large red poppies. I love the versatility of both. Neon is in this season, so get yourself a pop of it. And poppies...well who doesn't love them?

That spring sweater and scarf – Pretty soon, sweaters will be put away for months in my closet. But for now, lighter hues in warm cozies are what we need. A friend sent me this scarf made by the artisans at Barberville Settlement in Florida – the mint green is perfect – and I have it ready to grab when I need a bit of extra warmth.

Loosely Woven – This might be one of my favorite spring tops, with wavy stripes of pink and green. It's lightly woven so it's not hot, and it's just cheery and fun. I love wearing it anywhere at all. It feels dressy and yes casual, because it's so comfy.

A gray dress – Also recently discovered was Clover in Salado, Texas. What a cute store, full of all sorts of awesome choices for spring. I opted for this gray dress. Not only is it comfortable, but it can be worn from now through summer and on into fall. Check out this store!

Why not a kimono? - This boho vibe kimono is not my usual wardrobe staple, but I spotted it in a store recently and decided it would be a fun travel piece for this season through summer. It's super lightweight, has a cute belt that can be worn as a scarf, it's rich in color, and can easily be packed! It could even be a bathing suit cover-up for the next season that will be here before we know it.

Sheer tops, neon, bold blues, wide leg pants maxi skirts are among spring trends. Denim, too. So there are lots of choices for me and you!

Seven for You – Surprise, I Like It! - by the Panel

There are items we are gifted or we purchase that we think are so wonderful, only it turns out we never use them. Then...there are gifts or things we buy that turn out to be awesome, and we wonder how we ever lived without them! That's what we want to share this month...that surprise item(s) that has found its way into life and we use it all the time. It's such a fun read, hope you enjoy and leave your own item in the comments below.

I bought a dehydrator and it's been running day and night since I got it. The effect is such PLEASURE seeing 'extras' like marshmallows! Or, even frozen veggies that I've failed to use timely, converted to a sustainable, beautiful thing. – Debbie

I purchased a bag of stretchy bowl covers on Amazon and they will be on my to-buy list from now on. They're in a cute drawstring bag, and there are 100 of them, for easy covering bowls of lots of sizes. It's been one of my favorite purchases. I also wanted a wooden salad bowl but hesitated before buying, wondering if I'd really use it. Well, I do! It makes me want to eat salad more, and it looks pretty on a shelf in my den as décor when not in use! Finally, I started subscribing to Ipsy, a makeup club where I receive five items a month in a cute makeup bag. I started during Covid as a treat to myself, and now I LOVE it because I get samples of makeup and rarely have to buy anything else. – Marcy

I bought an air fryer on a whim. Everyone was buying them and I thought why not? It's just me, no other people to cook for, so I searched for a small one. I found the cutest small air fryer by DASH. It was the happiest shade of pastel green. When I look at it, the shape reminds me of a minion from the animated movie. I had no idea how this cute little thing was going to make cooking easier, but it did! I use it often. I use it so often that I hardly use my stove now. A couple of years into using it, the cooking rack inside became a bit worn and food was starting to stick. I reached out to DASH to see if they sold a rack replacement. They sent me a new rack but included an entirely new air fryer for free! I'm not only crazy about my air fryer, but I'm now a loyal fan of the DASH company! I also bought their small rice cooker...another kitchen item that changed everything! – Cathy

When our kids were in high school, they were active in FFA. So much so that we raised goats, other farm animals, and even took in orphaned goats and calves. At times we had many animals, and it became quite a family affair dealing with them all. One of those years, at Christmas, my husband had a wrought iron paper towel holder made for me in the shape of a goat! This was such a surprise, not only for the gift but more so that he thought to do this! I love it and it helps me to reminisce about those days.

Another surprise gift came from my daughter-in-law. Before this gift I used Saran Wrap when warming up something in the microwave. I always hated being wasteful throwing all that Saran Wrap in the trash and I had talked about that around her. One day, at her house, she said, "I got you something." I don't remember it being a holiday. She saw them and thought of us. It was these microwave splatter covers. I had never even seen them before. And she got us two, one for me and one for my husband. We use them almost daily! It's such a useful, thoughtful gift!

My last gift was something I bought for me. While at my daughter-in-law's house, taking care of my grandsons while she was in the hospital having our granddaughter, I cooked chicken using her Instant Vortex Air Fryer. I'm old school and never thought I would like one. I was still using my crock pot! But once I tried hers, I was sold and went and got me one. What I really love is it cooks so quickly and doesn't heat up the kitchen in the summer. – Carole

I will tell you about two items that I have that have been items that I would now not want to live without:

One is something Kris got me for my birthday last year and they are called "quick connects" that fit on the spigots, hoses, sprinklers, and drip lines in my yard. Instead of having to connect and reconnect by screwing on the hose adaptor, you just click it on. This saves me LOTS of time when watering my garden via drip hoses, or moving hoses around the yard to water the grass. Anything that a hose can be attached to can have a quick connect adapter installed.

The second item is our white noise maker from Amazon. It's tiny, but mighty. Unfortunately, we have a neighbor that owns German shepherds that they allow to bark almost 24/7. I was getting ill from a lack of sleep. This noise maker has drowned out their incessant barking, and I am able to sleep again. It is a very small box that is easy to travel with; we take it with us everywhere we go! – Laura

This is such an easy one for me to answer. Our household had given up on eating homemade popcorn. Air popped corn was too chewy. Microwave popcorn in the packets has ingredients that aren't the healthiest. Then one day a dear friend brought me a silicone Popcorn popper. It makes perfect popcorn every time in the microwave. It is very easy to clean and collapses so it can be tucked neatly away. Every time we enjoy a fresh hot bowl of buttery popcorn I think of that special friend and how thoughtful she was. - Shelley

In North Texas where I live, a heavy winter coat is only needed a few times a year. However, several years ago my niece found one on sale at a Disney store. It was adult-sized and priced ridiculously low. So, when she offered it to me I graciously accepted it. And, I have loved it. Who would have thought that a red, fleecy coat with a picture of Winnie the Pooh embroidered on it would have been so comfy that I would wear it over and over on very cold days?

One Mother's Day my daughter bought me a James Avery charm bracelet. It was lovely and James Avery is nice jewelry, but I wasn't particularly fond of charm bracelets. However, for years I had hoped for a piece of jewelry that would represent the members of my family. So, I started filling this bracelet with charms that reminded me of each family member. It is now one of my most cherished pieces and I wear it often.

In August I will be four years cancer free. God is good. The Christmas before I got the frightening news, a sweet friend at work gave me a gift of comfy boot house shoes. I thought it was a strange gift, but those house shoes proved to be so helpful and comfortable. I wore them a lot during the chemo months and loved them.

So, I guess we never know how someone's gift will affect us and make us smile. - Gina

This last holiday season, my husband decided that we needed to get a milk frother. You know, those small hand-held mini mixers that make your hot cocoa or latte foamy on top. We had one

before, bought it at a thrift store, worked for a couple years, then went to the appliance graveyard in the sky. Being an Amazon shopper nowadays, I found a Milk Frother for under \$20. And it's USB rechargeable, and 3-speed. Good deal. So I began using it on Dennis' morning hot cocoa – perfect.

Then, by pure serendipity, I put some heavy whipping cream in a tall glass and put the Frother in – and within 30 seconds I had the best whipped cream I've ever made! Now, whenever we have a dessert that requires whipped cream, I simply pull out my Frother and quickly make just enough for that serving.

Note: If you plan to try this, make sure to add some type of sweetener to your whipped cream. I like to use Italian Syrup, vanilla or almond flavored is my favorite. - Gloria

Cousin Moms – It's Birthday Time – by Charissa and Kamrin

We asked the moms about birthday parties for their kids and how to manage the planning, the spending, and the chaos involved for their own kids' celebrations. We wanted to know all the details involved, the good and the bad. And they shared it all!

Charissa

For the first two years of their lives, our little girls had individual birthday parties. The first birthdays are special, so parties are important then! A couple of birthdays we gave the girls an experience instead of a party. For example, on our oldest's second birthday we all went on a fun-filled train ride with all sorts of things for kids. Our two oldest have birthdays only one day apart, but they are almost two years apart in age.

When the girls got a bit older, I think the 3rd and 5th birthdays, we had a combined birthday party, since they have the same group of friends. This worked out well and was less stressful, with finances. They seemed to enjoy having the party together. This is Sadie's first year of school, so we haven't invited the whole class yet. But it seems that it's a requirement if invitations are sent to school. Because of that, we are more prone to invite family and close friends instead.

Another thing that saves us money is renting a place that plans it all – like an arcade or jump gym. It seemed like with them providing every little thing, it was better than buying all the pieces and having the party at our house. We have had a birthday party at our church, too. This saved money for us, too.

Maybe we can get away with a combined party one or two more years! As they age, I know their expectations will be different. They may want a sleepover, but we may encourage going back to experiences – getaways as a family – that will be their party and their gift.

Regarding gift-giving, the girls seem to love opening gifts and do look forward to it. We do ask for guests to not bring a gift, but they always bring gifts...always! We do make sure the girls offer thanks and acknowledge the person that gave a gift. We try to send thank-you cards where they sign their names.

From us, as their parents, we only get maybe one main gift and keep it small, since they get so much! I know change is coming, but these littles haven't been too expensive so far!

We do have a third now, and when her first birthday arrives, we shall see!

Kamrin

Birthday parties have morphed over the years with the kids! We had big parties with family and friends when the kids were small. Parents stayed and we had friends at our house. Later, we had themed parties and had them at home. We found rental places to be expensive, with limited guests.

Now that the kids are older, 11, 10 and 8...they have shifted to smaller parties or a day with a friend, or a sleepover. It's just the kids now, no extra adults. The parties aren't big and lavish and STILL expensive, though...in a new way! However, birthdays are a big deal in our house.

We do ask if they want an event and then one friend over on their birthday, or what they're thinking. Our son's big 10th birthday we attended a football game – it was a big deal. Our daughter turns 10 this month and is having a big Hollywood sleepover.

Having three kids and their birthdays all in the first quarter of the year, we have to think about budgeting.

Some things we talk about are being grateful for what they have, and what they get to do. We explain that a big gift might mean a smaller party.

As they continue to grow, we won't be having giant parties, because oh my – the gifts will be expensive.

So, first I'd say budget the parties out over the year.

Second, we realize we don't have to feed everybody. I used to feed everyone lunch and it was way expensive. It's okay to have drinks and treats for the kids...only. I am clear about that on the invitation, and I'm not aware that anyone has been offended! I don't think parents want to eat and stay, anyway!

Finally, because entire classes were invited, we could be at a party every other weekend. We just weren't able to go to every party, but had to pick and choose. But now there don't seem to be as many classroom invitations, as they've gotten older.

Sometimes, we text an invitation, and that's it! Utilizing digital invites saves money, too.

Kids are different. One may want a big party and the other an event, so communicate with the kids and let them be unique...no comparing parties with their siblings. They seem to be grateful when they're involved in the process (They still remember Covid when parties didn't happen!)

One last note...if the gift is a duplicate, we have instructed the kids to say thank you and not "I already have this!" (Yes, this happened when they were younger...) Some parents allow their kids to open the gifts later, after everyone leaves, and then write thank-you's. It's up to what works for YOUR family. My kids enjoy picking out gifts for kids, so they do like seeing their friends open them in front of them.

Lots to teach and observe and plan, isn't there?

In the Kitchen – Family Fun – by Marcy Lytle

We recently had the kids over for a family night, and the food was fun to make, and fun to eat. Sometimes, we need ideas that we think kids and adults both will enjoy. If you're having family or friends over soon, hope you'll enjoy one or all of these ideas!

Charcuterie Cups – A great appetizer to start with. We all sat outside and played “Would You Rather?” while we munched on this starter:

- Paper or plastic small cups (can find these at the dollar store)
- Skewers (World Market has some cute ones with twisted ends)
- Salami
- Cheese cubes
- Olives
- Pickles
- Nuts
- Fruit
- Pretzels

Whatever you choose for your cups is up to you – but just a mix of things low and high. These turn out so cute and they're fun to eat.

Tot Sliders – These were a hit, even though I wasn't sure if they'd hold together. But they did! And everyone really liked these little sandwiches with tater tots as the buns. Each one made their own slider to their liking.

- 2lb frozen tater tots
- Turkey or ham
- Pickles
- Mustard
- Other fillings you'd like

Microwave the frozen tater tots in a bowl, stirring every 5 minutes, until they're hot and soft (about 10-15 min). Let them cool a bit and then press 4 tots together to make each bun half. Bake at 425 until crisp, 25-30 minutes, and sandwich with your favorite fillings.

Easy Pizza in a Pinch – If the kids are coming over and you need something quick, this pizza was so easy AND tasty. Of course, you'll probably make a separate pizza for the kids, but the adults will like this one:

- 1 12-14" pizza crust from a can
- ½ c pesto
- 4 oz roasted garlic chevre (cheese)
- ½ c artichoke hearts, sliced
- ½ c cooked chicken breast cut into cubes
- Hot pepper flakes to taste

- 2 T capers

Using directions on pizza crust can, bake it and then add toppings and bake again. To top it, spread the pesto over the crust, top with the crumbled cheese, followed by the artichokes, capers, chicken and flakes. Bake til just starting to brown. Slice and enjoy immediately.

Farm Apple Pan Pie – LOVED this so much, and it was time consuming to make, but worth it, for sure. So pick and afternoon where you need a little baking therapy and bake up this pie that feeds a family:

Pastry:

- 5 c all purpose flour
- 4 t sugar
- ½ t salt
- ½ t baking powder
- 1 ½ c shortening
- 2 large egg yolks lightly beaten
- ¾ c cold water

Filling:

- 5 lbs tart apples, peeled and thinly sliced
- 4 t lemon juice
- ¾ c sugar
- ¾ c packed brown sugar
- 1 t gr cinnamon
- ½ gr nutmeg
- ¼ t salt
- 2% milk
- Additional sugar

Instructions:

In a large bowl combine the flour, sugar, salt and baking powder. Cut in shortening til the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Combine yolks and cold water, sprinkle over dry ingredients and toss w fork. Add additional water if needed, 1 T at a time, til mixture can be formed into a ball.

Divide dough in half. On lightly floured surface, roll half to fit a 15x10x1 in baking sheet.

Sprinkle apples w lemon juice, arrange half of them over the dough. Combine the sugars, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt, sprinkle over half the apples. Top with remaining apples, sprinkle with remaining sugar mixture.

Roll remaining dough to fit the pan, place on top of the filling and seal edges. Brush with milk and sprinkle with sugar. Cut vents in top crust. Bake at 400 til crust is golden brown and filling is bubbly, about 50 min.

Tried and True - Last Month's Learning – April

My daughter told me to put thin mints Girl Scout cookies in the freezer – I did. And they taste good. I didn't really like them otherwise.

Have you ever played "Would You Rather?" cards with your family? It's not actually a game, but it's fun to hear everyone's answers.

The Dollar Tree has small compacts (remember what those are?) for carrying in your purse – so cute.

There's a prayer guide published by Voice of the Martyrs that's free. It's so good and informative, and we use it nightly, as we pray.

Trays found at Target work on the wall in my bathroom for hanging my larger earrings!

I found a pair of slippers at Five Below for \$5 that I love! Who knew...

Did you know that Dairy Queen sells their Dilly Bars and Buster Bars in boxes to take home for your freezer? I just bought some!

The Stay at Home Chef – it's a good cookbook and a new one for me – if you like to collect them like I do!

I love tiny brooches and just saw cute cards of them at Hobby Lobby! They're so whimsical and fun to wear.

What's your favorite plant in your pots, this time of year? Mine is Dusty Miller, have you discovered it?

Just recently purchased a set of small bowls and cutlery by Pillow Fort at Target. They're kids bowls but work great for cereal – my fave.

Lately, I've baked chicken breast tenders at the first of the week, seasoned differently. Like some have Mexican seasoning and others Italian, or whatever you need that week. Could just be salt and pepper. That way, you have chicken for chicken salad, tostadas, with pasta, or whatever – it's already cooked and makes dinner a snap!

I heard the word nepo baby the other day – look it up. I had never heard of it, and now I know.

I have found that Walmart has the best spring pants – lots of styles – cute and comfy – check them out.

It's that time of year to stock up on paper plates with matching napkins for packing picnics for on the floor or in the park, or backyard! Dollar Tree and Marshalls are my favorite stops for these!

An elegant woman never carries an overstuffed purse – ha! I learned this from Myka Meier an etiquette specialist – she's a fun follow on Instagram.

A friend of mine Sarah sent me a picture of how she hangs her scarves and necklaces in her closet...over a rod. But she uses sticky tape on the hanger and shelf gripper on the bottom so scarves don't slide, and the hooks for the necklaces are ornament hooks from Christmas! How cool.

There used to be such a thing as a fold up bathtub. What? Yes, seriously.

Blackberry jam tastes wonderful on a grilled turkey sandwich. We tried it as a new entrée at a restaurant recently. It was delicious.

SUGAR + Spice Vintage Hollywood Beauty Secrets Part 2 – by Angela Dolbear

I hope you enjoyed last month's journey into experimenting with beauty secrets from bygone eras. I have adopted a few of the beauty tricks, especially what I am calling the "Harlow-Hayworth Hair Spa Time." It involves massaging oil (I like grapeseed oil) into my scalp and hair and hands, wrapping my head in a towel, and then relaxing for 20-30 minutes. Ahhh...

After reading a few articles about beauty secrets of film actresses from the mid-century and earlier era, which have always fascinated me, I had a long list of the treatments that seemed doable (and not dangerous or painful) and tried them out. Without further ado, here is Part 2 of my Vintage Hollywood beauty secrets.

PART 2

Vintage Make-up Tones Trick: Many mid-century actresses wore neutral tone makeup. Green-and-purple-loving me was intrigued. So, I used bronzer and highlighter for my eyeshadow, and on the high points of my face. I follow that with black eyeliner (top lids only) and a little mascara. It gave me a polished glow without looking too made-up. Surprisingly pretty.

Marilyn Monroe's Dry Shampoo

Ms. Monroe was said to minimize the number of times she washed her hair, probably because bleached hair is dry and delicate. To keep her hair fresh, she dabbed sifted Johnson's Baby Powder on the roots. Since I too like to reduce the number of times, I wash my hair because red hair fades so quickly, I tried this trick.

Baby powder would probably look better on light hair tones, and it made my red hair look dull. So I went back to using my favorite dry shampoo, [Dry Bar Detox Dry Shampoo](#). It freshens my hair without giving it a white residue, and I love the scent. I wonder if Marilyn would approve?

Elizabeth Taylor's Exfoliation Method

Elizabeth Taylor, as well as Cleopatra (who she portrayed beautifully on screen) made a habit of shaving their face to remove the fine baby hairs and the surface layer of skin cells, to make their skin glow.

Confession time...I already do this trick every once in a while, with one of my husband's electric razors. I don't like the layer of peach fuzz that grows on my face. It makes my makeup look cakey, especially on my cheeks. But I never thought of using a razor to get the extra exfoliating benefit.

I tried a [facial razor](#) with a safety cover. It did a good job, but it took twice as long as the little rechargeable razor I usually use. I think I will stick to using other exfoliators. Scraping my face with a sharp object was a little unnerving. I like [Lavido's 2-in-1 Purifying Facial Mask and Exfoliator](#), which is a product of Israel, which reminds me of Jesus, so it inspires me to think about my precious Savior while I care for my skin!

Joan Crawford's Face Firming Secret

Joan Crawford supposedly didn't use fancy products to keep her famous face smooth and taut. Simple chewing gum was her go-to method to firm her face. She chewed gum in the belief that it would firm her jaw and help to drain the toxins out from under her chin. Confession time: I have

been chewing gum for years, especially while watching television in order to curb my craving for snacks. (I love snacking.) I think it has tightened the skin under my chin. My favorite gum is Ice Breakers Ice Cube gum. It's sugarless and the flavor lasts for a while.

I hope you have enjoyed investigating Vintage Hollywood beauty tricks as much as I have. The beauty of blessings to you!

Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual 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](#). And she loves writing and recording songs with her husband, Tim --listen on [Sound Cloud](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at www.AngelaDolbear.com



HOME

Practical Parenting – Bag of Fun – by Marcy Lytle

Summer is on the horizon, with only a couple months of school left, and we are thinking about summer activities and vacation. And traveling with little kids in the car or on the plane can be a challenge, especially when 15 minutes down the road we hear, “Are we there yet? How much longer?” My son had a friend that went with us on a trip and that boy must have asked those two questions a hundred times. It drove me nuts!

Our entire family is planning a big trip soon, and we will be on the plane for hours. I remember filling a bag when my kids were little, so I’m passing on the suggestion to you to try for your kiddos, as well. Maybe this bag of fun will at least reduce those questions down to 50 or less!

Start now, and head to the dollar store, Five Below or Hobby Lobby, to start your bag for the kids in tow. Just as you’re out shopping, look for small and flat fun items that will fit in a stuffed backpack. Have it full of these things and then pull out a new treat every so many minutes, not all at once, or the kids will tear through them in 10 minutes flat. Make them last by you being the treat supplier, over the course of the trip.

My bag started months before our trip and here are a few things I found at the stores mentioned above:

- Seek and find books, crossword puzzle books (Dollar Tree)
- Keychains or other crafts to make (Hobby Lobby often has these half-off)
- Flash cards or playing cards (Old Maid and Crazy Eights)
- Painting by number books or canvases (Dollar Tree or Five Below)
- Colorform board games (these are in super thin boxes and can be thrown away after the trip) – Dollar Tree
- Mystery books – Nancy Drew and The Hardy Boys – Found these at Dollar Tree!
- Journals and pens for recording vacation fun – include stickers too, if you want!
- Magnetic games so the pieces stay put – these come in a little flat square tin.
- Candies and/or crackers the kids are allowed to eat.

I’m not finished stuffing our bag, but it’s so fun to do so. If you’re a grandparent, it’s nice for you to stuff a bag and carry it so the parents don’t have one more thing to mess with. If you’re a parent with no grandparents traveling with you, then start early with your shopping, and give Dad the responsibility of carrying the bag. We have a backpack that folds up into a pouch and it’s perfect for this. It holds a lot! If your kids are old enough, they could each carry a bag IF they can be trusted to pull out one thing at a time, and IF there’s availability for them to carry.

Kids will still be kids and grow tired of travel, but having little treats (you could even wrap each one if you have the energy) to open every so often along the way, makes everyone happier on those long drives or rides. And the journal – well that’s priceless – because they then have the memories recorded when they get back home.

I Don't Do Teens – The Beginnings – by Marcy Lytle

I remember gasping when I realized my daughter liked a boy at age 12, I mean really liked him, and wanted him to be her boyfriend. I should have known this was coming, because in kindergarten on the first day...she was kissing a boy on the cheek when I went to pick her up from school. But still, I wasn't ready for the boy/girl thing as middle school began. And there aren't really "manuals" that come with kids on how to navigate the first loves of their lives. Even if manuals existed for this sort of thing, kids aren't machines! They're all so different!

I suppose parents can just squelch any talk and ban these feelings from the kids, but that won't really work. Because she's still going to write him notes, go to bed at night thinking about that dreamy boy, and wonder what it might be like to hold his hand...or more. He's going to get sweaty palms when he's around that girl, or gaze at her longingly across the classroom, and wish he could get the nerve to text her hello.

I remember a couple of things we did...not sure if they were right or wrong...but here they are:

One thing I recall that we did that seemed to at least relieve my own fears was to invite the parents over, with the boy, and they did the same in turn. We made it a family affair of sorts. We the parents visited and the kids sat and talked to the side, NOT in another room or bedroom. This just wasn't allowed. There's no point in giving our kids opportunities for mistakes when other opportunities are available. I don't know if they kids thought we were silly, but they were just young enough to just be glad we all got together for fun.

Another thing we did was invite the young man out on a date with our family. He rode with all of us out to dinner or to do something fun. He got to see how our family operated. The other parents did the same. It was so helpful to me as a mom to meet the other mom and dad. We realized we had a lot of the same values. The kids got to see us interact together.

Did my daughter end up with this young boy as her husband? No way. That boy was her first "love" and she really liked him for quite a while, from age 12-15 maybe. They never went on an actual date because neither of them was old enough to drive, thank goodness! But this pre-date time and first love and attraction experience gave us, as a family, time to exemplify what we expected when our kids actually began to like someone again, when they were older.

It wasn't foreign or weird to have that person of interest come hang out at our house, with the entire family, often. It wasn't odd for us to insist on meeting the other parents, and to have outings with both families. Maybe it was because we started this practice from the get-go.

Parenting teens as they start to like and to love and to wonder and to flutter is hard. Throwing them out to be alone in those emotions with that person they like is dangerous, when there have been no boundaries or examples set. But starting out with family time, and keeping it that way, is a good practice to begin from the get-go. And if they buck that beginning, then they're in no way ready for the dating scene...

Family is important. Mom and Dad are part of any relationship that's starting to foster. And alone time is just not happening, with early teens... Parents can set it up that way, and teens

can eventually give thanks for those parameters...maybe when they're grown and gone. We can always pray that it's so...

An Adage A Day - Birthday Dilemmas – by Carole Gilbert

I've always thought April is a good month for birthdays, mostly because it's mine. But other months are good, too. Our immediate family has five birthdays between the middle of January and the first of February. For about three weeks, it seems like all we do is celebrate birthdays. This is a good dilemma, but it does require traveling, and eating a lot of cake. This year we tried something new. Each family had their own celebrations but together we all celebrated at the Great Wolf Lodge in Grapevine, Texas. It was so fun and seemed like the perfect answer to our dilemma. And who doesn't love a good water park for their birthday!?

That brings me to my next birthday dilemma. One of my favorite parts of anyone's birthday is blowing out the candles and singing, "Happy Birthday to You." Did you know this phrase and song began in 1893? It started from a Kindergarten teacher's good morning song to her class. She would sing "Good morning to you," in the melody we are so familiar with. It is said that the children loved the song so much that they substituted the words, "Happy Birthday to you," to sing at their birthday parties. This song has a lot of background and I'm considering it a dilemma because of its past. Even though Mildred Hill and her sister wrote and published the song in their 1893 book, *Song Stories for the Kindergarten*, it was later found published elsewhere in the early 1900's and ended up on Broadway in 1931. When the sisters discovered what was happening to their beloved song they took legal action to retain the rights. In 1934-1935, the song was published and credited to Mildred and Patty Hill, thus ending the dilemma for a while. But lawsuits continued again even as recently as 2013-2015. The song now resides in public domain after Warner Bros. paid \$14 million to end their case.

And to top it all off, another birthday dilemma that plagues my family is the "Icing on the cake," literally. This idiom means to make a good thing better. And to me, icing does just that. I love icing but so do many others in my family. Sometimes, I only eat the part of the cake right under the icing. I have one granddaughter, in particular, that loves icing like I do. We have been found to have our fingers poked deep in the icing. At our last celebration together, she had her cake and I had mine. She ate hers and meandered over to me. She began poking my cake's icing with her finger and I began to eat it myself as fast as I could. She smiled at me sweetly and poked off more icing, even faster. And then faster I would go until I realized I was not going to win. So, I gave in and started feeding her my icing. After all, she's only two and it was HER birthday cake!

These are three good and fun dilemmas but not all are. "Icing on the cake" also has a negative, sad, meaning referring to making a bad situation worse. God's Word is filled with dilemmas and with people who had to make a choice between making something better or worse. Like we do, sometimes. I like to remember the words from Paul when I'm faced with a dilemma. And positively, this is, the icing on the cake.

Philippians 1:23,

*“I am hard pressed between the two.
My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”*

A Night to Remember – All of Nature Sings – by Marcy Lytle

Why not take the kids outside to a park, for a family outing, and make the family devo time special and different this month? After all, all of creation sings of the glory of God, and teaching our kids to observe it will sustain them all their lives, as they remember to stop and wonder and give praise to the Creator of all things beautiful and orderly. It's good for us adults to be reminded of this, as well.

Preparation: Spread a blanket, bring some food, include kites, and good walking shoes. This can take place at a park or even in your own backyard.

Spread the blanket and have everyone lie down and close their eyes and listen. Ask what they hear (people talking, birds, leaves blowing...what else?) Sometimes we need to be still and close our eyes and just listen to all of creation, and then to our Creator speak over us his words of love and affirmation. Psalm 96 says *Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.* Have you ever thought about the leaves blowing in the wind as singing a song?

Sit up and look around at the park or yard where you are. What all do you spy? (Let the kids say what they spy, it can be a kid sliding, or a squirrel scampering...whatever.) Taking time to observe other people and other things is necessary when living a life for Him. It causes us to pause and be aware that it's not all about us here on this planet we call earth, but there are other things around us we need to see. Psalm 104 *How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.*

Enjoy your food. Talk about why it's so fun to eat outside, and also the hazards of eating outside (Let the kids name a few...) The weather and sunshine feels good if the temperatures are right. But ants can show up and ruin our food if we're not careful and diligent to pick a spot where they don't live! One of the favorite things of being outside is observing the clouds. Let's do that while we eat. Do you see any shapes, or is it a perfectly clear day? *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.* Have you ever realized how God is an artist? He is! He can create something beautiful out of nothing.

Pack up and take a walk. Can you identify any of the trees or flowers on the path? Are there any bridges or creeks? Would you rather walk or ride your bikes? Have a family conversation while walking and observing, and giving thanks for the beauty in nature. Maybe ask more questions of "would you rather" related to nature.

There's a verse in Job that says *In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.* We have a great big God that is the most creative being there ever was or will be!

Family Prayer: *God, what a great big and mighty and wonderful God you are! Thank you for the blessing of creation that invites us to sit and observe and feel and wonder, and then give you thanks for the order and the beauty that surrounds us. Our lives are in your hands, just like all of nature responds to your voice and your commands. We love you, we rest in your love for us. Amen.*

In Each Room – The Front Porch – by Marcy Lytle

Every season change comes with the desire to put away the old and set out new things, especially in the spring! Inside the house, we put away blankets and heavy throws, in favor of light colors and pillows and things like that. But on our porches – well we definitely want pretty color and something that welcomes us when we arrive, or invites us to sit as we exit the back door.

I've found a few things that I enjoy doing every single time the season changes on just the front porch alone:

A simple green **wreath** hangs on the wall, and I change out the picks. Spring and summer colored picks are inserted in pretty colors of lavender, yellow and orange. That's the focal point just to the side of the front door. I have a string of battery operated lights entwined around the wreath that light up at dusk.

A new **pillow and seat cushion** replace the reds and greens from winter and the cold weather, in favor of a rattan or straw look on the front porch chair. Target has both in their outdoor section. And while there, look for a pretty **lantern** to place somewhere on your porch, one that has a timer and comes on at night. These look so pretty along with the lighted wreath.

Do you have a new **door mat**? After you get your décor picked out, then pick a mat to go with. Or choose the door mat first and decorate to compliment that! Door mats are so pretty and welcoming, and not too expensive. So many to choose from at places like Kirklands, Target or Marshalls.

Fresh flowers are a beautiful addition in pots, grouped in threes on your porch, depending on the room that you have. Vary the heights. Choose one color, or a mix. It's your preference. Find some cute baskets to sit them in, ones that match the rest of your porch décor. Even **succulents in a tray** can make a pretty array at the front.

If you struggle with what to put where, or what colors, or what to buy, search on line for ideas and copy those. Pick one thing – like a pretty doormat- and even choose items to go with that. If the doormat has a bouquet of flowers, then choose those colors for your pots. Or maybe you really like yellow. Choose three things yellow, and place them around.

We purchased three **big pots** that sit right down on the ground as we step off the front porch. They are a dark charcoal gray and I thought yellow color would look great planted inside. The plants inside are African daisies, rosemary, and some trailing white blossoms. Again, groups of three.

It doesn't take a lot to brighten up the entry of your home. **A chair**, a wreath and a lantern. Or a doormat, a flower pot and a table. Whatever you choose, choose something that makes you smile. And if you're smiling, then your guests will too, as they step up to visit you this spring season!



YOU

Inner Strength - More than Interests – by Michelle Wyatt

Rubber bands, pencils, pens, glasses, and playing cards...

These are simple items that can become magical.

While YouTube can be filled with not so kid friendly advertisements and videos, thankfully my son Matthew and I have found it to be a source of magic. Matthew shows determination and persistence as he learns these tricks, as he learns by example. He shows pride in himself. While the tricks don't always turn out perfectly, he still has a smile on his face as he gives it his all. Brendan and I smile from watching Matthew share the world of magic with us and Matthew doesn't mind sharing the secret of the tricks, which is cool and to be celebrated as well.

What I've learned from this is how important it is to encourage our children's interests. While magic is Matthew's main interest, I occasionally remind him of his other interest, Dude Perfect tricks. Dude Perfect is a show on You Tube made of a group of men that do various trick shots using everyday items such as cups, playing cards, sports equipment, boxes, etc. They came out with a book, too! My favorite part of this interest of his is the quality family time that it creates.

For example, one night I pulled out a tube that holds a poster and a ping pong ball. I bounced the ball on the floor and it did not make it in the tube – we were not surprised. Matthew got off the couch and took a turn. Brendan was invited to play and he said, "Yes!" Yeah! It was family trick shot time! After several turns, we all made the shot!

My other son, Brendan, is interested in robots. He is in the robotics club at school. Recently, we went to an event where he got to show us what he has built and how he uses a computer program to control the robot's movements. Talk about impressive! I met the leader of the group who informed me that Brendan takes the lead if a member is struggling with his/her project. Brendan is a determined, persistent problem-solver.

Brendan's robot project at home is harder than even I expected. It requires many, many small pieces to be put together, but Brendan is not giving up. I help him get the parts ready while he reads the instructions and takes it a step at a time. I do not know when the robot will be completed, but this time, it's about the process - not the final product. I enjoy working with him on it when he invites me too. Sometimes, he enjoys working on it alone and there is nothing wrong with that. Brendan is a thinker, so it's important to give him quiet space.

Encouraging Brendan's interest is more than enjoyment. It builds his character, just as magic and tricks bring out great character in Matthew.

Be encouraged to keep an open mind and heart when it comes to the interests of children. See it as a gift, an opportunity for quality time and character building.

If I can do it, so can you!

A Hopeful Heart - The Waiting Warrior – by Christina Oberon

April holds a special place in my heart. It is the month I married my husband. It is also the month that honors those who have struggled with infertility, like myself.

My husband and I spent the first four years of our marriage desiring a child. The journey brought us to our knees, produced more tears than could be counted, and took us to deep places within our hearts and spirits. Through the barrenness, God nudged me to create something that would bring others in the trenches to seek hope, despite feeling hopeless.

Today, I share an excerpt from *Hope Strong*:

I saw it over and over in my head and sometimes in my dreams . . . the woman people would whisper about that could never have children. The woman they pitied. The woman they didn't invite to parties where kids would be present. That woman was me. I became flooded with shame. With that shame came feelings of failure and embarrassment. Was I a disgrace? I didn't want to feel less than the average woman who was able to procreate. I didn't want to be that woman.

Infertility can be a shameful thing when we focus on what others are thinking of us or how they view our infertile status. Over time, I affirmed that how others saw me didn't matter. I have a God who sees me as beautiful, strong, and blossoming, and there is no room for shame in his eyes. This acceptance and love removed the shame I felt and allowed me to share my journey and embrace the human parts of me.

You are not a failure, even though you may tell yourself you are. "I have failed at the one basic thing I was put on earth to do as a woman." "I am worried that this reflects on my relationship." "Does this reflect on my sex life?" These are common thoughts and questions that play in the mind of a woman on the infertility journey. We often feel like we are our feelings, and if these feelings aren't "right," we fear we become them.

Look at yourself in the mirror. What do you see? Do you see a strong woman whose body has been through a lot, yet is still here, standing in all of her glory? Do you see a woman whose determination to succeed and ability to never give up is grounded in her? Do you see a woman who, one day, whichever way this may be, will make a fantastic mother? Do you?

Reflecting on these words, I think about how God redeemed me from shame and set me free of guilt during my infertility journey. And now, despite finding myself in a season of secondary infertility, I can navigate it with my head held high, knowing who is leading the way.

Healthy Habits - Excess Weight – by Marcy Lytle

I was sitting early in the morning listening to large chunks of ice melt and slide off my roof and from the branches of our trees. We had just come out of an ice storm, where freezing rain accumulated on power lines and trees and limbs and entire trees just snapped and fell over, causing lots of damage to homes and cars. Besides that, losing a pretty tree in a yard is devastating. Those trees took years to grow and had incredibly deep roots!

But excess weight from the ice eventually got the best of these strong branches and limbs, and they toppled.

What does that have to do with healthy habits? I bet you thought from the title of this month's article we were going to discuss those extra pounds. But there are enough articles everywhere that address those.

Listening to the ice crumble and fall, I just keep thinking about excess weight we carry that we need to lay down, before we too topple and fall:

The weight of worry – This is a big one that plagues women and moms all the time. We worry about our kids and their future, about our aging parents, about our husbands and our own future, and all the things. And we know His word says to cast our cares on Him, but we just can't. So we carry these worries until we make ourselves sick. I believe it's a daily choice, not a once and done deal. Every morning new mercies await us as we consciously lay those worries down at His feet, and do it again tomorrow...and every day after that.

The weight of disappointment – If we live for decades, we suffer multiple disappointments and the weight of these results in a heaviness of gloom and doom that is visible in our walk, on our faces, and in our relationships. We're afraid to venture out, we're weighed down with the long list of misplaced hopes, hopes that were never fulfilled, dreams that crashed, and we carry these memories with us – and they're heavy. Disappointment is real, but so is renewed vision for a new day, every morning when the sun rises. Place your disappointments at His feet and expect his goodness and mercy to follow you today...as you walk or skip, instead of shuffle.

The weight of comparison – It starts when we're young, wanting what she has or a desire to look like she does. And it grows heavier as we age, if we're not aware. Pretty soon, that weight is so heavy we're pumping iron so that we can look like her, going into debt so we can feel better about the way we present ourselves, and lying in bed at night completely devastated that we can't keep up. It's a heavy load to carry, this weight of comparison. We've forgotten the truth that we are fearfully and wonderfully made and beautiful. That's the simplicity of walking lightly when we look ourselves in the mirror, without the haunting pictures of others in the background. Don't compare at all.

The weight of concern – We have friends that are suffering in illness, another friend whose kids are causing worry, or still another friend that's lost her husband, and we carry the weight of concern for them. Oh, that's nice that we're concerned, but what we do with that concern weighs heavily and causes us to feel heavy burdened for others, to the point of being upset with God that he's not acting on their behalf. Rest is available for us, and for them, and carrying this

weight doesn't help anyone. Pray, yes. Love, yes. But then we must trust that he is able and available and willing and aware, as we give these concerns to Him. And He asks us to come unto Him when we are weary and He will carry the burdens, while He offers us rest.

The weight of sin – We all sin. Daily. Perhaps we have one or two particular sins we just can't overcome. Or maybe we did that way back when, and we've never forgiven ourselves. There might be sins inflicted on us from our past that hurt so deeply, we can't forgive. The weight of sin is the first weight Jesus came to lift from our minds, bodies and souls through his death and resurrection. Remember, He took on Him all the sins of the world; he forgives us, and remembers them no more. Remind yourself of that truth, and run free. Freedom is yours.

Weights are only good when lifted and then deposited back on the ground, in a gym, for exercise. Imagine carrying home those weights on your shoulders all day long. They'd break you. Freezing rain landing on the branches of trees and staying there unrelenting, while temps are below 32 degrees, results in a heaviness that breaks things as well.

As I sit here listening to the crash and crack noises of the ice melting away this morning as temperatures rise, I'm hopeful that my own weights I've got on my shoulders will start to thaw as well...and fall. I'm reminded that I can do all things – not through me – but through Christ who strengthens me to let go of that excess weight and let Him carry it all for me.

Life Right Now - Old Stuff- By Jennifer Stephens

I like old stuff. Step inside my front door and you'll find a 1950's card catalog tucked into the corner, a stack of Grandma's dishes nestled inside a cabinet, and oodles of timeworn knickknacks in all the nooks and crannies. Give me a free Saturday and I'll be digging through piles of plates, racks of clothes, and random bits & bobs at antique shops and thrift stores, searching for that just right something to add to my collection. Treasure hunting. Each find must be oldish, a little kitschy, and speak to my heart. The brand, markings, and monetary value aren't important. What is it about all the things from long ago? For me, it's the story. The history. Whether it's a hand-me-down relic or something garnered from the thrift store, vintage pieces are precious.

When on a hunting expedition it's important to check the bottom shelf. Because whatever it is you're looking for, it's always on the bottom shelf. It just is. Searching the shelves last week, my eyes landed on an item that, to most people, probably should have gone straight to the dumpster. Grungy and tarnished. Discolored from years of neglect. But I picked up that old platter and headed to the checkout.

As I scrubbed and polished the oxidized edges, I wondered about the life it lived before me. Was it kept on display? Tossed in a drawer? Did it only come out for special occasions? Watching this discarded piece transform, I couldn't help but think of how our society treats everything that ages. Buildings get demolished. Clothes end up in the landfill. And people? When we reach a certain age, we're deemed completely useless. Unwanted. Irrelevant. Cast aside.

Older people are often accused of being "stuck in our ways." The younger crowd is quick to dismiss our input and seem to just want us to go away – putting us on the bottom shelf of life. Rudyard Kipling said, "Funny how the new things are the old things." Isn't it, though? Maybe those of us who've been around for a certain number of years already tried all the new things when they were old things. Is it possible we're not stuck in our ways, but we've finally found our way? Not because we've always done everything right, but because we've learned from what we've done wrong!

It took some elbow grease, but that once grimy tray now sits as a shining reminder that if we're willing to take the time and cast our assumptions aside, we'll likely discover something beautiful. Something that was there all along. And if we can find immeasurable value in each piece of vintage furniture and knickknack from years gone by, perhaps we can embrace the worth of the older generation. Because the bunches of us nearing our autumn of life are overflowing with priceless stories, valuable insight, and acquired wisdom.

If there's somebody willing to listen.

*"Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long-life bring understanding?"
Job 12:12*

Under Pressure – Spring Fever – by Debbie Haynes

Do you suffer from spring fever? Or hay fever? I love winter, and fall is my favorite time of the year, but spring affects me like no other season. When I worked full time, each spring when the flowers bloomed and leaves appeared on the trees, I felt trapped inside. Boredom set in and a hunger for something different arrived. My job was demanding, as I had early morning and late night meetings. Life felt mundane: work, cook, eat, sleep, and repeat. Can you relate? I just wanted to “jump out of the rut” and escape the unchanging familiarity of life.

I didn't dislike my job. I actually enjoyed the diversity of it and I was rewarded for my work. But even just having family over was a great distraction and so much fun. Hobbies and music and church were great...but I STILL wanted something different.

Finally, these feelings would pass, we'd take a trip somewhere or have company over, or I'd start a fun project and continue on. I have this sourdough culture from which I bake some really amazing things, which I never ever thought I could do! I've made sourdough bread, the best pizza dough ever, biscuits, muffins, etc. and I've been able to share this starter with others. I've even learned how to make fermented sauerkraut which is fabulous for gut health!

Besides those physical great things, I've been hearing from God in new ways as well. Writing songs, letting go of judgments, surrendering areas of my heart that I'd held on to before, to name a few.

At the start of the book of Galatians 6, Paul says we are to restore and help others with their burdens, but then a few verses later it says every man must bear his own burden and not depend on others. In other words, there is a place where we definitely stand alone in HIM. A time where we can't depend on an escape valve to eject us from a bad situation or on a person to rescue us, or anything else to provide an outlet for what bores us.

In verse 9, we read that we are not to grow weary in well doing because we will reap in due season if we don't faint! And we're to do good to all. In other words, we aren't to get fatigued when doing good and we must not quit. We must work for the benefit of all. This is how we maintain, and how we can stay motivated.

So even in the spring, when the fever gets hot, when we're tired of the “same old thing” or we don't really see any evidence of growth, we WILL reap a great reward as God's character is being produced in us.

I remember as a teenager trying to learn the piano, and making such gross mistakes as I played. But in later years, songs just came to me...as I listened to Him and played what I heard. What once sounded awful began to sound beautiful.

In conclusion, I know that if I do the mundane willingly and don't grow weary or give up because of spring fever or boredom...HE HIMSELF IS MY REWARD. I can grow deeper in Him and in the understanding of His word while He's building my character.

Be motivated to do good works, even if your whole being is screaming for a change! Maybe you'll have to play "awful" notes a while longer, until those sweet notes emerge. As only He can satisfy the longing we all have for change...



MARRIAGE

In This Together – DIY List for Couples – by Bekah Holland

Does anyone else out there wish there was some kind of handbook for marriage? I mean, I know the whole *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* book trends, but what about an actual how-to manual for navigating what happens after you pick another human and deciding to try to share a bathroom for the rest of your life. Because I could really use one. Now, at almost 17 years in, we've figured a lot of things, jumped over some landmines, and stepped on a few, too. And while we can and have sought advice from people who have managed to make it to whatever year of marriage equals "you can tune out the irritating parts of your partner and still love them even though they fart loudly in their sleep," I'm thankful. We can even read books or talk to our friends, parents, pastors, therapists or a combination of all of the above.

But really, a marriage is, strangely enough, kind of a solo journey.

Obviously we're on that journey with someone else, but how we feel, react, think, grow is very much on us as individuals. Shockingly, I was very good at recognizing areas that my husband *needed* to change. I mean, I really excelled at it. And because I was so very intuitive and brilliant, I normally didn't even tell him about any of it, but very much expected him to magically know. What a lucky guy! He had no idea what he was getting into when he decided I was the person to whom he should promise "to death do us part." Funny enough, I was not as well versed in seeing my own shortcomings and annoying traits. Weird, right? Those things took more than a few years to get better at. For both of us.

He had to learn to accept my waking up ready to talk while he needed a good two hours before human contact was recommended, and my penchant for leaving my keys in the weirdest places. Although, in my defense, setting them in the freezer while pulling out whatever hopefully edible thing I was going to cook for dinner and then forgetting to grab them before shutting the door back probably happens to everyone. And I had to learn to live with the fact that my beloved husband snored loud enough to drown out my own thoughts and was ridiculous enough to have a specific place for every single thing, as well as a favorite fork. We were, and still are, so very, very different.

He tends to be more serious, makes plans for plans and loves to learn, and I fall more in the flies by the seat of her pants, walk barefoot in the grass while reading a novel kind of girl. He likes scary movies and I'd rather cut off my own arm than pay to be scared by something. I would lose my head if it wasn't attached, while he can tell you exactly where something he hasn't used in 15 years is stored (unless I've moved it, but that's a whole different thing to fight about). But we do agree on the big things like food being a love language, the importance of carbs, and that if we won the lottery we'd move to an island far away from all the people. Other than that, on the outside (okay fine, on lots of the inside too) we couldn't be more different. Sometimes that works really well, because in places I struggle he can take the weight, and vice versa. Sometimes, however, especially earlier in our marriage, those differences could and did create major problems in our relationship. Thus, my desire for a freaking marriage handbook with easy to follow instructions.

Sadly, such a book doesn't exist (unless one of you is holding out on the rest of us), but I can tell you some things that I've learned along the way:

- If (when) you mess up, sincere apologies, including cupcakes, are usually effective.
- Fighting is going to happen. Accept it. Then decide the rules around fighting. Don't say things you can't take back. If it's late and you're tired and still mad, it is actually okay to let the "sun go

down on your anger” if it keeps you from falling down a mad rabbit hole that requires more than cupcakes to make right.

-No one wants you to fix them, so stop. Unless they ask, and then still, maybe double check just in case.

-Listening to respond, and listening to understand, are two completely different things. Learn to do the latter.

-Laugh at the hard stuff. I mean cry if you need to, but laughing together, even through tears, can offer a special kind of connection.

-Be kind. To each other. To yourselves. Even when no one deserves it.

-And lastly, remember that you’re both humans who are imperfect and sometimes stupid and selfish and are often in need of a little grace...or a lot of it.

This is not a how-to list. It’s not foolproof. It’s not complete. And it’s definitely not easy. However, learning to love another person, not only in the way they deserve to be loved, but also in the ways that they feel most loved, is worth every bit of effort. Why? It’s because when you’ve picked the right human to share a bathroom with, he’ll work to love you that way, too. And together, even when it’s messy and ridiculous and exhausting, is where you learn what home really is. It’s wherever your heart finds rest.

“I love being married!
It’s really great to find that one special person
you want to annoy for the rest of your life.”

Rita Rudner

Date Night Fun – Dollar Ideas – by Marcy Lytle

Funds might not always be available for fancy date nights out, especially if we're raising little kids and spending money on them, or we're spending our money on other things, and our budget is tight. Or...maybe we just like the idea of a challenge to not spend much money but have the time of your life. This month is it!

Red check – Every spring I see the little section at the Dollar Tree where there's a red check tablecloth, plates, napkins, etc. that just screams "Go on a picnic!" Pick up these pieces, grab a picnic basket if you have one (you need one!), stop by for a bucket of chicken, take some brownies and picnic in a park - all red and white and fun all over.

Paint and read – There are little canvases with paints or even blank canvases on the shelves at the dollar store. Grab a few that you both can do. Next, look at the books there. Choose one to read, or one to color, or even a children's book where you "spot the difference." Find your favorite book bag and fill it with your finds, then head out to a table in a park for painting your masterpieces, and to a coffee shop for sitting and reading your choices.

Puzzles and peanuts – The Dollar Tree has lots of puzzles and they're not the best quality, but they'll do for a date night with him. Grab one that can be done in an evening, no more than 300 pieces. Scoot over the aisle where peanuts are found, grab a couple of cokes, and plan for a date night in at the table where you can puzzle, visit, and drop your peanuts in your coke and enjoy.

Pamper spa night – Make a bee line for the makeup/lotion/bath aisle at the dollar store. Spend \$12.50 each (everything is a \$1.25 now and that gets 10 items). You choose items to pamper him and he for you. Here's an idea of 10 items to pick for him: lotion, socks, fingernail clippers, soap, Twizzlers and beef jerky, plastic bucket, towel, candle and an eye mask. When it's your turn, have him sit down while you snip, rub, wash and leave him with his new socks on, relaxed and enjoying the fragrance of your dollar date.

Romantic dinner for two – Grab a cart and go down each aisle at the dollar store looking for a romantic date night for two or picnic in the park. You might grab a vase and a plastic flower, paper plates with matching napkins (different from the red check!), a candle and a lighter, and even some mini lights if they're available. You could even choose a theme or a color scheme. If you don't want paper plates, there are always cute plates and glasses on the dish aisle. Just be creative and include everything for a perfect setting. I wouldn't recommend the food there, so either cook the meal together or grab something to-go and head home to create your restaurant event...and enjoy.

See what other dollar dates you can come up with just by cruising the aisles. There are always new things to see, especially as the seasons change...and it's so fun making memories without breaking the bank.

After 40 Years – Another Anniversary – by Marcy Lytle

We told someone our anniversary was coming up soon and when we said how many years we'd been married, we then followed with, "We were two when we said I do," because 44 years of marriage means we are not young! 44 years, I can hardly believe it myself. And honestly, I would not go back to those first few years of marriage, trying to figure out careers, start a family, arguing over dumb things that kept us awake at night, and all the things couples do as they navigate that first decade.

The next decade of marriage we had just lost a home and were starting all over, it seemed, in so many areas of our life. We had left my dad's church, my husband was in need of a hip replacement, and we had to leave our custom home in the country and opt to rent once again, only this time we were in huge debt. That decade was hard...but we also now had a daughter. And then a son...gifts we never imagined could be so delightful.

The third decade our children grew up, they learned to drive and started to date, and I honestly thought I might die in fear of them crashing on the road or ending up in the back seat of a car doing things they weren't supposed to do...besides wondering how we would pay for cars and college and all of those things. However, we lived, they are alive, and they're both happily married now...with children of their own.

When the kids left the house, let me say that was the hardest part of our 44 years of marriage, because rooms were empty, the noise was now silence, and the doing and the going and the cooking for four dwindled down to just us two...and I cried. I cried a lot. Some of my friends were glad to see their kids go, but I was not. I missed them!

So now we are in this 44th year of being married, kids have been gone a good while, we've both buried our parents, and we're now "senior" citizens. How did this happen?

To be honest, I absolutely love this exact time in our marriage for several reasons. I don't like the thought of moving forward to old age, but this age with all these decades behind us has served us both well.

We don't argue over dumb stuff (as often!)

We love each other differently and more deeply.

We get to go out every night of the week if we want to.

We can eat what we love to eat, any time of the day.

We keep a pretty clean house because it's just us two.

I could go on and on with the list of things we get to do, and I do it often...with a grateful heart. Because the other honest part of being married 44 years is that sometimes we still gasp in grief at the loss of our parents and what we witnessed both of them experience the few months and years before they passed. And if I lose sight of that list above of what we get to do, I can

descend quickly into the fear of what the next decade or two might bring to us as more years go by.

It scares me to think of it, so I try not to. I have this hand to hold, this man that loves me fiercely, and this life to live that we've been graciously gifted today. 44 years is something we celebrated with a weekend away a few weeks ago, doing all the little things we love to do...together.

That's the thing. We still enjoy each other's company, even more than we did the day we met.

He's my best friend, and I'm so thankful for 44. And maybe I wasn't two when we started this journey, but I was very young and in love and infatuated and smitten with this man that still makes my heart beat fast when he's near and looks my way...and I'm guessing it will be that way for years to come.

Tonight, we get to go to the movies, and he'll reach for my hand and I'll wink at him right before the movie starts as we both grab a handful of popcorn and get lost in another story, and then in each other's arms when we get back home.

For Better or Worse - Dating at Home – by Kaelin Scott

My husband and I haven't been on an actual date in over three years. I know, that sounds crazy. But we live on a ranch in the middle of nowhere and have no family nearby to watch the kids, so it's hard to get time alone together. Usually we're okay with this because it's just the season of life we're in right now. But last weekend, we decided to have a date night at home. We figured if getting away for some alone time wasn't an option, why not have some time together right here?

So after we tucked the kids into bed, we blew up an air mattress and put it in the bed of our truck. We brought a comfy blanket, some popcorn and a couple KitKat bars out with us and watched the stars together. Oh, and the best part is that neither of us took our phones, so it was just quality time together talking and laughing and sharing our hearts. It was really simple, but it was the best night I've had in a long time. Honestly, I wish we did fun little things like this more often. It was so refreshing and sweet and fun to unplug and unwind together for a little while.

Spending time together is so important for married couples, but sometimes we have to get creative in order to make that happen. Maybe it doesn't look the same as other couples, but that doesn't matter. All that matters is connecting and keeping that spark alive somehow.

I have to admit that sometimes I get jealous of couples whose families live nearby and babysit all the time. Or I wish we lived closer to town so a date would be more feasible. But that's not my reality, and I've realized that dwelling on it doesn't do anything other than sow seeds of discontent. Gratitude is such great medicine whenever I start to feel that way. I have a beautiful life with my amazing husband and wonderful kids. It looks a lot different than most people's lives, and that's okay. Maybe we'll have to have date nights at home until our kids are older, but I don't really mind because I'm right where God wants me to be.

Now that we've had a fun at-home date night, I can't wait to plan another one. It's kind of fun having something to look forward to for just the two of us. We might have to make it into a monthly thing. If you don't have time or resources to go on an actual date, try a date at home. I promise it can be fun! Also, drop a comment below if you have any ideas for what we should do on our next date night.



ENCOURAGEMENT

Rooted in Love - Steering My Ship – by Kaelin Scott

A couple weeks ago, I randomly lost my voice. Both my kids had gotten some sort of virus where they had a sore throat and a fever. I didn't get that, but for some reason, my voice decided to stop working for two whole days. If that's ever happened to you, you know how aggravating it can be. Especially as a homeschool mom, trying to do my normal daily activities was quite a struggle without being able to talk.

It was a frustrating couple of days, but it made me think about the value of words. How we use them in so many ways. To teach, to encourage, to question, to tease. Words are such a huge part of each day, yet sometimes we take them for granted. Sometimes we don't use them wisely.

When I think about the fact that God created the entire world by speaking, it really is amazing. Words aren't just words. They are powerful tools that can either build people up or break them down. They can make the world brighter, or they can make it uglier.

There are so many passages in the Bible that talk about the power our words can wield and the importance of controlling our tongues. The fact that this subject is included so many times in scripture shows how important it truly is. It also means that God knew we would struggle with it and need a little guidance.

Sometimes it's hard to control our words. Our mouths move faster than we'd like them to, or maybe our emotions get the best of us. One of my favorite analogies comes from James 3:3-6. It says, "When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell."

I don't want my words to be a source of evil. I don't want to turn people away or make them feel unloved because of what I say. I want to speak life into everyone around me. I know I fail and will continue to fail often, but I want to have control of what I say.

Losing my voice made me realize how precious the ability to speak is, and I don't want to take it for granted. I want to steer my ship in the right direction and shine a light through my words.

Firmly Planted - Change in the Air – by Dina Cavazos

Last month my story “Pinprick of Light” was about my introduction to Jesus and His Kingdom some fifty years ago. That changed my life, even though the change wasn’t visible on the outside for some time. My journey was a long and winding road through the wilderness, but God’s goodness and grace guided me through. It was a journey of survival (figuratively), and most certainly transformational.

As journeys go, there are often certain “crossroads,” “defining moments,” “epiphanies,” (whatever you want to call them) that can change one’s direction or have a lasting impact. I’ve experienced several. One in particular, many years ago now, brought me to the realization that I had been living with one foot in and one foot out of God’s Kingdom. My heart was always inclined towards God, but there were life events, choices, disappointments, and human weaknesses that hindered me from living a fully committed life with the Lord. It was time to choose.

I made the decision to go *all in* and this changed everything. My life took a turn into The Garden, much like the one I have now. There are still weeds, dying plants, annoying critters...but it’s a garden, not a wilderness. There are times when it’s thriving and beautiful, and times when it looks desolate, dried up, and hopeless, but Jesus is a constant source of all things needed to live a “Zoe” life.

After many years of enjoying life in The Garden, growing like a well-placed and nourished plant, I feel change in the air. Discontent and longing are stirring me to explore new avenues of worship and gathering with God’s people. *What does this mean?* I’ve attended the same type of church for a very long time but for awhile now it’s felt repetitious and somewhat lifeless. So, recently, I’ve been extending feelers in search of *something*: Something real and Truth-full, something soul-stirring yet soul-soothing. I visited an Anglican church. I visited a very small gathering with a sole acoustic guitar player and a meal afterward. I went to an exquisite Methodist Lenten service and a Christmas service in the Swedish language and tradition. I attended an ecumenical Taize prayer service. Catholic contemplative writers are among my favorites. All so different.

I ask myself, *What is this about?*

As I shared last month, I gave my life to Jesus during the Jesus movement. I watched the new movie *The Jesus Revolution* at the theatre and highly recommend it. I didn’t know the details shown in the movie but I do remember the times. I have to admit a (big) part of me wishes for “church” like that. The Spirit moved during a time young people were looking for something “real and true.” Maybe, when enough of us are desperate enough for what is “real and true” the Spirit will move again.

Richard Foster’s book, *Streams of Living Water*, describes several “streams” of Christian spirituality: Contemplative (Prayer-filled life), Holiness (Virtuous life), Charismatic (Spirit-Empowered life), Social Justice (Compassionate life), Evangelical (Word-Centered life), and Incarnational (Sacramental life). He concludes that all these are flowing together into a mighty

movement of the Spirit, forming the contours and shape of a new gathering of God's people, even as the condition of the Church is, and has been for many years, scattered and disjointed (my paraphrase).

But he has a vision:

"I see it happening, this great new gathering of the people of God. I see an obedient, disciplined, freely gathered people who know in our day the life and powers of the kingdom of God. I see a people of cross and crown, of courageous action and sacrificial love. I see a people who are combining evangelism with social action, the transcendent Lordship of Jesus with the suffering servant Messiah. I see a people who are buoyed up by the vision of Christ's everlasting rule, not only imminent on the horizon, but already bursting forth in our midst."

"I see a people...I see a people...even though it feels as if I am peering through a glass darkly."

I see it too, my friend...we're peering through the same glass. Are you seeing it, too?

Moving Forward – Awe-Some – by Pam Charro

Dreaming a big dream was so easy when I was a little girl. Adulthood seemed to be a million miles away, and I didn't doubt, even a tiny bit, that anything was possible. Settling for less than this big dream was out of the question because I was meant for greatness. It would be mine.

But then adulthood came, and I was always surprised that growing up didn't heal my childhood hurts and disappointments. Yes, I felt less powerless, but now adult mistakes and let-downs were being added to the ones from when I was little. And time was going by. I was trying different things, and, while some of the experiences were rewarding, they weren't making my life into the dream I had anticipated for so many years. I had taken shots at my big dream, but I slowly lost my faith in it. And that isn't always wrong, because we all change and learn and sometimes our dreams must evolve. My problem wasn't so much that I didn't accomplish my big dream; my problem was that I stopped dreaming altogether. Like the song in *Le Miserables*, I allowed life to kill my dreams.

I heard a great message today about the importance of fearing the Lord, and I believe it ties in with my issue. I lost heart, not just because life is tedious and painful, but because I lost sight of the awesomeness of God.

Some people have never experienced an encounter that inspires awe of God, while others have had multiple encounters and been amazed. It's not an area that is ever exhausted, yet even awareness isn't enough to keep us from getting tired. It's probably the reason Jesus said we must remain in the vine or we will die. I have been alive, and trusted, and persevered, and grown in spiritual maturity, and I've had moments of excitement in my walk with God. I have become better at understanding my identity as his daughter. I know he still does miracles, and I know he is my friend. But I suspect that I could have been even more alive had I spent more time specifically contemplating how he deserves my awe.

Maybe he will give me a new dream, and maybe I'll still be waiting for a long time. Whether I get one big dream, several small ones, or am just encouraged in my day-to-day life, having a greater reverence of God can bring nothing but good. I want my view of him to enable me to make dreaming a lifestyle, born from seeing him as he really is: worthy of my awe.

Simple Truths – He Knew – by Marcy Lytle

I observe and hear about couples these days that seek marriage counseling before the wedding, and I think how wise...because back when we got married no one even suggested it to us! We didn't know it was a thing or helpful or even who to go to, if we'd known it was a good thing. It just wasn't spoken of, so we married blindly without discussing all the important things like kids, work, finances, or any of those really, really good things to know before one ties the knot.

But He knew...

I remember worrying so much about how we were going to pay for our kids' college and buy them cars, things like that, and was sure that we wouldn't have any monies for either. Life was tough at that time, and finances were tight. Again, we had no budgeting teaching under our belt, had attended no classes, and we just lived paycheck to paycheck. Maybe it was dumb, but that's how we lived. I suppose we didn't know any better.

But He knew...

Another thing I observe these days is that parents have all these rules and precautions for babies so they don't suffocate, or take too long with potty training, or stay awake at inopportune times. I think my only source for all things baby related was a book by a Dr. Spock, and I think he never even had children! I checked that book often, though, because there was a remedy for everything. I just didn't know all the information available now for babies and their safety and their well-being.

But He knew...

All of the above isn't to say that we shouldn't have done better, or that we should have known better. Some of it was sheer ignorance and lack of available knowledge in our little world. Some of it was just living life and not caring or searching out ways to do things well, or learn more. College education I had, but educating myself in other common-sense areas was nil...pretty much. But that's the way it was then versus now.

Here's the moral to my story:

God knew all the things we'd need to know and how to work out all things together for good. In our weakness, he definitely showed himself strong. He provided in areas where we weren't even aware we needed to be provided for, he gave gifts to us that we didn't know we wanted or needed, and the sustained us and kept us together and thriving when we could have fallen apart and crashed.

In this world of information overload, it's easy to become anxious that we're not keeping up with the latest there is, or that we don't have what it takes to succeed in this area or that. And yes, it's so good to learn and take advantage of wise counsel and good instruction. But no matter how much time and money and effort we spend on all those things, we will miss something!

New conflicts or problems will arise, ones that don't have a manual on how to fix or maintain. And we will need someone in our corner that knows...it all.

I give thanks daily for so many things, but mostly that He knows so much more than I do, and he invites me to cast all of my cares on him...because he cares for me. How to deal with aging parents isn't a formula-given experience, nor is aging, or grieving, or a lot of other encounters with life we all have. And even the best of information we gain won't suffice to bring us peace, if we don't know the peace-giver.

God has been faithful to us in our ignorance, our lack of resources, and all the places we just didn't know what to do. No panic needed, because he's got our backs. And guess what? There were times we flubbed it all up and He still carried us through and out of the mess.

He knows...

And that should bring us all a heck of a lot of peace in this troubled world in which we live and breathe on a daily basis. We don't have to know it all or have it all when it comes to our homes, marriages, families and more. We do our best, and let him take care of the rest.

Unearthly Thing - The Crucified Life – by Angela Dolbear

Last month I wrote an article, really a note to myself, to cease striving, and learn how to trust God completely. My notes for the article were full of scriptures and points about living a crucified life...as if the two ideas are connected.

So, what could it mean to live crucified? Live like zombies? Are we to be like *The Walking Dead*?

God says in His Word, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

There's a lot in this one verse. I had to read it a couple of times to dig into it.

In it, I see my identity in Christ, sealed by His gifts. Such beauty from a wretched thing like crucifixion. (Beauty from ashes, for sure).

Thinking about living a crucified life reminds me of the passage in Luke, where Jesus says, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23 NKJV).

What does it mean to take up the cross? Is my cross whatever is bothering or plaguing me at the time? Hmm, if that were the case, then my cross would be temporal and based on circumstances, which change daily. That doesn't seem like an explanation that fits with God's characteristics.

The cross was an instrument of death, like the electric chair. Taking up the cross must involve some sort of death.

I read in one of my morning devotionals from long ago (I believe it was from one of Greg Laurie's devotionals), "The cross symbolizes the same thing to every person. It speaks of dying to ourselves and putting God's will before our own. Taking up the cross is exchanging our plans for His plans. It's when we stop trying to seek life and instead seek God."

Just like ceasing to strive. We should seek God instead of our own desires in life.

The Scottish theologian Samuel Rutherford said of the cross, "Christ's cross is the sweetest burden that ever I bore; it is such a burden as wings are to a bird, or sails to a ship, to carry me forward to my harbor."

It's through death to ourselves that we find life. It's through exchanging our plans for God's plans that we find the best life. Life as it was meant to be lived.

Let's take another look at Galatians 2:20, in the Amplified translation this time:

"I have been crucified with Christ [that is, in Him I have shared His crucifixion]; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body I live by faith [by adhering to, relying on, and completely trusting] in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

When we lay aside our personal desires and ambitions (and striving), and trust God completely, He reveals the desires and plans that He has for us (See [Jeremiah 29:11](#)). Which are always good and rooted in His love for us.

God's plans for us are good (so good, because He is good), so we can and should dedicate our lives to Him. If we live the crucified life, if we will take up the cross, then we will find life. A beautiful full life in Christ.

Prayer Prompt: Father, here is my life. Here are my plans, aspirations, and dreams, along with my weaknesses, shortcomings, and sins. I offer it all to You. I believe that Your plans are better than mine. I surrender my claim and say, "Lord, it belongs to You. What do You want me to do?" Please help me pursue the path that You have for me. Amen.

Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her novels are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN--listen to their music on [Sound Cloud](#). 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 - Cozy Mornings

Before summer comes, as spring is still here and temps fluctuate, don't let those mornings where you sit still and wrap up slip away...just yet. In fact, there are ways to create cozy mornings all year, if we look for them. Why are cozy mornings important? They just are. Just the word cozy invites us to come away from the cares, the day, the worries and the play to sit and feel wrapped and held...before the sun rises fully and the sound of the traffic emerges...

Here are 10 reminders for cozy on any given morning this month:

- Hot tea or coffee is a given, isn't it? Do you have a favorite mug? Or a cute teapot? This might be the time to get one, if you don't.
- Blankets are important, any time of year. Is there a designated basket in your house where the blankets are folded for the choosing, by anyone at any time? There needs to be...
- Music, not your playlist, but something from long ago or a time gone by, like something from a record on an actual record player. Consider one for your home for cozy mornings like this.
- Candles aren't just for the holiday season, there are candles for every season of the year. Spring candles that have scents of grapefruit or lemon, or peonies or lavender. Or if your favorite is pumpkin spice, who says it has to burn just in the month of October? Light one.
- Window with the blinds cracked open or the shades up are a place to gaze, at your backyard, at a tree, at the sky...so open and look and gaze...daily.
- Pillows everywhere, those things our husbands despise but we realize are necessary for a cozy home. Grab one for sitting for laying your head or just for holding, one that's yours and yours alone.
- Magazines or books stacked somewhere for browsing...the kind that are relaxing to read. Magnolia Journal is one of my favorite magazines. And I just finished *The Last Party* – a murder mystery.
- Outside if weather permits is a great choice, by a fire pit, or on a porch, with no agenda other than to observe the clouds and the trees, as they move and bud. Cozy can be time alone with the Creator.
- Breakfast so pretty for one...if you have a cute plate and napkin...why not? Sometimes elevating the first meal of the day makes one feel warm and loved inside.
- Staying in bed, something I never do. But I hear it's really nice when given the opportunity if you like lingering a bit longer before you rise for the day. Pray, sing, or just lay silently as you cast your cares on HIM.

Cozy mornings...don't let them slip away as the season of cool weather comes to a close. Keep them near and dear and enjoy every single minute, even if 15 minutes is all you have.

FRESH THYME - The Lady at the Market

Have you ever had a weekend or a day where your activity at the moment just seems non-exciting, unimpressible, and mundane? From there, your thoughts wander and wonder if you're making a difference or doing anything of consequence, and as the day wears on you become more and more blah in your feelings like nothing you do matters and you're not really doing the big stuff in the world that makes a difference?

I had one of those days last weekend. We started out at the paint store getting samples for the exterior of our house, and from there we went to my son's house to watch his sweet son for a bit...who is 5 ½ months old. It's an easy watch, he's the best to play with, and we were done in a couple hours and on our way. But we had no particular schedule that day or agenda, which (if you know me) I don't like. I like to be busy with a purpose and a checklist and things to do.

We decided on a whim to stop at a market in the parking lot of a mall where quite a few booths were set up. We didn't need one thing, but somehow ended up with a few bags on our arms. And as we were leaving, a cute skirt caught my eye and I stopped at the one last booth to look at it. As I stood talking with the lady at the market booth, she casually mentioned she was raising her two granddaughters, and that opened up a conversation that ended in hugs from her (twice) all because we said we'd pray for her daughter...the girls' mom. There were even tears over that simple conversation, listening to this sweet lady tell us the great burden she carries for her daughter and family. She called us "angels."

As we got in the car, I smiled at this surprise experience in our day that would not have happened, had we been going down our list. We hadn't planned on the market, because we had just gotten groceries and didn't need anything. While at the market, I also ran into another vendor from whom I've bought jewelry before. She's moving and gave me two big hugs as well, a young mom half my age (or more than half!) was extremely grateful for my stopping often at her booth.

Some days when those thoughts mentioned above swirl, I can wallow and feel pitiful and like a disappointment to God because I'm not doing big things. But that Saturday, I felt like he nudged me a bit and offered me one of his own hugs because of living in the moment, which pleases Him. I felt like he reminded me of a few things:

Singing one little verse of "Jesus Loves Me" to baby Camp, while I was putting him down to nap, planted seeds of love in our sweet grandson's heart that will only grow as we continue to sing.

Stopping at one booth to listen to a story and offer a prayer actually moves mountains that are unseen and in the way, offering hope and healing. It's anything but simple...it's consequential!

Sending hugs and best wishes to a young mom that's moving far away to carry on with her little business of selling her beautiful artisan jewelry is a lasting gesture of His love, and opens the door to more conversations and more of sharing His great love. It's big stuff that makes a difference in one heart!

Honestly, I still felt blah that weekend and voiced it to my husband, and he reminded me that we have good health, plenty of everything we need and it was a beautiful day. His simple truthful words were like water to my droopy garden of pitiful thoughts and I finally did perk up!

All weekend I thought about that lady at the market. We did pray for her daughter and granddaughters. I smiled as I remembered holding Camp in my arms until his eyes closed, and I really love that young mom that sells jewelry – I mean I have several things from her that will remind me to pray for her, too.

Next time you have a day of the mundane and inconsequential outings and errands and chores and stops, just whisper a prayer of thanks for the simple blessings you have, and look for a lady at the market or on the corner, or pick up your own child or call your daughter and offer a simple kind word of affirmation or praise.

The truth is that we move mountains, plant seeds, water weary souls and offer cool drinks multiple times a day without realizing it when we fold a towel, visit an aging mom, make dinner for a noisy ungrateful family or simply pat the dog on the head and give thanks for life.

I'm going to remember that lady at the market. I hope you do, as well. And notice your own surprise moments and hear your own words of affirmation from the One that's pleased with you and what you do.

FRESH THYME - Mountains and Valleys – by Marcy Lytle

We live our lives and we have both of these, mountain and valleys. And for some reason, mountains are presented as the place to live, high above the world where the eagles soar. And valleys are the low places, when we're in the depths of despair. Thus, we have the description of life being full of highs and lows, hoping that the lows are few and far between, and that we mostly end up on the mountain.

I woke up thinking about this picture, but in real life – the valleys are absolutely beautiful – maybe equal to the mountaintops!

Let's look at both:

In the northeast, where covered bridges abound and flowing creeks are underneath/, I have gasped before as we came around a curve in a valley set between two mountains and observed these red painted picturesque edifices. They end up in photos, and we stop by the streams just to gaze at the small waterfalls we hear across the water.

Valleys are worth noting.

There are entire cities in valleys, with the mountain backdrop behind them, like Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania. Shops and eateries and churches and trains line streets, with lanterns and brick paved streets, and all sorts of charm. Their location, in the valley, against the mountains, makes them a desirable place to visit.

Valleys are beautiful.

Now, the mountains we know are amazing, because we're told so, even though most of us never climb one to the top to lookout over the world. We just see them from below and think what a wonder they are. Or we ride trams to the top, and realize they are indeed majestic with a view from up there. But mountains are high and they have to be climbed...or ascended...and that takes work.

Mountains have to be climbed.

One doesn't really live on a mountain top, does one? It's cold up there, snow might be present all year long, and electricity and wi-fi, those things would be hard to come by...because mountaintops are basically untouched. Bears live there, but not humans, if the mountains are very high. But what else do I know about mountaintops? I've only visited, not stayed. I've only looked out from them, not resided there.

Mountains aren't livable.

So we think about both of these places and realize that valleys are where the living takes place, where the streams from the mountain snows run down, and where we can land after a ski trek down the mountain safely in a cozy lodge with a fireplace. Valleys aren't bad places to be, at all. They even seem safe and secluded because they're in between the tall mountains. The mountains are beautiful as seen from the valleys below.

But there will always be this desire to ascend the mountain. Climbers will strap on gear and proceed without caution, just so they can scale to the top and say they did it. And there will always be sentences and words associated with valleys that make them appear dark and lonely and a sad place to be.

Next time you hear someone sing or say they're down in the dumps or in the valley of despair, or you hear the lyrics to a song that speak about wishing for life on a mountaintop...stop and think again. Redefine these two words and give thanks that life is full of both, but mostly valleys. That's where the hustle and bustle takes place as people come and go, lights twinkle, and charming places are seen. If our life is full of valleys, we're just living an amazing life to its fullest. And pining for the mountain constantly, thinking "up there" is the solution and the pinnacle of hope and all things glorious, let's think again. Let's trust Him to take us for a ride up the mountain to behind his glory, which is so much fun, but then to land us back down in the valley between those mountaintop experiences, where covered bridges and trains and rivers run free.

FRESH THYME - The Grays – by Marcy Lytle

I avoided the older crowd because it makes me feel and realize I'm part of that crowd now...and I don't want to think about aging. I've made my way to the younger women to chat and make friends because I wanted to feel young too, to enter into their conversations, not hear about aches and pains and sorrow. You see, I've judged the gray-headed folks and stood in pride while I still had blonde highlights from the coloring box I used every six weeks.

I am just realizing this pride and this judgment and working through it. Just yesterday, it came to mind.

There are two gray-haired women (beautiful gray hair, I might add) that sat just in front of my husband and I at church. We are still fairly new there so we didn't know them, but they turned around and greeted us with enthusiasm. They asked questions about us (which I love – because often people don't!) and they truly seemed glad that we were there. And I felt those same thoughts coming on like...I'd rather be talking to someone else.

Before you gasp in wonder at the audacity of those rude thoughts, I too was ashamed of what I was thinking. But I've chosen not to color my hair for a while now, so I too sit among the grays in a crowd of people. So it makes sense these women would speak to me as their peer, because I am!

After my parents died such horrible deaths, I just haven't wanted to be around the grays...at all. It seems like the conversation turns toward who is sick now, the new pains in their bodies, and just a lot of talk that leaves me sad when the visit is over. But truly, that's not the case all the time. Very often, the conversation is full of laughter and joy over the simplest of things, and stories of kids and their antics, and places to visit and vacation. But I was only focused on the sad parts.

I sometimes catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror or snap a pic on my phone and gasp again at what I see, an older version of the young me inside. How did this happen? Am I of any value to anyone anymore, do others want to meet me and get to know me, apart from my graying hair?

Getting older isn't for sissies; that's for sure, especially in a world that doesn't really place a lot of value on those over 50. And I'm way over 50, now. And it's really easy to slip into depression over what was, what is, or what might be to come in another decade or two. So it's that thought process that has to be reined in, for me.

I got home and thought about how I felt when those two gray-haired beautiful ladies turned around to greet me, and how I observed their hair more than their personalities...until later in the day. Shame on me. And believe, me I felt ashamed.

I sit among the grays, and yet I don't want to be one of them.

Then I remembered how every decade of life has had its insecurities and pride and angst. We wonder if we will fit in when we're a young teen, if he will like us or ask us out, if she will invite

us to that party or include us in her group. We move from that to wondering if we will lose friends because we don't have kids yet and they do, if we start a new church will we be accepted, or if our home will be up to par with that group of friends. So this idea of hoping to be liked for who we are and valued stays with us all of our lives...because we need to be valued!

Those gray haired women valued me. One knew my name and I was frustrated that I didn't remember hers. They complimented my outfit. They noticed so many things and talked for a while to both me and my husband. And they were single and alone. Yet joy exuded from their faces.

I am wearing gray hair and growing out my hair, two things new to me. I've always had short hair and colored it. But if I'm going to enter the world of grays then I need to embrace the grays and settle up my sense of value with HIM, as I do. He cares about me and my need for value just as much now as he did when I was entering adulthood in my early 20's, yet I've lost sight of that truth. He even wrote lots of verses in his book about the beauty and wisdom that comes with gray hair...and even says gray hair is a crown of glory.

How can one that wears a crown sit around feeling sorry for herself when her Father is the King?

I don't know, but I am changing my attitude...one gray hair at a time.