



A BUNDLE OF
THYME
For Every Season

Online Women's Magazine | thymemag.com

January 2025



TIPS

The Dressing – Loving January – by Marcy Lytle

Maybe you just cozy up on the sofa or in a corner during the month of January with a big blanket, your slippers or cozy socks on, and a soft pair of leggings and a long sweater. And that's perfect! But maybe...you are still celebrating the holidays and going out and about shopping, to dinner, or coffee dates with friends by the fire. Need some outfit inspiration? Here it is...if you love all things January:

Black Sweatsuit – I found this one on Amazon and it's cozy yet pretty – and you can wear the two pieces separately or together. It's a rich black color and can be dressed up or down. I'm enjoying it!

Oversized Colorblock – I have no idea if colorblock is a thing any more, but I know that oversized shirts are. And they're great for layering or just wearing for coziness in January. Find one that's a little thicker than a regular shirt and wear it and love it. I found this one on vacation.

Black Jeans – Do you own a pair? Or do you just have denim hues? I found this pair at Old Navy – a bit high waisted – and I love them. They're sort of a brushed black and they are one of my favorite pairs of pants. This red flannel shirt was Old Navy as well, and they had lots of colors! I'll keep wearing this on into February!

Something Different – I found these checkered pants at Urban Outfitters on clearance and loved them. Then later I shopped on Amazon and found the perfect sweater to go with. Super cozy and comfortable for all of those after-Christmas sale excursions...or date night!

Stripes and White – You don't have to quit wearing the hues of the season just because Christmas is over. I love this green striped sweater and I paired it with off white cargo jeans from Old Navy, along with a tan sweater scarf.

Browns and Suede – I love this suede jacket and have had it for a few years. I layered it over a sweater and added a belt and it's super warm and pretty. Layers, of course, are best for cold weather. And layering suede with all your browns from the fall...well that's just magical and wintry!

Hats and Sweaters – Another layered look for you, using a long cardigan sweater over an unbuttoned shirt dress worn as a jacket! It's fun to just stand in your closet and see what items you can layer together, isn't it? Add a Sherpa cap and you're good to go!

Layers, sweatsuits, scarves, something different, new jeans, and oversized coziness – that's the prescription for a jolly January in your closet after the holidays are over, and the newness begins...

Seven for You – Hobbies – by the Panel of Women

Do you have a hobby, or several, or none? I love to meet other women that have hobbies and marvel at what other friends do in their spare time to wind down, be creative, or produce something awesome. We asked our panel of women to share with us some of their hobbies, just in case you too want to be inspired to try something new in 2025!

Three hobbies for me!

Word games. I really enjoy playing word games. I play Words with Friends with two ladies: one lives in Colorado and the other lives in Australia. I have been playing Words with Friends for 14 years! I play other daily word games from the NY Times on my phone, also. If anyone wants to play WWF, my username is: Ljomerc

Football. My mom tells me that I used to sit by myself and watch football as early as four years old. Why does a little dirty country girl love to watch football at four years old? I don't know! But this dirty suburban girl still really enjoys watching a competitive game of football. My family lived in Kansas City for 18 years, so we are Kansas City Chiefs fans.

Gardening. This is why I'm always dirty! I love gardening. I love digging in the dirt. This has become harder as I've grown older and gotten more out of shape. But I love to grow my own food and flowers. I love cutting and bringing flowers inside, or giving them away. I think it is incredibly satisfying to cut things from plants in my yard and cook them for our meals. I have a raised bed on my back porch just for herbs. No bending over and lots of fresh things to cook with!

I make time for my hobbies because I value rest. I think God values rest. I get mean if I don't rest. Yay for hobbies! – Laura

My hobbies are ever evolving. I spent 10 years trying to grow vegetables in raised beds and then in several different kinds of containers. It was seldom productive and often frustrating. I then concentrated on the landscape plants in my yard. I spent hours researching plants and their water needs and growth, etc. Along comes 48 hours of a hard freeze or no rain for 58 days or crazy, hot temps and many of the plants don't make it. Once again, frustrating. Through all of this, I kept reminding myself that hobbies are supposed to bring us joy. I did not feel joy when I had to pull up all my dead plants.

For the last several years, I have landed on a hobby that has been a good fit for me. This little pup and I walk 4-5 times a week while I listen to audio books. I have grown to love watching the seasons change on our walks through the nearby greenbelt. I take notes or even pictures of neighbors' landscaping in case I get the bug to try some new things. I listen mainly to historical fiction sprinkled with a few classics through the year. When I am in the middle of a good book, I can't wait for the dog and I to hit the trail so I can listen to more of the story. We have to adjust seasonally with the temperature variations and the daylight changes.

This hobby has kept me moving, filled my mind with interesting stories of different eras, and brought me much joy. - Shelley

I started writing as a kid, and I wrote short stories and poems. I still create, when the words come out freely...flowing easily.

As a kid, I stuttered and was bullied in school for many years. Reading and writing were my safe space...I didn't stutter when I read and wrote...in my head, the words would come out just as they were intended.

Creating poems helps me express my fears, sadness, happiness, and emotions. It doesn't matter if anyone reads them or not...they are mine. This is one of hundreds of my words.

FYI: Pablo is Pablo Neruda who wrote a book of love poems. I love his words. - Cathy

I have always had many hobbies. Some of which I still do as an older woman like writing, drawing, crafts, and organizing. Some hobbies I can't do so much now like woodwork and painting. And I'm talking about painting our house. I now mostly enjoy cooking and sewing. One of my favorite items I've ever sewn was completed just this last year. We had most of our grandkids coming for a weekend, so I bought each child a pillow and made their own personal favorite themed pillowcase, and I also made a blanket for the baby. We had pillowcases of unicorns, dinosaurs, tie dye, and sports. And they got to take them home.

Another hobby is word search puzzles. I enjoy just sitting and working in my puzzle books. But I also enjoy anything that has to be put together. To me, almost everything is like a puzzle, and it must be done just right to make it work. Like when I'm cooking, organizing sewing projects, or cleaning and redoing a closet. This is probably why I have so many hobbies. So many things need to be done. – Carole

I guess I'd have to say I regularly enjoy reading, and I have a stash of a dozen books I hope to find the leisure time to enjoy. I also enjoy watching my herb garden grow, and going outside to snip some cilantro or parsley or basil, for a meal. But now that I think about it, I think I love organizing and redecorating the most. It's quite pleasurable for me to re-do a shelf, a cabinet, or set out new decor for each season, and I thoroughly love the hunt for that new color, or a different pillow there on the sofa, or just rearranging my hall tree in the entry. So I'm not a one hobby type of girl. I just like to either escape into a story; create in the kitchen with natural things, or make something pretty in my space...whenever I have 10 minutes to two hours...as often as I get the chance! – Marcy

My most enjoyable hobby is sewing. I had several influences, including my mom and my grandmother. But my 8th grade sewing teacher, Mrs. Ressa, was my biggest influence. She was way ahead of her time. She made a 'capsule wardrobe' long before such a phrase was ever coined. She made 10 knee-length, solid colored straight skirts, and she rotated the skirts with different colored button down shirts! That way, she had endless combinations! My favorite, and I remember them well, was her olive green skirt with the light blue button down shirt. If it was cold, she would drape a sweater over her shoulders!

One thing I've made that I really enjoy wearing is a tiered jean and flannel skirt. The top of the skirt is made from a pair of jeans (just down to the zipper in front and pockets in back), and sewn onto that in tiers are SEVEN men's flannel shirts cut into 8x8 squares. I used some of the button plackets, pockets, and cuffs to add interest to some of the squares. The bottom tier has 48 squares and makes the skirt very swishy and twirly! Fun, even at my age. - Debbie

Cousin Moms – Inside Fun – by Charissa and Kamrin

January is cold most places...even in the south...and maybe the kids are bored, Mom and Dad are stir crazy, and what do families do then? We asked our cousin moms to share what they do with the kids in the cold wintertime...if they are stuck inside.

Charissa

The first thing I always think is, “Is it really too cold?” We just bundle up the kids and send them outside to have fun, in layers! But there are some days when it’s just too cold, or pouring rain, and we can’t be outside.

One thing we do is crafts. Our three girls love crafts. We make jewelry, we color, use colored pencils, and create with playdough. The girls also use their imagination, like playing school and going to work. They set up different areas of the house for these. They’ve also set up a concession stand or grocery store, using cardboard boxes, etc. Sometimes, they have a “secret club” - a closet downstairs, with a password and rules. They also love gymnastics, and they set up routines and stations.

As a mom with a bit of OCD, I have to let my guard down and let them play, because yes – it all creates a mess! But at the end of the day, they’re having fun and being creative.

We also watch movies as a family, but we do try to limit the screen time, so we’re not doing this all day!

When the girls say, I’m bored, I say that’s good – let the creative juices flow. I also tell them I have lots for them to do, like cleaning. And then they say, “We’re not that bored!” And then their imaginations start running...

Kamrin

Cold weather! We don’t really have extended extreme weather here where we live, and we don’t struggle a lot with not being able to go outside. My boys will be outside in whatever weather, unless it’s 20 degrees or less! However, if it’s a wet winter or storms come through, as we shift back and forth from warm to cold, the kids can go stir crazy inside. Thankfully, at their ages now, it’s not as hard to keep the kids busy.

My husband and I both work at home, so the kids are old enough to entertain themselves. The boys will go outside if they can, and our daughter is very artsy, so she will make slime, or draw, or paint, or talk to her friends or make movies, or write! I’m thankful my kids do find things to do.

Our daughter is better at inside fun than the boys. But if they are inside, they love movies and video games.

On the weekends, if we are home and it’s cold and rainy and we’re indoors, we love movies as a family. Friday nights are often movie nights. We do like to play board games but it’s a challenge sometimes to find one we all love. We do love the board game Clue. We play video

games with our Switch that we can all play together. We also love the game of Life. The kids like Rummikub and card games. One of the faves is Zombie Run.

We have also played a three color challenge. We provide paper and markers or crayons. We write a bunch of nouns on paper and draw from a bucket – maybe like a cow. Everyone shuts their eyes and chooses three random colors and they draw that thing in those colors. (I'm the worst artist of the five!)

Sometimes, we do go for a cozy car ride. It's very budget friendly and fun. We get a blanket, wear our house shoes, and we go get a hot cocoa or snack from Sonic, or even a blizzard from DQ (yes, in the winter!) We are so excited that the ice cream doesn't melt (as it does here in the summer!).

One particular memory is when we had a winter blintz – no power or water – and we were inside for days! Boredom was actually good, because they created awesome things when they were bored. One of our sons built an entire dinosaur out of cardboard. My daughter has written stories and plays or choreographed dances. My youngest built Legos. Technology is good, but disconnecting is good, too!

I am very thankful we aren't stuck inside too much during the winter, here in the south! And this particular January, my daughter and I are hoping to cook together!

In the Kitchen – January Yum – by Marcy Lytle

We made some of these in the past few weeks and loved every dish. January is all about comfort, and each one of these comforted and sang goodness to our bellies! Try one, or try all!

Chorizo Corn Dip

We made this for our Thanksgiving table and it was a hit! We continued to eat it the next few days, even serving it over fries. It's so good and tasty.

- 1 pound fresh chorizo or spicy bulk pork sausage
- 2 cans (15-1/4 ounces each) whole kernel corn, drained
- 1/2 cup finely chopped sweet red pepper
- 1 cup finely chopped seeded jalapeno pepper (about 4 peppers)
- 6 green onions, chopped
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1-1/2 teaspoons chili powder
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 3 cups shredded Monterey Jack cheese
- Tortilla chips

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. In a large skillet, cook chorizo over medium heat until cooked through, 6-8 minutes, breaking into crumbles; drain.
2. In a large bowl, combine cooked chorizo and the next 9 ingredients. Transfer to an ungreased 10-in. cast-iron skillet or 13x9-in. baking dish.
3. Bake until heated through, 30-35 minutes. Serve warm, with tortilla chips.

Falafel Bowl

This was just an impromptu bowl night, using some frozen falafel balls we had in the freezer. You need to get some!

- Brown rice (quick cook)

- Falafel balls
- Almonds (or any nuts)
- Cucumbers
- Shredded carrots
- Olives
- Avocado
- Dressing of your choice

Cook the rice, and heat the falafel. Add butter and salt and pepper to the cooked rice and place as the base into your bowls. Arrange the falafel, and all the other ingredients in the bowl. Serve with a nice light dressing to drizzle over top (Tzatziki or Tahini)

Winter Salad

We headed to the market one weekend and then used what we bought, along with a few veggies and things from the fridge, to make a winter salad that was delish:

- Greens (we had romaine and arugula)
- Cilantro
- Broccoli
- Carrots
- Red onion
- Celery tops
- Bacon (fried and crumbled)
- Cheddar cheese grated
- Bbq chickpeas (found at World Market)
- Honey mustard dressing

Just place the greens in a bowl and top with all the ingredients and enjoy with the dressing!

Fried Green Tomatoes

We saw these at the market and bought some. They turned out SO GOOD!

- Green tomatoes
- ½ c corn meal
- ½ c flour
- Egg and milk
- Canola oil
- Salt and pepper
- Ranch dressing

Slice the green tomatoes while you're heating your canola oil in a frying pan (about an inch deep). Place corn meal and flour mixed together in a bowl. Crack one egg and add a bit of milk in another bowl and whisk together. Dip each tomato slice in the milk mixture then into the dry mix, back into the egg and back into the dry, then place on a plate. When the oil is hot, place

the tomatoes into the pan – not crowded – and fry. They fry quickly. Flip so both sides are golden.

Drain on paper towels and salt and pepper them. Serve with Ranch or other dip or salsa of your choice.

Chili and Rice Wraps

This is a recipe from my vault – easy and so tasty – great for the family on a cold night in...

- 1 can chili
- 1 c Minute or quick cooking rice
- Shredded cheese
- Chopped tomatoes
- Sliced green onions
- 6 inch flour tortillas

Bring 1 can of chili and ½ cup water to a boil. Stir in 1 cup quick cooking rice, and cover. Cook on low heat for 5 minutes. Spoon mixture onto the tortillas, and then add all the toppings. Fold ends and roll up or serve like tacos.

Granola Made Easy

I found this recipe and tried it. We loved it!

- 1/2 cup almond butter
- 1/2 cup maple syrup
- 1 cup pecans
- 1 cup walnuts
- 1 cup oats

Preheat oven to 350 and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Mix almond butter and syrup in a big bowl. Add in the oats, pecan and walnut – mix all together.

Transfer to baking sheet and bake 20-25 minutes, flipping halfway through.

Once done, turn off oven and let granola cool there another 20 minutes.

Break into pieces and add dried cranberries if you wish (I did!) and store in airtight container for 2-3 weeks.

Tried and True – Last Month’s Learning

December is over and it’s January. Seriously? Of course, there was so much going on during the holiday season that I learned a lot! I bet you did, too. Feel free to add what you learned in the comment box and I’ll add it to next month’s story!

Did you know that *hymnody* is a word? It means the singing or composition of hymns. Learned that in our advent reading!

If you eat in the car a lot like we do, you’ll love these French Fry holders – they work like a charm!

I love this little set of small boards, great for spreading out hummus and tabbouleh and feta for dipping with pita chips!

Need a game to play with the family on cold nights in? Exploding Kittens is fun for all!

We bought a rolling cart over five years ago and forgot about it! Recently saw it, took it with us to markets when shopping, to hold all the things. It’s the best.

I had lots of tiny stud earrings in a drawer and hardly wore them because they were jumbled up...until I saw these earring cards. Great for organizing them all...and now I wear these tiny jewels again!

I love, love new calendars, and maybe you already have one on your desk...but maybe not. Canoe2 is a great source for this cute wooden base with calendar cards for 2025!

Do you subscribe to any magazines? My favorite is *Magnolia Journal*. I can start you a subscription if you’re interested!

We’ve decided no more heavy boxes of Christmas décor to move around or lift. So, we opted for smaller boxes and grouped things by weight, so the boxes are not heavy at all. Yay!

One of my favorite lotions is JR Watkins peppermint lotion – the tingly feel of the peppermint and the scent – is wonderful for January and winter vibes.

Have you seen the hoodie blanket? We took it as a gift to a Christmas party and everyone wanted it – it’s plush and warm and so comfy!

I have been using this swan soup ladle that actually floats in the pot and it’s so cool! You need it for winter soups!

Trader Joe’s has the best selection of dark chocolates – right above all the frozen produce – on the shelves. Honestly, all of it is good. Have a New Year’s party and provide lots of choices!

If you didn’t get enough of Christmas shows this year, look for Christmas TV show episodes on YouTube and catch some! We loved the Hazel episode!



HOME

Practical Parenting – Include the Kids – by Marcy Lytle

I remember hearing over and over again when I was raising my kiddos that quality time was more important than quantity time. And it was often said to and by working moms, to ease their guilt and make them feel better about having to be gone all day from their children. And I get it. We are all working moms in some form or another, and it seems that days are endlessly filled with housework and preparing meals and all of the maintenance of a family, so it's hard to know if we're spending enough time with our kids. Especially, if our kids are now in sports and music and theater and all the things!

Maybe we just need to be reminded that we're doing our best, and be offered some practical ways to include our kids so that quality time is right there in the living and the doing and the busyness, and how to purpose to make it so:

If we're cleaning house, we can put on music and let the kids take turns choosing the songs, while everyone does their part. Dance and smile, and make it a family time like no other.

If we're paying bills and making schedules at our desk, we ask the kids to bring their books and sit with us while they do homework, in a circle with pillows all around, and a snack in the middle for all to enjoy.

If we're making meals in the kitchen, making sure everyone gets fed, and then the cleanup awaits, we can delegate. Moms, we can delegate! Assign the oldest kid the job of making a chore chart when it comes to meal time, where kids rotate on the help they give – one sets the table, one removes the dishes, one rinses and places in dishwasher, one helps prep the veggies, etc. and include Dad in that rotation as well!

If we're overwhelmed and need a day to clean closets everywhere in the house, we can make it a family affair and a day to be remembered. We can hand the kids boxes that are labeled – throw away, give away, keep – and write down what we expect from each kid and let them check it off. Maybe it says: sort your clothes and put them away, place every toy where it goes, pick three things to donate, dust and vacuum. At every hour mark (or 30 minutes or 15!) ring a bell and have everyone come to the hallways and jump up and down and scream, then go back to the closet!

If we're stressed and need quiet time we can gather the family and tell them, "Mom needs quiet time, and so do you!" Tell everyone to grab a blanket or pillow and/or a book and head to a corner or a spot (no arguing allowed) and set the timer for 30 minutes or more, when no sounds or movement are allowed except the turning of a page or click of an iPad.

If our bags and totes and our cars are full of junk, we can all an emergency plan to organize and reset once again! The family brings in everything from the car. Dad and/or the oldest kids are assigned to vacuuming the car, and the others help mom unload totes, etc. And to celebrate a job well done, the family piles in the car for a trip for ice cream. Yes, in winter, spring, summer or fall – ice cream for all.

In other words, we can include the kids in the mundane, in the things that make us tense, in the family clutter, and teach them how to maintain and still have fun and be together and live.

And then when all that quantity time has produced some order, we can have quality time in peace.

Sounds like a dream, doesn't it? Enlist your family's help and make this dream come true.

I Don't Do Teens – Important Things – by Marcy Lytle

This photo.

This expression.

Well, it's everything.

And no, she's not a teen in that photo, but this story is about raising teens, and it was inspired by that photo of my niece when she was baptized by her dad...whom we lost this year. Everything about that photo speaks to me, and I hope it speaks to you, too...to keep on keeping on as parents.

There are rituals we tap into when our kids are little like baptisms, dedications, reading stories at night to the littles, affirmation ceremonies, birthday parties, and more that often fade away as these same babies and toddlers and kiddos become teenagers and are not around as much anymore. And when they get their licenses and freedom, and start becoming little adults, a lot of those things we did with them are just memories.

But here's the thing. Those are lasting. And I'll tell you why.

If you baptized your child as a kid, you can continually pray over them for faith to be part of their fabric of life no matter what you see at the present moment. You can stand on the faith you deposited in them, and see it grow...one day.

If you dedicated your children to God and promised to teach them his ways, even if you've failed miserably, it's never too late to make amends, simply ask forgiveness from them and from Him, and lead the way again by turning toward Him yourself. Kids don't need to see perfect parents. They need to see parents that turn to God in their imperfection.

If you read stories and books to your kids, they will remember those times and cherish them, and they'll one day read to their kids. So keep those books and give them to your teens' kids when they get married. Save some to read to your own grandchildren one day. And slip into your teen's room sometimes at night and offer to read with him or to him...surprise him/her with this!

If you were so good at affirming your tiny kiddos with a pat on the back, a hug, or a "way to go" but now you can hardly get them to look your way, then leave notes on their mirrors, treats under their pillows, any way to continue to affirm who they are – even if who they are makes you sad or hurts your heart. They belong to Him and they are beautiful in his sight, and they need to be told this, often, by their parents.

If you recall those elaborate birthday parties where you invited every kid in the room from elementary school, or you made it the event of the month with balloons and amusement park rides, etc. but now your teens just want cash and to be left alone, you can still give. And give without expecting anything back, as if you're sowing seed into hard ground that you can trust that He will water. Pray about what to give them, bless them with a card with a handwritten

message, continue to celebrate their day...and they will never forget...even if they turn their heads and walk away.

Teens are a puzzle, aren't they? One day they want their stuffed animal and blanket, and the next day they're independently fierce in word and deed. They're trying their wings and we're watching in terror as we're sure they're going to crash to the ground.

This photo of my niece and her dad shows immense emotion as the dad is praying and the little girl is realizing that this is an important thing. Giving one's heart to Christ is eternal. And trusting Christ with our lives is paramount. And leaving our kids in His hands is vital, if we're going to survive the teen years and beyond.

Be encouraged yourself as you continue to give and train, when the training gets tough. He's well able to keep all of those things we commit to him, especially the most important things – our kids.

Homesteading – Memories and Emotions – by Leyanne Enterline

Almost done...

We're at the final stages of moving and things are wrapping up with the new build!

We traveled for the holidays and will be coming back home to a finished HOUSE.

I can't even believe it!

We literally have NO furniture, so I do need to work on gathering some things. As I reflect back, I get a little emotional thinking about the journey. It's been quite the process and we have laughed a lot, cried a lot, learned a lot, and are so thankful.

We have such great memories of living tiny and will have stories to tell for forever! I know it had an impact on all of us for the good and the bad.

Though we are beyond ready to have more space, I think it's a little surreal that living tiny is coming to a close! I think of the Israelites (and no we were not abused and taken captive) and how when they were finally freed, but they were almost missing their bondage because that's what they got used to. They were in a terrible situation, and after leaving and moving forward, they were sad and complained of their new situation.

I want to pray that we remember the positives of tiny living but also remember the parts we didn't like and how God is delivering us from that! I'm not complaining, because we did have a roof over our head and food to eat, but it was definitely a struggle. Living tiny was one situation that I maybe wouldn't recommend experiencing for such a long time if possible!

As I think of moving into a larger space and the excitement and struggles that will come with all the newness, I want to thank the Lord for what He has brought us through and to remember that He is with always through the happy and sad. And we learn and grow through the process.

Remember love grows best in tiny spaces!

In Each Room – Shop and Store – by Marcy Lytle

It might be your attic, a designated closet or two, special boxes, or somewhere...and it's the place where you keep all your wrapping paper and ribbons and bows, it's where you place your holiday décor until next December, or it's where you store all of the new items you bought after Christmas on sale that you can't wait to set out when Christmas rolls around again.

It also might be that you are the type of person that is so organized that everything is perfectly in its place by January 1 and your home is in order, every closet and attic space is labeled, and things are put back together beautifully like a magazine page...

BUT...

If you're like me, I don't want to do all of that organizing right after Christmas. I'm tired from the lists and the wrapping and the baking and the doing, so trying to make sense of all the chaos right after the holidays is not what I want to spend my time doing!

I have come up with a system that works for me, and gives me fun all year long, as I tackle each task in each room:

All of the wrapping paper, ribbons and bows, scissors and tags are in a specific closet and the mess from Christmas just gets stacked and placed in that closet until July. July is the month where I organize and go through all of what I have, make a list of what I need, and I'm in the mood – because it's hot outside and I'm excited that the fall is sort of near! July is closet time for organizing wrapping paper, etc.!

All of the seasonal dishes and towels, etc. are also just stacked away in this big storage unit I have in the garage, and I do not want to tackle that either...right after Christmas. So, I just take everything out there, place it somewhere on the shelves, and then pick another month for this, as well! It's usually sometime in the spring when I'm in the mood, on a rainy day. I step out in the garage and empty the whole unit, and I stack and donate and organize to my heart's delight.

All of the Christmas décor like tree trimming and wreaths, and yard décor, etc. does get put into boxes when we take it all down, but it's not neat. We're usually tired of taking it all down and we just want it out of sight. However, this IS the one thing we spend a bit of time looking at before we place the boxes away. And that's because we need our fresh memory of how we liked this or that, if it worked or not, etc. So we take a Saturday and wind up the lights, label the boxes, make room for all the stuff...

BUT...

We leave these boxes down through about mid-February because of all the after holidays sales. I must say I take great delight in shopping the sales all the way through mid-February, because I often find a brand new wreath 75% off, or the cutest manger scene or snowman, or a great set of tea towels, etc. – and I want to have a spot for these in the boxes! Then...the boxes are put away.

And then...when Christmas rolls around and I'm ready to decorate, the boxes are opened and I am so excited as I see those new things once again!

Maybe you have your own system and places and how you do things. Awesome. But if you don't, consider planning and waiting and doing what you can do, and want to do, and then picking a time later to finish...it's okay to do that! And it's quite fun.

Rooted in Love - The Truth Is I'm Treasured – by Kaelin Scott

When people find out you homeschool your kids, one of their biggest questions is how your kids will get “socialization.” It always kind of makes me laugh because it's not like school is the only place where kids can be social. My kids literally make friends with other kids everywhere we go. They're kids, so it's easy for them. Plus, they have each other to play with, and they're absolute best friends.

What people don't talk about much, though, is socializing for homeschool moms. That's something that no one really warns you about, and I'm going to be honest with you. It's tough.

Making friends as a homeschool mom is so hard, especially when you also live way out in the country. There's not a lot of socializing going on in my little piece of the world. I don't mind most of the time. This is the life I've chosen, being with my kids 24/7, investing my time into their education and childhood. It comes with the territory, and I've gotten used to it over the years.

But sometimes it really stinks. It can feel so isolating and lonely at times, like I don't have anyone to talk to. Sure, I talk to my husband all the time. In fact, I constantly yack his ear off. Still, I sometimes find myself wallowing in self-pity because I lack adult interaction most of the time. Not that I'm a huge extrovert or anything. I'm actually a pretty big homebody. I guess I just struggle with balance and feeling like I belong. Sometimes it feels like I'm just existing in my own little world. I absolutely love my family and homeschooling and living in the country, but there are times where I just grow weary.

If none of this makes sense to you, that's okay. I'm probably rambling on without making an actual point. I guess my point is that we all get lonely sometimes. Everyone gets weary and feels down on themselves once in a while. Sometimes life feels isolating. Maybe you're surrounded by people but you still feel alone. I get it. I know how you feel.

On those days where I feel sad and lonely, I remind myself that this is just a season and feelings are only that. *Feelings*. I might feel alone, but I'm not. I have an amazing husband and two wonderful children who surround me with love and laughter every single day. I have a playful puppy and a grumpy cat to pet and play with. I have a yard full of chirping birds and beautiful trees and sunsets that pictures can't quite capture. I have a God who treasures me beyond my wildest dreams.

There's evidence of His love all around me every single day. Even when I feel alone, He's always there. I can always trust Him to hold me and let me rest in His embrace. In the busy seasons or the slow seasons, lonely or not, I know I'm never alone. That's the truth, no matter what my feelings might tell me. The truth is what I'm holding onto when I feel all alone, and you can hold onto that truth, too. Because just as He loves me and treasures me, God loves and treasures you. And you are never, ever alone.

A Night to Remember – Sturdy Joy – by Marcy Lytle

What a phrase – joy that can't be knocked down even when circumstances aren't good – that's the sturdy kind we all need! And that's the *Joy to the World* that Jesus came to give all of us. Joy down in our hearts to stay!

Preparation: Have the song Joy to the World cued up to play at the start of this devotion. Then find three "sturdy" things that are no longer so and have them ready to reveal (maybe a table or chair with a broken leg, a toy or decoration that used to sit up but now falls over, or even your car that now has miles on it and needs repairs)

Joy to the World, the Lord is come, Let earth receive her King

Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing

And heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing!

The whole world was waiting on the promised Messiah, the Savior of the World, and he came as a baby who would then become our King. That's the message of the Christmas story. A Savior born so that all who believe could have sins forgiven and eternal life with him! He is the Joy of the World. And now that Christmas is over, we can still enjoy the lyrics to that song!

What brings you joy? (Let kids answer and write them down) – maybe family, toys, pets, friends, snow days, candy? Why do those make you feel joyful? (Let the kids answer).

Joy is a feeling of great pleasure or happiness.

Now, what if you lose one of the things that brings you joy, or that thing is broken or somehow doesn't bring you joy anymore? Has anyone ever lost a toy? Or had one break? What about a pet that ran away? What happens to our joy when we lose the things that bring us joy? (We are sad, we cry, we want it back...)

And... what does the word sturdy mean? (It's strong and powerful). What are some sturdy things in our house or family? What about the fridge! It's heavy and can't really be moved very easily. What else?

But even the most sturdy things or people we know can still be moved or broken or lost...

Jesus came to bring us sturdy joy, the kind of joy that can't be knocked down or destroyed!

The beginning of *Joy to the World* says to let heaven and nature sing. What two lights shine in our skies by day and by night? (The sun and the moon). Would you say they are sturdy? They appear every single day and night and nothing can stop them!

Jesus was born as a baby, he grew up and obeyed his parents and then began to love others as his Father sent him to do. And then what happened to Jesus when he was a grown man and was taken to a cross to die? Do you think he lost his joy?

Guess what? His joy is us – in our knowing Him – the sturdy joy that never leaves us or disappoints us...or Him!

(Bring out the three items that were once sturdy but now they're not. Or have them ready to show, one by one.)

Every sturdy thing that we can buy or place in our homes can eventually get scratches, wear out, or break...and even tumble over or quit working.

But guess what? Jesus is our sturdy joy that cannot ever be taken from us! Romans 15:13 says this,

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him.

You might be sad some days, because something that was once sturdy in your life is now broken, but you can talk to Jesus and find that He was, and will always be, the *Joy of the World*.

Let's prepare our hearts to receive Him now: (read the prayer and have family repeat each line)

Jesus, thank you that you are our sturdy joy.

Jesus, we invite you into our hearts to stay.

Jesus, thank you for all of creation...

That reminds us that you are our King.



YOU

Healthy Habits – Stave Off Cranky – by Marcy Lytle

Are you cranky, after the holidays? You've now got all the decorations to put away. The kids are all out of whack with their sleeping schedules and yet, school is starting again. The house will look bleak and lonely once all the lights are gone. And you're not sure the kids liked their gifts. And, oh. You didn't even like what you got, or didn't get. Maybe everything seems overwhelming in a different way from how it did in December...and you're craving something...but you don't know what it is.

All of the above and more can make for cranky words and looks and attitudes towards those we love the most, so how do we take that "joy to the world" feeling right on into the new year of 2025?

- Lists are your friend. Place everything that concerns you and overwhelms you and write it down on a list. Pray about the list, physically lift it up as you pray to Him, and ask Him for help to do one thing at a time, as he leads.
- Breathe. Whatever you do to breathe, do it. Maybe it's coffee/quiet time, a walk down the street, a visit with a friend, time with a good book. Take time to breathe, no matter how many things are on your list to do.
- Elevate your thoughts. Your mind really can be your worst enemy or your friend. As you find yourself thinking "downer" thoughts, lift them up with thanksgiving. Give thanks for at least three unlikely things each morning to set your thoughts higher.
- Burn candles or simmer smells. Keep the pine scents and the vanilla wafting through the kitchen all throughout January. That will send the crankiness away...as you breathe and then take in all that winter brings.
- Play music. So the Christmas carols were wonderful and bright, and you played them every day. Why do you have to stop? Or purchase a new album if you have a turn table, or make a whole new list on Spotify of new releases, and play them. And, of course, dance.
- Plan a weekend getaway. Get it on the calendar for late January or early February, just a night or two. In a small town, or in your own downtown, away in a hotel...if funds allow. If not, then just a day trip. Pick a new place to eat, somewhere to shop, maybe a theater in another town, or a trail to hike on a winter's day.
- Cry. Some days, we just need to cry to release all the tension we carried throughout the holidays of getting everything done and everyone served. Perhaps spend a day baking or not, cleaning or not, or just sitting in your car eating fast food by yourself, and crying about everything that's on your mind. Let it out and let the tears flow.

Hopefully, you're feeling less cranky and more hopeful by now. Cranky moments come and go daily, but cranky days and weeks place burdens on our shoulders that cause us to lash out at others and then despise ourselves.

No crankiness this year, because we're going to be of good cheer! I'm telling myself this, as well!

Under Pressure – Great Expectations – by Debbie Haynes

It seems as though the holidays were a long time arriving...but then they were over in the blink of an eye! And now we are entering a new year...with great encouragement!

There is an incredible amount of “noise” out there in the world...due to the availability of the internet full of voices. And they all say different things that can cause fear in the best of us! But as followers of Christ, we have to have our ears trained to hear His word above the din. This is because if we don't draw the line of hearing too much fearful noise, this tears down our faith in God's word.

That's exactly what happened to *Isaiah* in chapter 8: 11-14. Isaiah was challenged by God himself. Isaiah was warned not to think like everyone else did and not to call everything a conspiracy, living in dread of what frightens. Instead, he was to make the Lord of “heaven's armies” holy in his life. He was to preserve the teaching of God...to wait for the Lord and trust in Him.

So Isaiah told the people to seek God first to know what is true and right, and then compare what the king said with what God said.

Fear is a powerful enemy of faith and it destroys peace. Our world today fears the same thing the world feared then: war, terrorist attacks, disease, pollution – and more. And their fear robbed them of their faith in God.

However, verses 4-6 remind us that HE IS OUR HIDING PLACE. We can ask him to drive away fear of outside things so that our hearts stay focused on him, in an awesome and reverent way.

Over in the book of Lamentations chapter 3, Jeremiah was preaching a strong message to the people saying they should rise up in the night and cry to God, pour out their hearts like water to Him, and lift up their heads in prayer for all of the dire situations they were in. And in the middle of terror, Jeremiah says there is hope. Verse 22 says that the faithful love of the Lord never ends. His mercies never cease. They begin afresh every morning. The Lord is our inheritance. Verse 25 says the Lord is good to those who depend on him and search for him. And in verse 31 we are reminded that He shows compassion, again because of his great unfailing love. What awesome words of truth!

And thirdly, in *Psalms* 65 we are told how God provides abundantly for his own and that we can and should be thankful for his many, many blessings. We read that he faithfully answers our prayers with awesome deeds, and that God is the hope of everyone on earth. I love verse 8 where we read that from where the sun rises to where it sets, God inspires shouts of joy. There are such great visuals of God's care and provision and joy in this entire chapter!

If we plant ourselves firmly in Him, we can expect our year to be crowned with a great harvest, so that even the hard pathways overflow with abundance.

God gave strong words about not following the culture around us. Instead, we are called to tremble at the One who keeps us safe...

Inner Strength - Freedom in Creativity – by Michelle Wyatt

Have you ever heard the phrase “a helicopter parent?” I know most of us are familiar with the phrase “under child supervision.” So what is the right balance between giving a child freedom and protecting his/her safety?

I’ve come to accept that there is no textbook answer. I can suggest the following though. Trust your instincts, observe how your kids handle certain levels of freedom from a close distance and either increase or decrease accordingly, and ask questions of people whom you trust to be non-judgmental.

I’ll give you an example of how I did this with my 10 year old. This past month we have done a lot of arts and crafts and he has seen me use the hot glue gun lots of times. Matthew learns best by observing and then when he is allowed to take charge of creating something, he will ask questions and listen to instructions. For example, he picked up a fidget toy and looked around at different surfaces. My intuition was correct. I informed him that he could not glue anything to the wall or flooring. So, together we found a safe surface where he could glue. He then turned the toy into a contraption.

I wish I could explain what the contraption is used for, but I’m still figuring that out. Now in this particular case, I stayed in the same room with him. I wanted to make sure he was safe and followed the proper way to use such a tool. (He’s a smart kid and picks things up quickly.) I merely added some tips to help him be most successful, like we glued the objects together quickly after applying the glue and held them together for at least 15 seconds.

By giving him this freedom, I witnessed Matthew thinking outside of the box and his imagination soaring. I have lots of craft items and I left out those bends on purpose. That way he knew what he had permission to use. So, he chose to decorate his remote control car with small ornaments, shiny fake snow, a plastic ring box, and a miniature frosty figurine. The ring box is for the purpose of holding a note that he gave to his brother by way of the car. There’s no way I would have thought to decorate the car like he did. I am blown away and so proud of him every time I see it!

Going back to the tip I shared with either adding or subtracting the level of supervision needed based on observation, I scaled back my level of supervision after he successfully glued the fidget item to the unique surface without burning himself. By doing so, he surprised me with his decorated car, and my reaction meant a lot to him!

This process was not as easy on me as I may make it sound. Trust me, I had plenty of anxiety for a while. It takes a lot of strength to trust ourselves and kids.

But if I can do it, so can you!

A Hopeful Heart - Blessed in Brokenness – by Christina Oberon

Would you agree that it's hard, perhaps even impossible, to feel blessed while feeling broken? Brokenness has a weight to it, a heaviness that presses down on the soul. It's how I have felt lately, coping with grief. It's the shattering of our expectations, the fragments of plans that once seemed solid, lying jagged on the ground. In such moments, the word "blessed" can feel like a cruel paradox, a phrase reserved for someone else's highlight reel, far removed from the raw ache of our own reality.

Yet, what if the cracks in our lives are not merely wounds to be mourned but invitations to discover a blessing deeper than surface joy? What if brokenness is not the absence of wholeness, but the fertile soil where grace grows? These are the deep spaces I have been exploring, lately.

Brokenness has a peculiar way of forcing us to see what truly matters. When life is smooth and the path clear, it's easy to take things for granted, like our relationships, health, even the beauty of a sunrise. These become background noise in our busy lives. But when brokenness strikes, it strips away the unnecessary, leaving us with bare essentials: love, hope, and the quiet strength to keep going. In the emptiness, we discover a sacred kind of fullness.

Consider the image of a broken vase. At first glance, it seems ruined, its purpose lost. But if you hold it up to the light, you might notice something extraordinary; light spilling through the cracks, dancing on the walls in ways it never could have if the vase remained whole. The very thing that seemed to rob it of its beauty transforms it into something luminous.

So it is with us. Brokenness opens us to light we couldn't otherwise hold. It humbles us, reminding us of our humanity, our dependence on others, and the fragility of the lives we build. It's in these moments; when we're forced to let go of control and face the unknown, that blessings often whisper their way in. A kind word from a friend, a sunrise after a sleepless night, or the realization that even in despair, we are not alone.

And there's a quiet power in brokenness. It softens the heart, making room for empathy. The cracks in your story become bridges to another's pain. What once felt like a wound can transform into a wellspring of compassion, one day enabling you to offer hope to someone walking a similar path.

It's not that brokenness is easy or that we must romanticize suffering. There's nothing inherently beautiful about pain. But the beauty lies in what pain can teach us if we let it; about resilience, about grace, about the strength that comes from surrendering to something greater than ourselves.

To be blessed in brokenness is to realize that the breaking is not the end. It's the beginning of something new, a deeper understanding of ourselves. The pieces may never fit together quite as they were, but maybe they were never meant to. Perhaps the cracks aren't flaws but the places where blessings leak through.

So, would you agree that brokenness can hold blessings after all? Maybe not at first. Maybe not easily. Maybe I can't quite see it, yet. But if I hold it up to the light, I just might find it there, glimmering, unexpected, and real.

Life Right Now - Perspective - By: Jennifer Stephens

Right side, balcony. That's where we sit. Always. So, imagine our surprise when one Sunday morning after climbing the lengthy flight of stairs leading us to our seats, my husband and I arrive at the top and unexpectedly find another couple heedlessly planted in the spot we laid claim to many years ago. The nerve! Doesn't everybody know our names are very clearly written on each cushion in an effort to stave off newcomers? Okay, okay, maybe our names are written in invisible ink that only we can see. But still, these were OUR seats!

Well, I did what anyone would do in such a seat stealing situation. I marched right up to this seat swiping pair and I...I...I smiled and said, "Hi!" as my husband and I shuffled past our beloved seats, walking over to the other side of the balcony, eventually settling into two identical chairs on the left side of the upper level. Because sitting in "our seats," no matter how deeply we've sunk into our self-diagnosed creatures of habit condition, isn't really that important. And changing locations that day sure did provide some perspective.

When we're used to seeing things from only one point of view, it's easy to get used to thinking things would - and should - always be exactly the same. That our way is the only way. However, from our new seats we noticed we could see faces we don't normally get to see. And we discovered it was actually easier to see the pastor speaking from this new location. When the worship band played, we could see the guitar player – we didn't even know there WAS a guitar player! Throughout that morning's service we commented on all the little changes we noticed from this new vantage point.

How often do we get stuck in our own seats? Our own way of thinking? Only seeing things from our own perspective? It's easy to do. We stay where we're comfortable. But staying comfortable isn't how we grow. Especially in our relationships with other people. Perspective taking is vital in order to develop empathy for someone else.

In my classroom, we used to read a book called Duck! Rabbit! by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Tom Lichtenheld. The story is based on an 1890's illustration that kind of looks like a duck, but also kind of looks like a rabbit. Is it a duck drinking from the pond or a rabbit dipping his ears in the water? We each formed our opinions. Whew! These first graders were fierce with their individual reasons for why it was most definitely a duck or why it absolutely had to be a rabbit. Through our discussion, we learned it depends on each person's perspective – built from our past experiences and understanding that led to a decision. We also learned there was no wrong way of thinking about this – just different. It was important in our classroom community to always consider each other's perspectives.

While the passage of time usually offers a perspective shift, sometimes in life we find ourselves saddled with a negative always/never mindset. And we need to make a change. Right now. Maybe we're discouraged. Out of control. Little inconveniences seem like insurmountable problems. This often requires a shift in our focus. Like when we're riding on an airplane. Taking flight and glancing out the window from thousands of feet in the air gives a different perspective. Gigantic trees become bite-size pieces of broccoli, semi-trucks are suddenly Matchbox cars vrooming across a ribbon road, and three-story houses turn into miniscule Monopoly game pieces. And the everchanging landscape of the Heartland below transforms into a patchwork

quilt of shapes filled with browns, greens, and blues. The trees, the vehicles, and the houses didn't change. Our perspective did.

Whenever life starts to feel too messy and I need to see things through a clear lens, I'm reminded of God's offer of divine perspective. In Corinthians 4:18, we read, "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." When we fix our eyes, our hearts, and our minds on God, our perspective follows. And when we're navigating relationships and life, sometimes a changed perspective is exactly what we need.

Even if it means switching seats every now and then.



MARRIAGE

For Better or Worse - I Promise – by Kaelin Scott

I was really young when I married my husband. I didn't know much at all about marriage or even about life in general. I had rose-colored glasses on, thinking we'd ride off into the sunset and never worry or fight or struggle. I still had a lot of growing up to do, but I was old enough to make a commitment. And it's a commitment I didn't take lightly, even back then when I was so naïve.

We didn't know everything about each other when we said our vows. Heck, we didn't even fully know ourselves. But we knew we wanted to be together, and that was enough. We promised to spend our life together, through every season. And that promise still stands today.

We've chosen each other through thick and thin, and we choose each other still. It hasn't always been easy, but we've both committed to making that choice.

There have been challenges and obstacles along the way. We've had to put our marriage before many things and work through difficult circumstances. We've grown together and trusted each other with some really tough stuff. But with every battle we fight together, our bond grows even stronger. It gets easier and easier to keep the commitment we made, because we know that hard times don't last forever. If we can hang on and stay in the fight, we'll make it through together.

Sometimes marriage is hard, but it's not to be taken lightly. Maybe it's been years since you made that promise and you don't have those warm fuzzy feelings you had back then. It might feel easier to give up than hang onto those words you said long ago. And it probably would be easier, to tell you the truth.

But easier isn't always better. Staying together is hard, but it's worth it. Choosing each other – no matter how much time has passed – is worth it. No victory comes without fighting a battle first. Marriage isn't supposed to be rainbows and butterflies. Sure, those newlywed days of pure bliss are nice, but they don't last forever. And they're not supposed to. That's not what marriage is truly about.

It's about choosing someone even when it's hard. It's about committing to put someone else's needs before your own. It's about fighting through life's challenges with your partner by your side. It's knowing that someone has your back, and having theirs too. It's sticking to your commitment, even when life tries to tear you apart.

And most of all it's loving someone, every day, in every season, because that's what you promised to do.

Date Night Fun – In with Friends – by Marcy Lytle

January is usually cold...I suppose...in lots of places. And maybe we're stuck indoors more than other times of the year, so why not invite another couple or two for date night in...and make it fun? Include your single friends as well!

Books and Chocolate – We recently had a fun night with two other couples. Everyone brought their favorite book wrapped up, and we had a book exchange. And...we just had a table full of chocolates. What an easy get together to have – no cooking involved! Trader Joe's was my store of choice for all the chocolates. And we all went home with a new book to read!

Card Table Fun – Set up your card table and chairs in front of the TV and set it with lights and fancy cloth napkins...for four...and invite one couple to join. Place the TV on some background music or scene for the season. For January, choose a snow scene and winter playlist! Order pizza, and pick up churros from your local Mexican market. If the weather allows, slip outside to the fire pit for the churros as you warm up the chocolate and caramel sauce for dipping.

Grilled Cheese, Anyone? – Ask a few couples over and ask them to bring a block of cheese. You provide the bread and some add-ons, and let each one make their own sandwich as you sit down and enjoy by the fire. Watch a movie together, or just share your Christmas stories and enjoy each other's company.

Remember When – Take a bowl or basket and place little slips of paper for conversation starters for your guests. Invite a few couples over for snacks and hot cider. Just set out pretzels, trail mix, grapes and easy things like that! Each one draws a slip of paper and remembers when... (examples – your first big disappointment, a time when you were embarrassed as a kid, the best Christmas gift you ever received and why, the most hideous outfit your mom made you wear, describe in detail your first car, etc.)

Games Around the Room – Set up four to six stations of childhood games: pickup sticks, jacks, Trouble, Candyland, etc. if you have them. If not, then choose different card games: Old Maid, Snap, Uno, etc. Have a bowl of snacks at each setting. Have couples and friends play each game for 20 minutes and then switch places, until all games have been played and snacks enjoyed! How fun this will be!

January can be the month when new friends and memories are made, and perhaps a tradition you might want to start and keep all year long.

After 40 Years – The Foot Rub – by Marcy Lytle

A friend recently saw the above photo I posted on social media, praising my husband for giving such good foot rubs. And she texted to ask me how to get her husband to do the same! Well, of course, there's no real answer to that question, because the reason my husband rubs my feet is because he enjoys it. Or at least, he's a good pretender!

Another thing my husband does, which I really enjoy as well, is he sits and we read...and then he reads aloud to me. We enjoyed this SO MUCH during the time of advent in December, and we're going to keep it up! We have a basket of books in our front room, two comfy chairs, and we enter there at night and are actually excited to do this!

I'll say this. After decades of being married, we still have lots to learn in the area of communication. However, I'm thankful for so many things that have settled in to be the norm, and those nightly foot rubs and reading are the best.

You may be wondering. Do I rub his feet? The answer is no, because he doesn't want his feet rubbed. (And I'm not mad about it...)

So back to my friend's question. Is there a way to "get" our husband to rub our feet, read with us, plan date nights, do all the list of things we want him to do to enhance our marriage? I'm not sure there is, and I'm pretty sure he wouldn't want to be coerced into doing these things, if it was something I pressed him to do too often.

What he has learned (and I'm still learning) is that I LOVE to have my feet rubbed, he doesn't mind doing it, it's something he can do when we're watching a show, and he knows how grateful I am afterwards and I always make sure to thank him! He sees the result of the foot rub, which is me being in a happy mood!

I'll be honest. I have pressed hard for certain things in our marriage, been bitter when they didn't happen, and hurt my husband's feelings multiple times with my words. There are some things we can voice that we'd like to have in our marriage, and then once they're voiced, that's the time to say nothing and pray.

I've seen it work over and over again, and sometimes (okay, most times) the work is in me...not him.

We see things other husbands are doing that ours aren't doing, and we want that kind of husband. Or...we have this "love language" that he never speaks, so we tell him over and over again that he's not performing. We want our husbands to be everything we aren't, and to complete us. Maybe I should be writing this personally, and say that *I* wanted all of that, but maybe it's *we*, too.

I know that for me, the attitude behind my request is everything. And then belittling and losing desire for him because he's not our "perfect" image can ruin my good marriage.

So, I'm still telling myself this after all these years, and we are definitely still growing...

- My husband is a gift and he has gifts, ones I need to notice and appreciate
- My husband is a man to be honored for who he is, and it's a privilege to pray for him and watch his Father work in my husband's heart
- My husband gives to me in ways I take for granted and sometimes don't notice, but when I do...he's oh, so handsome

We will most likely watch a movie tonight because we're both tired, and I'll most likely place my feet on his lap and he'll remove my sock and start to rub my feet. This will then make me so happy, and I'll tell him how much I love it.

And we will go to bed happy and in good moods, if I keep my mouth shut about what I'm not getting, or what he's not giving.

(We mess up sometimes and say and do the wrong thing...but thank goodness for forgiveness and love when we do!)

After 30 Years - For...Not Regarding – by Marcy Lytle

(This was written over a decade ago, and since the content goes with the current After 40 Years article, it's being republished this month! Enjoy...)

Have you ever worked in an office and gotten a memo, and at the top it reads “Re:” and then on the line is written what the memo is regarding? It might be about a staff meeting, time off, or pay scales; and it serves its purpose well to inform you of the content you’re about to read.

Our prayers for our husbands are often just like that. We start out by letting God know that the content of our prayer is going to be regarding our husband: his behavior, his lack of initiative, his waning romantic side, etc. We’ve got an agenda for our prayer regarding our husband and we want God to take note, respond to each request, and wrap up the answer in a memo back to us, stating “Done.”

I’ve spent a good part of my married life praying prayers *regarding* my husband, just like that. First, I tried telling my husband what it is that I want and need, and then if he didn’t respond like I expected him to, I wailed and wept to God, hoping he would then take up my cause and make me happy.

However, it came to my mind one day that maybe I should be praying *for* my husband, instead of *regarding* him.

In other words, what if I started asking God to speak to my husband and let him know how much he is loved, to encourage my husband with favor at work, to heal my husband’s wounds from his childhood, or to bless my husband with rain from heaven? What if I changed up my prayer life to include petitions *for* my husband’s well-being instead of *regarding* my own desires and demands?

This may seem like a small thing – the difference between “for” prayers and “regarding” prayers – but it’s anything but small.

When we pray *regarding* our husbands, we’re usually frustrated, disappointed, and angry. We can’t remember the last time he actually asked us out on a date, we can’t forget the way he screamed at the kids, or we are still fuming that he forgot to take care of that important item we asked him to do...and now we have to do it. It’s the same with the memos at the office. When they arrive in our inbox, we know someone somewhere has complained, noted a problem, or there’s a change in policy about to take place.

But what if...one day we were sitting at the computer and a memo arrived with nothing on the subject line, and the content was full of compliments, praise, and bonuses we had no idea our boss was sending us? Wouldn’t that be a great place to work, where we received those kinds of messages daily?

That’s the kind of message and memo we need to send up to God, our heavenly father, who loves marriage, loves the family, and loves us. We need to petition God *for* our husbands, so

that our husbands receive God's love, acceptance, forgiveness, power, and maturity that only comes from walking close to Him, hearing his voice, and responding to his direction.

Somehow, when we begin to take the focus off of ourselves and start focusing on our husbands and their needs...our own needs begin to fade...and we realize something huge.

Our husbands have difficulty being all that we need them to be, often because they never measure up, and we let them know about it way too often.

God usually works in complete opposite ways from the norm, and our marriage connection is no different. **The more silent we are in the ears of our husbands and in God's ears "regarding" all of his faults, and the more verbal we are in petitions "for" blessing and goodness to follow our husbands every day, the more our own needs are met.**

God has a way of getting our husband's attention that doesn't include our memos regarding him. All we have to do is pray for our husband and his relationship with his Father, and the rest falls into place. And the quicker we learn to place our husband's pitfalls at the foot of our Father, trusting in his goodness and mercy to follow us daily, the more satisfied we become in our walk with Him...and our walk with him.

Next time you start to pray for your husband, check and see what's on the memo line you're sending up to God. Is it blank, allowing God to fill it in with what he sees is necessary and good for the moment? Or is that line full of your complaints, notices, and changes you want done...pronto?

It's a hard thing to do, for sure. And it requires making a choice daily. But it's a lot easier and fulfilling when we learn the secret of praying *for*...and not *regarding*.



ENCOURAGEMENT

A Day in the Life – January Ripples – by Bekah Holland

A new year, a new column! I'd love to say that it comes along with a new me, but, well, let's be honest...that's not really my thing. I've tried. And if you've ever met me and still like or at least tolerate me, you've probably accepted this and either laugh with me or sometimes at me, which is totally acceptable, or you have a mute button with my name on it. Maybe just don't tell me about it because it's totally going to mess with my head at some point. So anyway, like I was saying, after the last few years of writing a questionably categorized marriage column every month, but rarely staying on topic, I've been gifted the chance to, well, write about whatever random thing my scatterbrained mind comes up with, which is basically the best gift ever!

So welcome to "A Day in the Life Of..." What is this column about? I think we're just going to find that out together every month. I'm essentially the human version of those "mystery" flavored DumDums you'd pick as a kid after a check-up at the doctor, assuming they didn't have to call in extra help to hold you down for a shot. And I guess the logical (this is likely the only time you're ever going to hear me reference myself and logic in the same sentence because, well, I know my strengths, and that is not one of them) place to start is at the beginning.

I always have mixed feelings about beginnings, and January, the beginning of a new year is, no exception. In some respects, I love new beginnings. I love the chance to start again and try to do better. I love the hope that comes along with it. However, the uneasiness and anticipation that comes with the unknown? Not so much. And January tends to bring with it an expectation of something I've never really been able to pinpoint, but the barrage of ads flooding every medium for weight loss drugs, botox, micro-surgeries with a nip here and a tuck there, exercise plans and fad diets makes me want to light everything on fire. Now, don't get me wrong, if those are things that you do and they make you feel good and you're doing it for you or for your health or whatever, then I'll be your biggest cheerleader and bring you carb-free whatever (just know I'll be eating enough carbs for both of us after I leave) and support whatever it is you try. But the pressure that the world puts on us to look a certain way, or the idea that beauty comes from meeting some kind of stupid standard that society has deemed attractive, is rage-inducing for me.

You know what I think beauty looks like? It looks like when someone sees you're hurting or struggling, seeing beyond the smiles and laughter you use to hide the pain. Or when someone drives by and sees a person on the street, maybe holding a sign asking for help or money, then follows their heart, which they've likely worked their whole lives to keep soft and open, giving cheerfully, whether they can afford to or not. And when they do it, regardless of all the others who drive past the same corners, pretending not to see, while making assumptions about "those kinds of people?" When they give without judging or questioning how that person might spend their seemingly inconsequential gift because it's God's job to worry about that, not theirs? That is truly beautiful. I think beauty looks like friendships that are so deeply rooted that it doesn't matter how much time goes by between overdue talks or girls' nights, they show up, loving you bigger and louder than anyone else. Beauty looks like a woman who hasn't met whatever milestones the people in her life expected of her, whether that was getting married, having children, or a million other expectations that weigh her down. She's likely feeling less than, or not enough because, in some people's eyes, she doesn't measure up. But every day, she lifts up her face to the sky and accepts her journey and her purpose, whether it was by choice or one that was never a choice at all...overwhelmingly beautiful. I tend to see beauty in the ashes because I know what it's like to burn, and then, begin again with nothing but memories of who you used to be. Over and over again, like Maya Angelou so perfectly wrote, "...but still, like dust, I'll rise. "

They say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. But we all get to choose, usually countless times a day, how we are going to view the world around us. We can look at our partner, our children, friends or colleagues, in whatever place they are in, whatever thing may be consuming their lives, we can choose to see a mess or another thing to “fix” or a problem to deal with. Or, perhaps, we can choose to see a person, with struggles we may never understand and the inspiration they are because they are still standing bravely in spite of the voices that tell them it’s not worth the fight. We can choose to see the strength of a person who is trying her best to live and not just survive. How we choose to see the people around us speaks loudly...not about them, but about us, our hearts, and even who we are or are trying to be.

So as we step into a new beginning, a new year, I hope we step boldly into living out loud, offering love without strings, compassion without reservation, and sharing a light bright enough to shine into the darkest of nights. We may never know what the effects are of choosing to see others through the eyes of Jesus. However, I can promise you, without question, that the ripples from each small act of kindness are immeasurable.

*“Blessed are they who see beautiful things in humble places where other people see nothing.”
Camille Pissarro*

Do you enjoy learning about God's Word, talking about his work in our lives with others?

How about coffee?

I get together with a great group of women to chat over coffee about such things. We meet at a very popular shop in Georgetown called 309 Coffee, outdoors under tall pecan trees, weather permitting (which is most of the time in Texas!) One week when we were in Psalms, it was suggested to come up with our own. David, seemingly an ordinary boy, did just that, which resulted in the rich collection of poetry we call the Psalms.

Loving poetry and writing some here and there, this was fun for me. I named it, appropriately, if not very imaginatively, Psalm 309.

Psalm 309

Lord, I am in awe of you.
I see your beautiful presence everywhere around me—
Shimmering leaves, bubbling water, warmth of sun,
light shining and bouncing into dark places.
Through gifts of sight, sound, taste, and touch
my senses are filled with your love and goodness.
The flowers bow their heads as you pass,
the trees shout for joy. Every living thing pulses with your energy.
Your vibrant life fills the earth, and I am satisfied.

May we learn to be satisfied with his presence, his goodness and truth, in the midst of a world groaning in sorrow, yet rejoicing.

Unearthly Thing - The Year of Trusting God – by Angela Dolbear

When New Year's Day comes along, I don't usually make resolutions, but I do reflect on the past year and how I would like the new year to be different.

This year, 2025, I want to be the year of trusting God. Trusting Him completely.

More and more, over the past months, when I have encountered a difficult situation, my mind flips to a similar time when God helped me. I am learning to trust God. I want more of this.

I do trust God, but not as entirely as I should. I still get overrun with worry and anxiety when I know I should be enveloped in peace. My intellect knows God is the Creator of all things, but my emotions and faith need to get on board with my mind.

I love looking at the NASA and other space pages that show up in my Facebook feed. I marvel at the beauty and vastness of space. All of which is God's creation. Immense and powerful. So how could I think little old me would be out of God's reach? I'm not. Not ever.

So, I need to trust God completely. Here is my current strategy to accomplish my year of trusting God.

1. **Spend time remembering who God is** -- I try to spend the first half hour of the day in a time of gratitude and now remembrance. I think on God's promises, and I recall the times He has helped me (and I am grateful for those). It looks like gratitude and remembrance go hand-in-hand.
2. **Clear out negative thoughts** – I have let my thoughts run wild like Legion, the possessed naked man in the Bible (good story, check it out at [Luke 8:26-33](#))! But not anymore. Negative thoughts lead to stress and anxiety and push out the fruit of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control). Whenever my thinking starts to go south, I stop it in its tracks and bring to mind good thoughts, usually scriptures, so it's good to memorize a handful or more of Bible verses. My go-to verse is John 14:1, where Jesus said, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in Me." Notice how the verse says "let?" Meaning I give permission for negative thinking to be in my mind. Not anymore!
3. **Meditate on all the good things God has done for me** – God has healed me so many times and continues to heal me. He has provided for me many times, and His Word said he always will.
4. **Know who I am in Christ** – I am a child of God. Jesus gave His life for me. I need to have confidence in the fact God loves me (see [John 3:16](#))

As I write this, my home is in severe plumbing distress. We can't shower, run the dishwasher, or do laundry, and we have to flush toilets sparingly because the city sewer system we are connected to has a blockage. If we use too much water, whatever has drained comes right back up through the tub and toilet. It's a huge mess and a major inconvenience.

But through my grumpy annoyance, I am praying for God to repair the system. I remember all the multi-day power outages we've been through in the past and how He got us through. I am grateful we have plenty of clean clothes and food, and the bills are all paid (nothing to do directly with the plumbing disaster, but it's proof that God has us during this time).

This is an opportunity to trust God. To keep my eyes fixed on Him and not on my inconveniences.

Recently, I heard the Hebrew word for peace, "shalom," translates to "complete." That's how I feel when my anxiety slinks away from my mind because I remember God's working and trust Him with whatever is going on. I feel peace and completeness.

So, in 2025, I will trust God by employing my strategies, feel peace, and be complete.

Blessings to you!

Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her latest release, The Mid-Century Breakfast Club, is the fourth book in The Garden Tales series and will be released in Summer 2025. All of her novels are available on [Amazon](#) in paperback, Kindle, and audiobook formats. Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, and writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN—listen to her new album [STORMS](#) on your favorite music streaming service. Please drop by and sign up for news, read new stories, and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!

An Adage A Day - Should've, Would've, Could've, Continued – by Carole Gilbert

Last month, I used bullet points about what I should've, would've, and could've done in the past. This month will be about what I should, will, and can do now. I think one of the most important aspects of following God in our lives is to remain disciplined. It is sometimes very difficult. The best example I can think of for this as a mom of grown children, or little children, is to remember there are boundaries. I am a curious and feisty person by nature, so this can have its moments. After all, they are my children that I raised, or am raising for you younger moms, but I must remember I raised them to be independent.

I disciplined my kids, and I believe we're still disciplined as adults, by our actions, and by God. I have to pay the price if I say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing, and sometimes just by doing nothing at all. But my Heavenly Father is good to somehow help me see where I should've done differently. And He's good to forgive me where I fail. I don't think we're ever done enough or smart enough to not need this. And we do an injustice when we don't listen to God and follow His discipline as He instructs. Discipline taught me to listen and obey when I was a rambunctious child. So, I now try to listen to His Holy Spirit first to help me keep from doing what I shouldn't. These points are for me, and I hope they help you too.

- Say the right thing. Social media is so prevalent in our lives today. We must be cautious. When my son and D-I-L were having their second child, I stayed with their first child while they were in the hospital. They went there the night before she was to be induced. I was so excited about them having my next grandchild the next day that I posted the wonderful upcoming news on Facebook. First off, to put it simply, it wasn't mine to tell.
- Do the right thing. Minutes after posting the good news, my son calls me and asked, "Mom, I know you're excited, but could you please take your post off Facebook?" He went on to explain that as a pastor they wanted to tell his congregation after the baby came. So, I immediately removed the post. Simple enough, it wasn't mine to tell.
- Do nothing at all. Sometimes discipline requires us to sit back and not act on something, even when we think we know what to do. This was one of those times I thought I was helping but the best help was to do nothing at all about sharing this news. They now have four children and I'm so proud of the parents they are. And simple enough, they posted it better, because it wasn't mine to tell.

There are still times my rambunctious, curious, feisty, self wants to jump in where I shouldn't. I must be quiet and patient. They are my children, but they are independent adults. I, we, must be disciplined. Isn't that what God expects? It's a new year. Do we need to adjust our behaviors? Should've, would've, or could've, doesn't have to be about changing our past. It's also about what we can do differently today and, in the days, to come.

Last and this month's verse says, *For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them,* 2 Peter 2:21.

So, I will work to not look back and think I should've, would've, or could've. I know God's righteousness, and this is what is mine to tell.

Moving Forward – Just Receive – by Pam Charro

Have you ever given a very expensive gift or had to forgive someone for something they did that caused you a lot of pain? God is really good at this! But we aren't always very good at receiving.

I realize that we could never deserve forgiveness, but I cringe when a believer defines himself as "just a sinner saved by grace." I'm very concerned that this person may not understand the enormity of the gift. No saved person is "just a sinner" - we are all brand new creations who are no longer defined by what we used to be! Now we're free!

Please don't misunderstand - it is so important to always remember what he did for us. But if I give something to someone, I want him to know it's because I love him so much that he is worth the high price in my eyes. I want him to be close to me, and I don't want any of our past mistakes to get in the way of that closeness. In fact, if he only saw himself as a failure because he had hurt me, my heart would be broken, because we both would be missing out on the joy of our relationship.

I wonder if God feels good about the receivers we have been. Do we grieve him with false humility, continually focused on our own unworthiness to the point that the lover of our souls is not getting what he paid for? He is wise enough to know if something lacks value, and he decided that our hearts were worth it.

It saddens me to think that he often may not get our hearts. We are so much more than just repaired from our past -our creator passionately desires to be close to us!

I realize that being good receivers isn't often mentioned in church, and it's just as important to deny ourselves and be good givers. But we love because he first loved us. It is my sincere prayer that we may all grow in our understanding of the "why" of the cross and that we may receive more of that love.

Only then will we be able to love him back, even more.



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - Midnight Lullaby – by Marcy Lytle

I don't recall my mom ever singing a lullaby to me, nor do I recall even knowing what a lullaby was, as a kid. By definition, it's a quiet gentle song sung to get a child to sleep. And by the time I had kids, I do recall singing partial lyrics and humming the tune to "Lullaby and good night..." Maybe you know it, too. However, I'm not writing about our children, but rather about us – full grown adults – as children in need of lullaby.

It wasn't actually midnight, but it was 1:00am and I could not sleep, at all. My mind was racing with all sorts of thoughts. I don't know if it was a panic attack, or just thoughts from the day, if I was overly tired, or what. I laid there for maybe an hour, wrestling with these thoughts that would not allow me to rest...at all. I thought about getting up and just starting my day, but at 1:00 a.m.? That seemed like a terrible idea.

So, I decided to wake my husband, because I knew he would pray with me. And he did. Just a quiet prayer and he even just whispered and placed his hand on me, and I did fall asleep.

When I awoke this morning I thought about how often God in his great love sings lullabies over us, in various forms:

- Our spouse whispering prayers in the middle of the darkness...
- Leaves falling in front of us in a rhythmic form and waving as they fall...
- Words from the bible brought to mind that we hear and hum perhaps from a song we know...
- Baby tunes we hear young parents sing, or ones we sing to the children as well that also calm our own hearts...
- Specifically, the psalms, as so many of them are comforting and poetic and truth...
- Winter's snow as it comes down in snowflakes that speak of our individuality to him...
- Fires flickering in the fireplace causing reflections and as we cozy up and know we are held...

I bet you can add to this list. But often, we miss those lullabies because of the noise of our heads, our minds, or the noise around us.

This winter, let's choose to still our hearts often and hear the lullabies of His great love over us and rest at night in peace. And if we should have one of those nights where the thoughts just won't stop, we can wake the one next to us...or even better...realize that the ONE who loves us never sleeps at all. His eye is on us all night and his ear is attentive to our cries.

Sleep, my child, let peace attend thee.

All through the night...

FRESH THYME – Teach Me to Abide – by Marcy Lytle

Abide. It's an old word, isn't it? I don't think I hear many people use this word at all any more, and I only recently heard it in a song that was asking God to "teach me to abide."

Jesus told his followers, "Abide in me." This means *to stay, continue, or dwell*. The Hebrew word for "abide" is *yashab*, which includes ideas of interpersonal relationships and being in a shared space. I love that!

Abiding in Christ is having this knowing relationship with Him and it's to be dependent on him for sustenance, salvation and satisfaction.

If we are told to stay in Christ and to continue in Him, then there must be a tendency or draw to wander. There's another old hymn that says we are prone to wander...we can feel it! "Prone to leave the God I love..."

Why in the world would we even contemplate leaving the One who loved us so much that he gave his life for us?

When I heard this song with the phrase, "teach me to abide" in it, I cried. And it was because that week (and lots of weeks) I had wandered from the peaceful presence of the Savior.

Another meaning of abide is *to endure without yielding*. And that is where I personally fall short. I often find myself yielding throughout the day to fear, stubborn pride, selfishness, and more. And when I do...I don't feel as if I'm abiding next to Jesus but rather afar...pushing him away in favor of my own way.

It's no wonder that the very things that help us abide, the words that teach us to abide, are the very things we struggle to do and think about, on a daily basis.

But here's the truth. If we believe, we abide. Jesus doesn't wander off, ever. He tells us that we are in Him and He is in us, and we are One like He and the Father are One. That's pretty incredible, isn't it?

I read that abiding in Jesus is believing, trusting, savoring, resting and believing.

I think it's that middle word that we have trouble with...**savoring**.

Sometimes, when I eat I'm in such a hurry, the meal that took an hour or more to prepare is gobbled down in five minutes and gone, and I barely know what tastes were present...as they didn't linger on my tongue at all.

One of the things I want to do this year is savor God's goodness. I believe that when I do, I will find it easier to abide.

Here's what that might look like:

- Reading his Word and closing my eyes to think on a particular verse
- Looking outside at nature and observing all its beauty (even in the winter)

- Taking one word from a scripture reading and holding it close to my heart
- Shutting the door and closing out all the noise until I am at rest
- Reciting the truth about who He is and who I am in Him

I said at the beginning we find sustenance, salvation and satisfaction when we abide. And by savoring the flavors we are given when we are in his presence, this will enable us to be satisfied in 2025. Many things we physically eat are supposed to linger on the tongue, swish around in our mouths, and be eaten slowly with the intent to enjoy each bite. It's only then that we leave the table satisfied, and that meal abides with us until the next...

*Teach me to abide, Jesus, in you,
and may I find that abiding in you in everything I do
is truly the pleasure of life that I so desperately long for,
and you so joyfully give.*

FRESH THYME – The Cave of Crankiness – by Marcy Lytle

Do you ever wake up cranky? You don't really know why, but everything and everyone irritates every fiber of your being and you just want to be left alone and everyone else to leave!

To be cranky is to be bad-tempered, irritable, grumpy and grouchy. And it's not fun for anyone to be around us, or for us to be around anyone!

Sometimes, when I'm cranky, I do stop and go to my room and think about perhaps why it is that I'm feeling so testy:

It could be that I feel fat or old or without purpose

It could be that I've been thinking untrue thoughts about God's love for me

It could be that I'm longing for friendship or attention that I think I'm not getting

It could be that I didn't sleep well or I haven't been resting

It could be that I haven't been reading the Word or praying and pouring out my heart

It could be that I haven't eaten well

It could be that my house or home is in chaos and I need a day to clean

It could be that I'm having phone or TV or car issues, and they've interrupted my day

It could be that I lost something and I cannot find it, anywhere

It could be that the weather isn't cooperating with what I want to do

It could be that something broke...again...

It could be that the credit card was compromised and I have to re-do passwords...again...

If we sit down and think about it, there might be a dozen reasons we might be cranky, and identifying those reasons is often a quick solution to emerging out of the cave of crankiness. And if some of those things occur often, we can often change our way of thinking and correct the cranky thoughts!

If you live in a home with others, and more than one person is cranky in a day, all hell breaks loose, doesn't it? A house with one cranky person, that's not pleasant. But a home with more than one crank on the loose is just unbearable, and we all want to scream and leave...and run for ice cream! But, wait! We will feel fat if we do! Sigh...and the process starts all over again.

Maybe we only need one resolution this year, and that's to work on our own crankiness. Cranky is a word that sounds like it means. Just say it long and drawn out, "Craannnkkyyy."

Did you know that crank is a Dutch word that describes a ship that is unstable, often due to bad design or imbalance? I did not, but what a great description. Crankiness is often rooted in an imbalance in our bodies or minds or spirits.

We all KNOW how to balance our lives and our thoughts, but we often choose to let them run rampant.

Maybe we can just identify one thing on our cranky list and focus on that, until it comes back into balance. For me, it's going to be the untrue thoughts I tell myself about who I am and who He is. And then...I'll go from there.

Because when we try to tackle the whole cranky list at once, we get overwhelmed, and that too causes us to be cranky.

Here's to a turnaround in the new year to being good-natured and pleasant, at least most of the time...as we crawl out of the cave of crankiness.

FRESH THYME – Wonder All Year – by Marcy Lytle

Wonder

All Year

Not Just at Christmas

That's what I wrote down several weeks ago, because I think the reason some of us are so sad when the holidays are over is because our wonder goes away, as well. The holiday season ushers in wonder with all of the lights that twinkle and shine, the songs and the lyrics that turn our gaze upward, the scents and the flicker of the fire that draw us to sit and give thanks.

Wonder is *surprise mixed with admiration at something beautiful, unfamiliar or inexplicable*.

And once those lights are down and the gifts are open and the tree is bare, and all of the boxes are staring us in the face waiting to be stored away...it seems the wonder goes with it all...to the attic, under the bed, in the closets until next year, when we bring it all out again.

Little kids wonder all year, don't they? They don't know the calendar days, what's going to happen tomorrow, or the why's of today...and this is a blessing to their little minds. Every day is a new day to wake up and discover a new taste, learn a new skill, set forth on a new adventure at the park, or just sit and observe and laugh at a squirrel scampering along the fence line.

But as we grow and develop these minds that fill in multiple calendar days with activities, worry about tomorrow and all that it holds or doesn't hold, and become frustrated with today, the wonder becomes the other definition which is...*to feel doubt*.

Isn't that interesting? Wonder is surprised mixed with admiration in one definition of the word, and it's to feel doubt in another definition.

It's January, and we wonder what the new year is going to be like. Will our finances improve, will our kids ever grow up and mature, will our health be good, what will the economy look like, and on and on we wonder until we entertain doubt that any good is on the horizon.

But...what if we could enter this new year with renewed wonder that we take from Christmas with us...all year long?

We can make every month, every week, every day, and every hour a wonderful time to wonder, and here's how:

At the start of each month, we can anticipate with faith the goodness of God in our lives, and we can choose to read about the character of God and choose to believe it. This sets our minds on the truth. Practically speaking, this means choosing a chapter or a topic in the bible and focusing on that...all month long. We can wonder at the mercy and grace and awesomeness of the God who loves us and gave himself for us.

At the start of each week, we can make our plans and our to-do lists and fill in our calendars, and then pray over all of the activities and concerns and appointments. We can leave space to

comment on our calendar about how things went, and give thanks for each activity, whether it was a blast or bad...and wait to see how God will work things together for good. Practically speaking, we can learn to leave our burdens on that paper and not pick them up, and wonder at the provision and leading hand of our Father.

At the start of each day, we can pause and give thanks for five things when our eyes open wide, before our feet hit the floor. As we give thanks, we can marvel at those things we just thanked God for, and we can pray for those things that our friends need, and trust God to transfer that burden from our shoulders to His, knowing he hears us and cares for us, and that he knows the number of hairs on our heads. Practically speaking, that means training our minds to wonder at how easy it is to give thanks and how that settles our souls for a good day.

At the start of every hour...what? Well, that just seems impossible to pause on the hour, but we can at least set reminders on our phone every few hours during the day to stop. Stop scrolling, stop worrying, stop complaining, stop criticizing and start wondering. Practically speaking, when that pause beeps on our phone, we can step outside and look up and around and marvel, we can look into the eyes our children or our spouse and shake our heads in amazement at God's blessings, and we can wonder at the provision in our homes like food, shelter, clothes and more...

Once we start to wonder on a regular basis, when Christmas arrives again, our minds and hearts will already be set to receive Him and to enjoy Him after the lights are put away and stored...because the Light of the World has become our mainstay and our focus and our heart.