



A BUNDLE OF
THYME
For Every Season

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TIPS

In the Kitchen – Tortillas, Anyone? – by Marcy Lytle

I love tortillas, especially the ones that are freshly made in the deli area – not found over on the aisles. There's a world of difference in the taste! I mean, who doesn't love a warm tortilla either loaded, rolled up, or on the side of a tasty dish? This month of March, we are sharing some ways to use tortillas in serving up meals for you and yours...

On the side

We recently had this warm potato salad and served a rolled tortilla on the side, and it was delish. In fact, we recently had a BBQ plate to-go with tortillas on the side, as well. Rolled tortillas instead of classic dinner rolls or bread – a winner!

Warm Potato Salad with Sausage

- 2 lbs Baby potatoes, halved
- 12 oz. Kielbasa cut into ½ inch chunks
- 1 large Red onion, thickly sliced
- ¼ c apple cider vinegar
- 2 T whole grain mustard
- 4 stalks chopped celery plus ½ cup of the leaves
- ½ c chopped fresh parsley
- ¼ c chopped fresh dill

Boil potatoes in salted water til tender, and drain. Heat olive oil in large skillet and cook sausage til well browned. Add the red onion and cook still just wilted but still crunchy, reduce heat and whisk in vinegar and mustard. Whisk in a bit more olive oil and season with salt and pepper.

Transfer to serving dish the potatoes – season with salt, then pour sausage mixture over top and toss gently. Add in celery, leaves, parsley and dill. Toss. And serve warm. Serve rolled warm tortillas on the side.

Lunch Rolls

I had lots of tortillas left over, along with other items that needed to be eaten, so this recipe evolved, was easy, and we took it on the road in tiffins, from World Market!

- Tortillas
- Turkey, sliced very thin
- Grated pepper and Colby jack cheeses
- Cilantro lime dressing (or your choice of Mexican dressing)
- Avocado

Spread the dressing on the tortilla. Lay out the turkey, too. Add the cheese and avocado and then roll up tightly, and slice. Stack them on their sides on a plate, or pack them in a to-go container for eating on the run.

Taco Salad Bar

This is a great family meal and was really pretty simple to put together. All of the items can be prepared ahead of time and then just lined up on the table for serving and creating. But the most fun was preparing our salads in tortilla bowls!

For the bowls:

- Large burrito sized tortillas
- Grated cheese

Spray a small bowl with Pam and drape the tortilla over the bowl (about two will fit in my oven). Bake at 375 until just starting to brown, then remove. Sprinkle cheese in bottom and return to oven to melt. Remove bowls and set aside until serving time!

For the bar:

- Meat and chicken (I just made a basic taco meat mixture, and roasted some chicken seasoned with Mexican spices)
- Grated cheese and/or queso
- Black beans
- Sliced black olives
- Grape tomatoes
- Romaine lettuce, chopped
- Red onion, sliced
- Avocado
- Grilled corn
- Sour cream
- Chopped cilantro
- Salsa
- Dressings
- Tortilla bowls

Quesadillas

With your leftover taco meat from your taco salad bar, you've got another meal! This was so easy and tasty!

- Tortillas
- Leftover taco meat or seasoned chicken
- Grated cheese
- Dressing (Mexican flavored)

Place meat and cheese between two tortillas. Melt butter in large skillet and place the quesadilla down, grilling on both sides til browned, and cheese is melted. Slice into fourths. Serve with one of your Mexican dressings for dipping. That's it – so easy!

Chicken Tacos

I had a few chicken breasts, random veggies and seeds, and a few tortillas left in the fridge, so this is the meal we ate for lunch. His comment was, "This is good!"

- Chicken breasts
- Taco seasoning (I used chile lime seasoning, Cumin, and a Taco blend)
- Veggies (I had kale, carrots, onion, and grape tomatoes)
- Seeds (I had sunflower seeds) - toasted
- Avocado

Season the chicken breast and drizzle olive oil on the top, and bake until tender, or cook in a pan, or a slow cooker, however you wish! Shred the chicken when done.

Cut up the veggies and toss with olive oil, and more taco seasoning. Roast at 375 until tender and charred. (The grape tomatoes will easily burst open.)

Slice up the avocado and heat up the tortillas.

Assemble the tacos with the chicken, veggies and avocado, then sprinkle the seeds on top. You can add a squeeze of lime if you like!

Seven 4 You – All Things Green

It's March, and green will be worn for sure, by some, come St. Patrick's Day. But this article isn't about wearing green. It's more about adding green to our yards, homes, porches, etc.! And sometimes, that's hard to do if we don't have a green thumb, no idea of what plants to buy, where to place greenery in our homes, or all the things! So we asked our panel of women to share all things green, the plants and pretties they love, so we can grab a few ideas for our own spaces!

My favorite greens are in two spots at home. One on my front porch – a stair stepped array of succulents – easy to grow – and they add so much happiness as we come and go! Another is my new little herb box indoors, and my herb box outdoors. Rosemary, mint, parsley and more...grow all year with no effort.

My favorite plants in my yard are my hibiscus. They got off to a rocky start but once they settled in, they were gorgeous. They need sun and space, neither of which I have given them, but I prayed for them and they bloomed beautifully!

I have a small outdoor space. My collection of vintage tin children's watering cans and the addition of color brighten my day. The plant on the top left is my favorite but I have no idea what it is called, maybe Plumbago? The color is periwinkle blue. Once a week watering. It's in a pot and not in the ground. It might do better in a bed but I don't have the space.

I have what I call "my babies." They are sweet little grapefruit plants that I have grown from seeds. What is amazing to me about my babies is that these three seedlings sprouted inside the grapefruits. I have never seen that before. One day when I cut open my grapefruit there was the seed inside with a root attached where it had already started to grow. How could I not plant these to see what happens? I would love to, one day, have grapefruits trees with grapefruits. Looks like it might be a while.

I don't have much of a green thumb, so I like plants that don't have to be watered. My favorite is my succulent pot which just seems to take care of itself. My other favorite part of spring is watching all the trees bloom. We have Mountain Laurels and some Red Bud trees and they just make me happy. It makes me think that the Lord takes something that looks dead but is really alive and then makes it come to life. Like He did for me and continues to do in my life. I planted some Irises this past fall so those will be fun to watch bloom along with some daffodils. They are already coming up, but not blooming. I think our weather confuses them...

One of my most rewarding green adventures is my lovely avocado tree. From the time I was a kid, I tried to grow an avocado tree. I did the toothpick in the sides and set it in a cup of water. Never could I get one to grow. I don't know why, but one day I took an avocado seed and put it in a baggie with a paper towel at the bottom. I filled the baggie with water about halfway up the side of the seed, and left it on the counter. About two weeks later I noticed a crack in the side of the seed and before I knew it, a little sprig popped out. Once the sprig popped out, it did not take long for the tree to take off. I have grown three trees since. I'm now waiting to see the fruit of my labor.

I love our 'green little garden' we had last year. It's made of three 10' x 10' raised garden beds. We planted tomatoes, yellow squash, and cantaloupe last year which turned out great. March is when we will plant this year and possibly add a few green bean plants as well as a few pepper plants!

This herb pot overflowing with oregano delivers joy. When it warms up I will add basil and thyme. The plants stay healthy and growing throughout the hot summer months because of an olla pot that is submerged in the center. An olla is an unglazed clay pot that, when filled with water, leached out the water as the plant requires it. In August I will fill the olla every three days and never worry about it being too hot or dry. Bringing joy and being low maintenance is a great combo.

The Dressing – Spring Trends – by Marcy Lytle

Rattan and straw bag – Isn't this a cute bag? And it will go with everything! Perfect for those spring road trips, vintage market shopping, and more... I want this!

https://www.amazon.com/Handbag-JOSEKO-Weaving-Bucket-Outdoor/dp/B07CS5TCYF/ref=sr_1_5?dchild=1&keywords=raffia+handbag&qid=1612219964&sr=8-5

Rich tie-dye – I love that there are so many choices with this top. And it's long, has the split sides, so what's not to love? The rich colors are so fun for the spring season!

https://www.amazon.com/Womens-Casual-Tunics-Blouses-Tshirts/dp/B088R65HVW/ref=sr_1_52_sspa?crd=1TZW6CM7PG8N&dchild=1&keywords=tie+dye+tops+for+women&qid=1612219309&s=apparel&srefix=tie+dye+top%2Cfashion%2C251&sr=1-52-spons&psc=1&spLa=ZW5jcnlwdGVkUXVhbGlmaWVyPUEyR1I4MkNPQIIBVkJFJmVuY3J5cHRlZEIkPUEwMjg4MzZkZ2V0TmFtZT1zcF9idGYmYWN0aW9uPWNsaWNrUmVkaXJlY3QmZG9Ob3RMb2dDbGljaz10cnVl

Contrast piping – I remember liking this style a long time ago. To me, it's a classic look, and I'm glad it's in style this next season. Check out this pretty one from Amazon. It's great for dressing up or just with jeans, or wherever you want to wear it!

https://www.amazon.com/Allegra-Womens-Office-Contrast-Piping/dp/B083NPKPMF/ref=sr_1_5?dchild=1&keywords=contrast+piping+blouse&qid=1612219180&s=apparel&sr=1-5

Knit dresses – Okay, I didn't see this as a spring trend, but I'm adding it in. Last year, I purchased a few knit dresses from Amazon and wore them ALL the time, they washed up nicely, and they were faves! So I just ordered a few more...

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0829YRR22/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_image_o00_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1

Face Masks – Yeah, they're still around, unfortunately, so why not stock up on some cute and "cool" ones that let your face breathe, now that temps are warming up slightly... We found some really pretty ones at the Loft Outlet, and they fit snugly and feel great.

<https://outlet.loft.com/general-purpose-mask-set/557687?skuld=30765382&defaultColor=9998&catid=cat3950062&selectedColor=9998>

Released Hems – I have a couple of these style jeans and love them. The released hem and the fit of the jeans from the Outlet is so nice...not restrictive...and they're well made.

<https://outlet.loft.com/released-hem-boyfriend-jeans-in-storm-blue-wash/555487?skuld=30814080&defaultColor=1992&catid=cat3950035&selectedColor=1992>

Loungewear – I suppose this is still around, although I'm not a fan...but most of you are! And florals will be showing up for spring, so a lounging outfit in a floral print has to be a win!

<https://charmingcharlie.com/collections/loungewear/products/18777>

Three Moms – Does Planning Help?

Mom of Three

I'm definitely a planner, especially with three kids! I love to have visuals that I can see, and it's taken a few years to find the best way for me. I have three different ways!

First, I have a printed custom planner from Plum Paper, customized to my business. I can keep track of it and separate it from my family life.

<https://www.plumpaper.com/>

Second, I have a meal planner book, for just meals. There is a grocery category, which I love. It has a place for meals – and any notes. I love this to have in ONE BOOK that I can take to the store. It has all of my meals listed, and it's kept me organized, now that the kids are all in school. It's helped me budget, and not waste food, and I also am more creative with meals! In fact, I've even started planning out lunches.

Third, we have a wall calendar, a family command center that we can all see. It has a chalkboard calendar, and we all have a different color pen. I can see my husband's work schedule, kids' events are on it, and it's on a wall we all walk by frequently. I also write the weekly meals on there, because the kids can see what we're having. They love that. There's also a square with a to-do list – like buy a birthday gift, or clean out our car. I quit tracking every day chores, and just write down the big stuff. And finally, it has a chore list for the kids! It's up there as a reminder for them. Other reminders go up there, as well – like wear your masks, do your homework!

Three ways may seem like a lot, but it's so helpful. We used to use a google shared calendar, and we may use that again. But now that we're both home, we don't need digital. Our wall works! Digital would work, though, to share if we are apart.

My biggest tip is to really think about how you process. I've wasted so much money on other planners, over the years. Some are by the hour, overview, etc. Some like a straight to-do list, but I needed to keep business separate from family. Now, I can put my business planner away when work is over. And the visual reminders are the best for me!

(All my recipes are usually pulled from Pinterest and I move them to a new board called Family Favorites, and then I also use *Magnolia Cookbook!* I even write down if we're eating out on the calendar, so we can budget!)

Mom of Two

I love this topic. Growing up, I was not much of a planner, but rather a go-with-the-flow person. Becoming a mom has challenged me to be a planner, because it helps with my stress level. Planning can be great! I still like to leave room for spontaneity and surprises, but I do like to plan for days and weeks as a family!

I did start planning out our meals, because it stressed me daily about what to cook for dinner. And with working full time, I needed order. We have a *google.doc* where we keep a running list for groceries. It's categorized with groceries, home items, work supplies, and more, so that we can both access it if we're out. I usually plan four meals a week, and that leaves me room for being able to eat out some. Within those four meals I have one additional "easy" meal. I always have ground turkey, black beans and taco seasoning for a taco salad as a go-to meal.

We also like to keep up with birthdays with a *physical calendar* on the fridge, because we have a large family. We want to be able to remember and call or give to each one! We also have a *google calendar* for events. We are big "google" people! We like to always know what's going on each day!

For vacation, we have had to plan our weeks off, as we own our own business. We always book the place and lodging and flights, but we only book one or two events ahead. We like to go away and do things we want to do, not necessarily all planned out...

Mom of Four

Our family calendar goes all in *my phone* – everything – for kids, sports, church, etc. My husband and I share that calendar. We also have a calendar on the refrigerator, mostly for the kids to see. We also have all the kids' school items/papers on the same wall as the calendar.

For meal planning, we do a grocery pickup once a week, as we drive about 30 miles to the store! We don't really have a set meal per day, and we just stay flexible based on what we have.

For budgeting, we do have a weekly budget for groceries, gas, and miscellaneous and kid stuff. We take out cash weekly for our budget, and we use envelopes. A certain amount is for groceries, kids, home, personal care, gifts, and fun! This helps us stay on budget!

As far as planning fun events, unless it's a big vacation, we just plan weekly based on what's coming up. If we see a free night on the calendar, we think of something fun to do. But mostly, right now our nights are full with sports for the kids and stock show season, and church! If we do plan an outing for the day, which is rare right now, we sort of want to be home and relax!

Tried and True – Bathroom Re-do- by Marcy Lytle

I have had the same bones of décor in my bathroom for years, now. A white-themed bathroom shower curtain with touches of brown thread, so that I could then change out the counter and shelf décor from season to season. I have loved doing that, and it wasn't very costly. However, over the past few years, I've collected a fall shower curtain and a Christmas one, and now I have a spring one!

I'll share how you too can *switcheroo* your guest bath to reflect the season of all things new, bright and colorful!

Start with the shower curtain. That sets the tone and the color palette for the room. I found one on clearance at World Market for half off, mostly white, but then the bottom half is pretty spring flowers. I was hooked!

Right next to that shelf were some pretty colorful succulents that matched the curtain. I was thrilled and picked up a few. You could go with real plants, or fake ones, whatever fits your fancy. And I knew I had another plant or two at home, that might look good in a group! **Plants are awesome.**

I walked over to the bath area of the store and their **round rugs** were on sale as well! And there happened to be one in a pale turquoise that matched the curtain, so I snagged it.

I was all set to begin my bathroom transformation to spring...

Before buying any more items, I decided to **shop my house**. I had a vase in that same turquoise hue of glass and opted to set it in the corner of the counter. And I had a dried twig/flower in my stash that fit right in with the décor, so the corner of the counter was done!

On the wall above the toilet sits a triangular shelf I like to change out, and I did look and shop the house and a few stores to find something to set there, for prettiness! **Groups of three** are great to see (I've heard that, for home décor, and it works!)

Finally, we **removed our cabinet doors** years ago, and I previously had folded towels on one shelf and a large basket of hand towels on the top. I left the top basket, but I removed all the towels and placed them in a hidden cabinet underneath the sink. Then I curated that bottom shelf, and it's my favorite area of all:

I found a large **round tray** in the outdoor section at Target, and that was the base. Then in the Dollar Spot there were two small wooden pieces I bought to add some height, and one more tiny plant, for the group of three. One of the succulents I had purchased was a hanging one, so it was tacked up in the corner. This shelf **needed light** (it's deep and dark) so I opted for a stickup light. And finally, this **sign** at Target that said "Be our Guest" was the last piece that brought this shelf together!

Now, just step back and look at the entire room and see if it speaks spring to you! If so, you've accomplished your goal of a bathroom re-do.

Enjoy your switcheroo, however you choose to do it. Hope something here inspires you to start with the curtain...and go from there.



HOME

A Night to Remember – Winners! – by Marcy Lytle

Easter is in the first weekend of April this year, and I remember last year thinking how weird of an Easter it was, with a drive-by egg hunt for our kiddos. Who knew a year later, we'd still be social distancing? So, whether or not your kids are participating in egg hunts or not, you can participate as a family in a delightful minute-to-win-it Easter celebration about the art of losing...because you know you've won.

Preparation: You'll need plastic straws, goldfish crackers, paper plates, potatoes, cookies, and streamers!

Jesus knew from the get-go that he had come to earth to die. He kept trying to convey this message to his followers, but they wouldn't hear of it. He also kept telling them that he was Messiah, God in the flesh, come to be the Savior of the World, but they wanted a winner, a king, a leader that exalted himself and rode on a chariot. Instead, Jesus rode into the city on a humble donkey, and exalted his Father, instead.

Some looked at Jesus as a loser, but Jesus knew that he was a winner, because he was about to conquer death!

Let's play some *Minute to Win It* games as a family. You can either play individually or divide into teams. The object is to play each of the five games and see who can do the most of the task in a minute's time. Let's talk about this game, first.

What does it feel like to lose? (let kids answer). We might feel embarrassed, less than, angry at the winner. Those feelings come when we lose, but it's what we do with them that matters.

As we play, we're going to talk about Jesus and his death and resurrection, as it relates to our games!

Straws and fish: Place goldfish crackers on a paper plate and give each participant a paper straw. The object is to move as many goldfish off the plate by sucking it on the end of the straw and moving it, as possible. (Make sure they are whole goldfish)

Remember the story of Jesus feeding all those people with just bread and fish that a little boy gave? I bet he felt like a loser, handing that tiny bit of food to Jesus. But Jesus gave thanks and blessed it, and it fed 5000! What a winner!

Nose roll: You'll need a potato and an area rug or hall, to play this game. Each participant has to roll the potato down the rug to a designated line, to see who wins the race. Remind participants to keep their nose down and focused, not looking at the other players.

Remember how Jesus died and there was a big stone at the mouth of the cave where his body was placed? It may have seemed to some of his followers that Jesus was a big loser, because he died! But what happened on Easter morning? God rolled that stone away, maybe with his nose! And Jesus was alive! What a winner!

Cookie slide: You'll need a cookie for each participant. Have them place it on their forehead and when the clock starts, they have to wiggle it into their mouths, no hands. If it drops, they start over.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, he became thirsty and wanted a drink in his mouth, but he was unable to get a drink and had to ask the guards for it. What a loser, he must have felt like. No, he didn't! He wanted a drink so that he could speak loudly and say, "It is finished!" so that all nearby could hear that he had completed the work his Father sent him to do – die on the cross! What a winner!

Mummy wrap: You'll need two rolls of streamers, and each one will need a partner. The goal is to wrap the other person in as much of the paper rolls as possible, in a minute.

Remember someone else that was wrapped up like a mummy? Jesus! His followers probably felt so sad to see their Lord, the one they followed, wrapped up in grave clothes and left in a grave. But, wait! Jesus told them on the third day he would rise again – and he did. What a winner!

Because of Jesus obeying his Father and loving all of us, he came to die and overcome death so we could live. He was and always will be the winner of all winners!

When we played these games, some of us won and some lost. And even though we don't like to lose, we aren't losers. We must always remember that. Because of what Jesus did for us, when we believe and receive Him into our hearts, and follow him, we are always winner with Him...forever and ever.

Read John 3:16 and pray and believe, together as a family.

An Adage a Day - A Quite Contrary Garden – by Carole Gilbert

When my children were little, I did a lot of gardening and canning. I look back and wonder how I ever had the time to do that with three small children. I loved to garden, and I could sit for hours and weed, while they played, if they allowed me to have the time. Sometimes my children wanted to help with the gardening and they especially loved picking the veggies off the vines or bushes. I did have to teach them to not pick them when they first saw them but to wait until the veggies were big and ripe.

I always felt like we were “sowing the seeds,” by letting them help. This phrase has been around for a long time and dates to Biblical times. It simply refers to doing something that reaps responses or rewards in the future, either good or bad. I knew from my own childhood that learning to garden was a good seed to sow.

Gardening with three children was never a “tough row to hoe.” We all loved watching the seeds sprout and grow and we especially loved seeing the veggies appear.

One year I decided I would try growing watermelons. It was something new and “between you, me, and the gatepost,” it was quite the experience. We had watermelons everywhere. They grow on vines and these vines got so big you could hardly see the rest of the garden. As the watermelons grew, they were so plentiful we could not see them all.

One day our daughter was walking around the outside of our garden and she started calling to me, “Mom, Mom, Mom, Mom!” I went to investigate what she was exclaiming about and saw quite the phenomenon. To my wonderment there was a watermelon growing right beside our six-foot wooden fence. The amazing part was that the other half of this watermelon was growing on the other side of the fence! This one watermelon was growing on both sides of the fence! It was so skinny, only about an inch wide, in the middle!

Luckily, we had great neighbors and never had “to mend fences” before but now we were going to in a different way. I did not beat around the bush but went right to them offering up an olive branch. They had a daughter the same age as my children and watching the watermelon grow on both sides of the fence became an exciting daily event.

We all felt like we had a green thumb watching it grow. When it came time to pick it off the vine, my husband and the neighbor removed the cross boards from the fence so we could lift it up safely in one piece. We thought it would be fun for the kids, and for us, to see this phenomenal watermelon in the shape of a figure eight. And it was!

After marveling at the watermelon, we all laughed, celebrated, and then ate it together. You could say we made a grand mountain out of a molehill over this one watermelon. And I am not beating around the bush, that experience sowed so many seeds.

2 Corinthians 9:6 says,

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly,
and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

This is such an encouraging verse. We felt the bountiful reap that day and many more days after. From there 2 Corinthians goes on to speak of our hearts. What we give from the heart is what God returns to us plus so much more. And if we think about sowing and reaping, it brings to mind a question that comes from that wise ole gardener, Mary, Mary, quite contrary. A question we should all completely and simply ask ourselves,

“How does your garden grow?”

Chipped China - Gifting Go – by Jennifer Lytle

Our big plans to celebrate Michael's graduation with a double master's from Fuller Theological Seminary had been disrupted with no hope of any recompense. Everything that could have gone wrong, did. There would be no traditional ceremony. During the virtual ceremony, Michael's most prestigious degree, a Master's of Divinity, was not "awarded." We decided **not** to travel halfway across the country on a plane and stay for a week in three different areas along the West coast to discover one theme park, the southern beaches, and the northern forests. Worse than canceling our summer vacation plans, we realized the reality of the limited agreements marked off in tiny print for almost every aspect of our trip. Only our flight had insurance that allowed for a refund. It was a disappointing situation.

However, much like [last month's story](#), Papa gets to write His version of events. He has the last say (please see [Proverbs 16:1](#)). And this, my friends, always results in [triumph that I too get to enjoy](#).

God kept urging Michael to say yes to a new travel plan. Since we had lost so much on our canceled plans, Michael was hesitant to sign up for more adventures. But God insisted on a particular time frame and He wanted to answer our desire for Legoland. We went ahead, slowly saying yes to lining up the reservations. Michael asked God to confirm that we were to go when a specific prayer for finances came in the form of a text. A proposal for work had been accepted and a check was in the mail.

Next, we discovered that God lined up a rental vehicle for our travels. Our reservations were for a small vehicle. When we went to pick up our reserved sedan, a customer jumped in line ahead of us. He was a member of the rental company and this privilege allowed him to come in and have a car available to him of his choosing. He pushed his way into the parking lot and selected the basic sedan. Michael had patiently been waiting for the customer representatives to work out a solution for the increased deposit that was not in the original agreement Michael had made reservations under; though it was now being required. A different representative ended up helping Michael and charged him only for the rental, forgetting to charge any deposit. The customer service representatives could not figure out how to undo their mistake, so they asked him simply not to let their manager know about it. Was he ready for the keys? There were no other basic sedans available. Would he like the luxury SUV? Our family would be much more comfortable in a larger vehicle and the three rows offered everyone a bit of space to enjoy during the long drive. That was the second gift we were granted.

Michael kept trying to consider scheduling to go later in the year, but God kept confirming to Michael to go, now. As we started our trip, I received a phone call to offer me a position I had interviewed for seven weeks prior. They wanted me to start right away. We hadn't expected that, but God did. That was the third gift we were granted.

As we finally pulled into the parking lot to our grand getaway, the two of us looked at one another with concerned eyes. I could see the entrance to the theme park directly across from the hotel. Neither sights were appealing. Michael spoke quietly so the children wouldn't overhear.

"We're going to have to lower our expectations."

My mind wouldn't accept this disappointment.

"Hmm?" I asked just as quietly.

"I'm not sure this place is going to be what we expect," he nearly whispered as he got out of the car to go inside the lobby to check in.

We had pulled under the overhanging second story and sat in its shadow. I looked around at the sad looking potted plants. This was not what I hoped for when we agreed to swap out one theme park for another. It was colorful. The colors were traditional Lego colors, but the resemblance stopped there. This was . . . well . . . it was unacceptable.

Michael got back in the car and exhaled in relief. This was not Legoland. That was our fourth gift! We had pulled into a hotel built near the worker's entrance of Legoland.

We promptly drove away and said goodbye to Pretend Land.

I'm not sure why we doubted Jehovah Jireh who had already been recognized to have carefully set out every detail of this trip. The gifts of provision, the gift of time, the gift of space, and the gift of our desire had been set out for our family to partake.

I wonder, in this season, is there a place you know you are to go but have yet come to? Have you arrived in a place that you know is not where you are to go? May our loving Way Maker make your steps clear.

I Don't Do Teens – Fact or Fiction – by Marcy Lytle

By now, your teens know that the Easter Bunny is not real, Santa is just an old man in a suit, and Cupid is a drawing on a paper. They're realizing that there is so much fiction in the world around them. If they watched the news with you during the election, they saw and heard slander, mistruths, and realized that even leaders fail at presenting facts and a faultless campaign. They may have been disappointed in the truths they felt as a little kids, where Mom and Dad were together, but they're now apart, and they don't know if that love was ever true, or not.

So how do we help our teens distinguish between fact and fiction? Of course, we tell them that fictionalized characters are ones that are not true in books and on the movie screens. But, of course, there are non-fiction stories that are told of heroes and those that have lived lives that inspire and strengthen our own lives, if we read.

And then...there's the case of the Bible. Every person, teen or adult, has to decide for themselves what to believe. And so will your teens. Here are some pointers to remember:

If we pick up the Bible like we do a Bandaid, just to bandage our wounds when we're hurt, they'll see the Word as an occasional fixer upper, and won't ever realize the truth of the story told inside.

If we use the Bible as a weapon to shape up our unruly kids, quoting verses in discipline, they will see the Word as harsh and unkind, and that will relate to the giver of the Word – God. And it will damage their relationship with Him. They might even reject the truth of who God really is.

If they see us only open our app or our Bible occasionally when we attend church or listen to a sermon on line, they may look at it like they do a movie – a story to read for entertainment or when bored.

However...

If we read the Bible together as a family to learn about the character of God and his love towards us, they will see and know God and want to follow him. (Start with the book of John – it's a fantastic one – as Jesus interacts with all those who question who he is).

If we have come to know the Jesus of the pages in the bible as our own personal savior, and we love him so much that we want to sit in his presence and digest his words because they are life, and those words actually evoke change in our lives for the better, our kids will see those words as life – true life!

If we listen to the questions our teens ask about God, their wonderings and their frustrations, and offer to pray with them, search with them, and then allow God to speak to them, they'll soon realize the truth...

And just what is fact?

It's a fact that the Word of God is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12). We don't have to use it as a weapon, ever. It rather should be seen as an extension of who God is to us, personally. Just like we read a non-fiction book about the life of a great person and feel as though we know them when we close the book, we should train our teens that getting to know God and the power of his Word is what will carry us through life.

And we can't do this, if we don't know it ourselves.

Consider reading the synopses of the books of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation to be once again renewed in your own faith of the facts of the geography, the people, the places, the stories and the power of the God, the Creator, the Savior. Talk about these things with your teens over dinner, not as something laborious or boring, but as life giving and amazing.

The way for our kids to know the truth about God's word is to immerse our families in it, so much that when they step out into the world on their own and see anything that doesn't align with "Love God and love others" they immediately recognize it and turn away from those untruths that destroy and kill.

Practical Parenting – Date Them – by Marcy Lytle

Dating our kids is a great thing. Whether or not we celebrated Valentine's Day traditionally or not last month, our kids noted all of the chocolate hearts and roses everywhere...and they need to know what it's like to be cherished. Yes, taking care of our kids' needs for food and shelter is necessary, but treating them as they should expect to be treated when they start relationships is fun and a blessing!

If your own marriage suffers in this area, it's a good time to sit and talk about dating. Why don't you and he go out on dates? If you're a single parent, it's a great month to show your kids some extra love. And if you are parents that do go on dates but never include your kids, it's time to share the love! Don't wait until they're teens to do this...show them now.

Here are a few ideas on dating your littles, so that they feel like the prince or princess that they are:

1. First of all, date your spouse. Let them see you plan a date, dress up, prefer one another, and show the love. It doesn't matter if we're still at home, a fancy dress-up occasion or a bit of creative romance is awesome. Even a simple thing like adding candlelight can speak volumes.
2. Next, every once in a while plan a date with your kids. Dad can invite his daughter to breakfast on the patio, and prepare it, let her mark it on her calendar, and tell her he'll "pick her up" at a certain time. Single or married moms can share a dessert with their little boys, and demonstrate good conversation and fun.
3. Have a family dress-up night with candles and fancy foods at the table. Instruct on table manners and how to ask questions and have pleasant conversation, and politeness and manners. Do this, instead of eating on the sofa in front of the TV or all at separate times.
4. During movie or show time, actually have a talk afterwards about relationships depicted in the movie or show. If revealing clothing or smack talk or manipulation occurs (even in cartoons!) talk about how that's one way...but there's a better way...to relate to the opposite sex.
5. Have a family night in the car! Pretend it's an actual date. Get fast food, play I SPY in the parking of the restaurant, and then drive to another drive-through for dessert. Show what proper behavior looks like in the car.
6. Let the littles plan the date and ask YOU out! Give them instructions: plan food, conversation, a treat (can be a flower picked from the yard!) and ambience (music). This can be SO FUN for them to plan and carry out, with you as the date!
7. Dance. Let dancing be some part of the date. Twirling for little girls is like being at a Cinderella ball. Letting boys groove and move while you try to copy makes him enjoy your company. And slow dancing impromptu in front of the kids – well – it's priceless gold being planted in their minds for years to come.

If you need more ideas on how to date your children, search for them. Notice their likes and cater to those. Make them feel special by paying attention to, lavishing love on, and inviting

them out to intimate time...all by example. This way, they'll be better equipped as young adults when they start noticing someone other than Mom or Dad...

Tiny Living – Home Hacks – by Leyanne Enterline

Last month I shared funny “trailerisms” that I hope made you smile. And this month, I thought it would add some more fun to share hacks we’ve discovered while living tiny. Humor gets us through many days, and makes our life quite interesting! Maybe you’ll want to try some of these home hacks, no matter where you live...tiny or big.

- Free foil wrapping containers from Whole Foods curbside behind the blinds in bedrooms to make it darker and insulate.
- Long mirror on glass window on kids’ bedroom door to make it darker in their room and it adds a nice long reflection for them!
- Foil used as lining on all pans when cooking so not to wash ANOTHER dish!
- Crockpot or one pan meal makes for less clean up, since we are hand washing.
- Make extras often, to have leftovers, so we don’t have to “dirty up” more pots.
- Plastic bins for everything to “appear” more organized.
- Live minimal! One bowl, plate, cup for every person and clean up your own stuff.
- Invest in a slightly better shower head, the original is super tiny and barely sprays out.
- Roll clothes tightly in drawers. Looks nice and “sparks joy.”
- Command strips everywhere. Provides a place to hang up keys, pictures, calendars...
- Use a pool noodle on bunk beds to prevent kids from falling off.
- Do not put food items in the outer cabinets, they will overheat.
- Put ice cream at the very back of the freezer; otherwise, we have shakes instead.
- Use a pool noodle to cover outdoor pipes in case of a freeze.
- Make sure to put outdoor awning back in, during a wind storm.
- Change out air filters regularly.
- Buy wrinkle free clothes, because there’s no room to iron!

Invention is the mother of necessity...haven’t I heard that somewhere? And humor for sure is the best thing for keeping our family sane and smiling.

Remember...love grows best in tiny spaces.



YOU

Healthy Habits - Portioned Eating – by Marcy Lytle

During all these months at home, it's been easy to sit in front of the TV, spread out a huge array of food, and eat for an hour...nibbling on this and that...because it's fun while chilling with a movie. Am I right? This started me thinking about portions, and how that seems to be so important with maintaining a good habit of eating in a healthy manner. After all, it's not fun to eat and eat, and then an hour later feel bloated and stuffed. Not fun, at all!

Here are a few ideas on portioned eating and keeping our stomachs and bodies a bit happier and healthier this month...and maybe these habits will stick with us!

One plate rule – There's this deli we frequent and you can get a one plate salad bar (well, when the salad bar was open) or a return trip salad plate. Opting for one plate rule when eating at home can help so much. Keep the food in the kitchen, fill your plate one time, put away the rest in the fridge, and retire to the sofa and enjoy.

Slowly chew – Instead of wolfing down the meal you've just prepared, take a bite, put your fork down, and chew. These rules aren't new, but they help to remind us to enjoy and savor, not gulp and gag.

Small snacks help – I've found that if I eat a few nuts or trail mix in the mid-morning hours, it curbs my appetite and I'm not so likely to overeat when lunchtime comes. But when I'm starving? Forget it. I'm so hungry, all the above rules go out the window!

A big bottle of water – It's true that drinking a big glass of water staves off hunger and fills your belly, so then hopefully you won't overeat when dinner is served. In fact, a good drink of water during your meal, to pause between bites, is helpful as well.

Sectioned plates or bentos – I love bento boxes and have mentioned them before. They have little squares, and they're so cute. I think filling those squares and making the food so pretty helps to enjoy each bite and not eat so much.

Share – If you make a big batch of chocolate walnut bars (we recently did!) then share the love. Portion out a few in bags and give to your kids...or someone...so that you only have say a half dozen at home. Portion one into a snack bag, and only allow yourself one a day.

Don't do it – Don't order huge meals any more, when you're getting takeout or eating on patios. Whomever you are with, ask if they want to share maybe an appetizer and a plate. You'll be SO GLAD when you're finished, that you didn't eat that huge pile of food by yourself. And your stomach will smile, as well.

Of course, we all need to move and exercise and walk and all the things. But even that won't help, if we're piling up food and eating without stopping, during a 2-hour movie. Go ahead and enjoy your meal. But make the portions small, make it cute and pretty, and fill in your stomach growls with a tiny healthy snack or a huge drink of water.

We are trying to do this...and some days we do...and some days we don't. But trying is good. Right?

Life in a Nutshell – Hydrangeas Love Me – by Jill Montz

I love plants, but I kill cactus.

I need this declaration printed on a t-shirt, water bottle, bumper sticker, and perhaps even as a black and white framed print I can hang in my bathroom, bedroom, or office. Because of my love for all kinds of plants, I have friends and acquaintances who periodically ask me questions or my advice regarding their green growing beauties. But if anyone has a question about a cactus I refer back to my proven declaration...*I love plants, but I kill cactus.*

You know what all plants need? Sunlight and water.
You know what cacti don't like a lot of? Water.
You know what I do to show my plants love? I water them.

Therefore...I love plants but I kill cactus.

The last few months have been very wet in our area. Most people will comment, "Don't farmers like it when it rains?" And to that I respond with, "Yes and no." Rain is a good thing. Our trees need rain to grow and produce crops. But just like most everything else, too much of a good thing can turn into a bad thing.

Too much rain can cause root rot, trees can develop fungus and diseases, and all this can eventually kill the tree if the problem persists. Too many rainy days with no sunshine can cause the trees to not produce crops or to shed crops in order to survive. And rain during harvest time can slow down the pecan gathering process. If the pecans are not gathered in time a timely fashion and remain damp on the orchard floor, the fallen nuts can begin to sprout and thus be ruined.

Most of the time our problem, in this part of north Texas, is not enough rain. We have survived many years of droughts or low rain totals. In fact, all new orchards we plant these days are done so with irrigation systems in place just in case the trees need more water. But on some rare occasions we have had years that were just too wet to produce good, abundant crops.

As I drove through the orchards earlier this week and saw all the water puddled down the rows of trees I couldn't help but wonder what in my own life am I "over watering?" If Dotty were in the car with me she would be raising her hand and making gurgling noises to prove her point.

At 13-years-old she points out to me (often) that I am very involved in her life. Sometimes, I'm too involved, in her opinion. I volunteer for many of her events. I make friends with many of her teachers. I ask a lot of questions. I give a lot of advice. I make sure she knows my opinion on everything from what she wears to what she says to who she says it to.

Now some might say...that's just good parenting.
And some might ask...where do you park your helicopter?
I promise I can see both sides.

I grew up in a house with very involved and loving parents. They weren't (and still aren't) perfect, but I never have nor ever will doubt their love for me. I knew how lucky I was to have parents at every ballgame and school program. I knew how much my friends loved my parents because my parents truly cared about all of them. I knew I was fiercely loved because they set boundaries for me and checked on me often. They kissed me goodnight, they grounded me

when I rebelled, and they made me work for things I wanted but provided me with all I needed. They were my fiercest warriors and biggest supporters always, but especially when life got hard some days.

My parents still do all this and more, even now. They cheer me on when I have success and they dust me off and send me back out into the world when I fail. They call me out when I am wrong and they call me often to tell me I am doing great. They let me soar but they remind me if I need a place to rest I can come find that with either of them. They gave me roots in a good childhood but they gave me wings to go out in the world.

Some days, 13-year-old Jill would have said I was being “over watered with love.” 18-year-old Jill might have screamed that phrase a time or two (my most rebellious year for sure). But 41-year-old Jill knows better.

Kids can be like cactus. Sometimes they don't want too much water. And their attitudes can be prickly too! Especially teenage girls' attitudes.

But in reality, I think kids are way more like hydrangeas. They crave water and need to stay saturated to really grow and bloom. Lucky for Dotty, I am very good at growing hydrangeas. So maybe my next printed water bottle should say...

I kill cactus but hydrangeas love me...just ask my Daughter.

An item like that probably wouldn't sell a lot on Amazon or Etsy but it would mean a lot to me. And I am sure someday I could buy one for Dotty when she is a mom, too.

Palms Wide Open – Life Right Now – by Hanna Bouck

Recently, my husband and I took the plunge into minimalism by buying and beginning to renovate an RV. One thing that inspired us to pursue RV livin' is something a friend spoke to me years ago.

“How so many of us live with arms extended but palms closed

(Like a little kid hanging onto their candy.)

When we do that yes, things can be taken,

but there's also so much to be placed in them as well.”

I didn't fully understand what she was saying at the time, but I continue to hear those words and I'm letting them sink in.

For context; I grew up with not much. My parents had me early on, and we didn't have a lot as far as physical possessions. So, in my adult life I have/had been obsessed with the idea of *the best*: the best clothes, the best home goods, best looking, and just being the best. Not that those things are bad, but when it is such a focus that it takes away from time with people + generosity - I think there's an issue.

Conviction hit immediately after I got married. Here I was sitting with my husband in a house with so much stuff. Stuff I didn't even want; and dreaded putting away and cleaning week after week. This same season I started to have an abundance of friends starting small businesses and others pursuing dreams such as missions; or supporting mission's organizations.

My heart tugged to do more, but literally, and dare I say, spiritual *stuff* was in the way. One Tuesday night, we had both had it.

We were cleaning when my husband said,

“Wouldn't it be great if we just bought an RV and got rid of everything?”

I looked up and said,

“Yes it would! Let's do it.”

He was definitely as shocked as I was at the epiphany, but a week later we walked away with keys to a new RV and bags full of Goodwill donations in the back of the car.

Life right now doesn't look like what I would have thought. Right now, it is a lot less cluttered and a lot more unknown. But I do know that Scott and I are choosing less so we can give more and do more with what the Lord has/is giving us.

Continuing to pursue peace + living life with palms wide open...

Strategic Women – Judge Deborah – by Debbie Haynes

This is the final look at strategic women, and this particular lady rivals all the former ones we talked about! Her name is Deborah, and she had leadership ability, strength of character and unwavering faith in God. After all, the traditional meaning of her name is “woman of a fiery spirit!”

Here’s a little background. Joshua had been ruling the land where the Children of Israel resided for about 30 years, and he was now about to die. Just before his death, Joshua gave the people a “pep talk” reminding them of all the miracles God had performed (miracles they didn’t deserve), the blessings they’d received in the Promised Land, and then he sternly warned them to stay close to God and not follow after idols.

Joshua 24:15 says,

And if it seems evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve – whether the gods your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood – or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell; but for me and my house we will serve the Lord.

The people gave a good answer of dedication to follow God, but Joshua knew their hearts and reminded them that God was holy and jealous and would not bless them if they followed after other gods. Joshua then died.

Judah was then chosen to lead the people, and Judah picked his brother Simeon to be his war general, and God gave them many victories. However, so sadly, the grandchildren that were now present had not been taught God’s ways by their parents, and intermingled with the enemy camps and completely forsook God. Of course, they were then devoured by their enemy, the Philistines.

Now that we know that back story, we can move on to read about God’s undying love for his people...

Judges 2:16-20 tells us that the Lord raised up judges which delivered the people from the hands of those that spoiled them. But the people still were stubborn and went “whoring” after other gods. And when these judges died, these children corrupted themselves again and again.

Boy, was God hot with anger against his people!

Over and over, these 12 tribes failed to drive out the enemy as God had commanded them to do...and this is the point where Judge Deborah appears on the scene – the first and only female among Israel’s 12 judges! She held court under a tree and followed God with all her heart.

One of her first actions as Judge was to commission Barak – a general for war – and he agreed to serve. But only if Deborah would go into battle with him! You see, he was a bit of a coward. Deborah agreed and now the story gets exciting...

The army coming against the Israelites had 900 chariots of iron, and the Israelites had none. However, they had fought this enemy before and lost, so they knew what they were facing. And

when Deborah prayed, she told Barak that the Lord was going to deliver this enemy into their hands. She instructed him to take 10,000 men to the mountain, but the enemy spotted them and started after them! The chase was on!

In Judges 4:15 we read that the Lord discomfited (utterly confused and defeated) Sisera and all his chariots and this guy even fled away on foot! In fact, the entire army ran for cover! Barak pursued the chariots and slew the entire army – with no one left alive except the still-fleeing Sisera.

Sisera fled to a nearby town (can you just visualize it?) to hide in the tent of Jael, where Sisera took a rest, while Jael said she'd stand guard. However, she drove a tent stake or nail through Sisera's head. And verse 21 says, "So, he died." Of course, he did!

Barak shows up at the tent and realizes Jael has already killed the enemy, because God had given his head to a woman, just as Deborah had told Barak beforehand!

All of Judges 5 is the victory song of Deborah. She praises God for avenging Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. And she sings in verses 12-13,

Awake, awake, Deborah, awake, awake and utter a song!

This fiery woman of God didn't let the power God entrusted her with go to her head. She acknowledged Jael, the woman that killed the enemy, and she acknowledged Barak for leading the army. But God got all the glory!

There's a lot to read in that victory song that we don't read in the details of the battle. The song says God used the heavens – thunder, lightning, hail and rain (and even a flood!) to sweep away the enemy.

Judge Deborah was definitely a strategic woman, dedicated to her people and to God, and in a time of crisis she never lost confidence in God, or in herself! She knew exactly where her help came from and gave all the glory to Him!

Judges 5:21 sums up this story by saying God had a purpose when he handpicked Deborah – because after this battle – the land had rest for 40 years! That's the sweetest part of the victory because this woman was willing to arise and be counted. She was obedient as she judged in wisdom and with a strong faith in her God.

The enemies of God are never a match for those whom God chooses and those that serve Him. That's what serving Him is all about – obeying his directives to keep ourselves from becoming polluted with the world's idols and ways.

Absolutely impossible situations become amazing victories to women that trust and serve their God with a faith that leads our families and followers to places of rest in Him!

Strengthening Your Core - No More! – by Marcy Lytle

There are some things I just have decided I won't do, won't buy, won't worry about, etc. and I thought it would be fun to share them with you! After all, life shouldn't be so worrisome and cumbersome, right? And I've realized, over the years, that some things I've been doing or buying or thinking about are useless and only clutter up my life, or make me frustrated. No more!

Throw pillows – I used to buy new ones for each season for the porch and the sofa and the beds, and then I ended up with a mound a mile high of throw pillows! Did you know that Amazon sells the pillows, and the covers? So I only need a few pillows and can then change out the covers seasonally, and the covers can be folded and put away!

Blah Looks – I've gone shopping dozens of times and ended up with a top in a color that looks awful on me, thinking I will wear it because it was a cute style. No more! I don't look good in beige or khaki green, both of those colors wash me out. So I've quit buying them! I know the colors I love, the ones that make me feel vibrant when I wear them, so I only look for those. Feels good...

Mincing garlic – Maybe I'm wrong, but the jar of minced garlic seems to work just as well as fresh, and the jar lasts forever. So why would I peel garlic cloves, use that mincer tool, scrape the garlic off and then try to clean that tool with all those tiny holes, anymore? I don't! That little jar of minced garlic has saved me so much time and energy!

Bitter roots – I'm in the process of doing a study on bitterness. It's SO EASY to become bitter as we grow older, dismissing people because they disappoint, allowing roots of unforgiveness to tangle up our hearts, etc. But I've decided I don't want even one tendril of bitterness showing up in my heart. It takes diligence, knowledge, and lots of prayer and faith to uproot each one. But it's SO WORTH IT. It starts by seeing others as He sees them, and that frees us to continue to love...

Messy car – This is a goal of mine because messy cars drive me nuts. So I've begun to add organizers that help me keep the inside nice (since we spend so much time eating in it, and road tripping). I have a little JIC jar in the glove compartment (just in case things - like extra plastic forks, safety pin, pen, tissue, tiny screwdriver, etc.) We also have a three compartment organizer for the back, so things we purchase don't roll around. We've added two plastic trays for eating, and little trash bags for gathering and discarding, etc. And...I'm trying to add on my schedule vacuuming more regularly! Why feel icky in the car? No more!

Pity parties – You know, those days where you feel less than (because you've compared), nights where you feel fat and old (geez, when we ever stop that stinking thinking?), and mornings where you can't get motivated because you feel depressed about the world, your kids, your life, etc. (some days, the thoughts just get the best of us!) I've been practicing the art of giving thanks (3 things a day) and recently began to look up, more. Who wants to attend a pity party? No one!

Folded jeans – I recently saw where shower curtain hooks can be hung on closet rods for hanging jeans! Genius! I had tried draping them all over hangers (looked messy), folding on a shelf (looked messy) or storing in a drawer (didn't like not being able to see them), and finally I really like this idea of the hooks! I'm sold!

What have you stopped doing, in favor of a better way? I'd love to hear!



MARRIAGE

After 40 Years – We Get To – by Marcy Lytle

I hopped into bed the other night and looked him and smiled and said, “We get to sleep together.” Of course, all married couples do! But have you ever looked at it as something to give thanks for, to note and smile about, and to tell him how much you love that you get to? He smiled, and we both snuggled and it set the tone for a good night’s sleep.

Why not look at other things we “get to do” with our spouses, a list to read over, a list to share, and a list to savor every day, so that giving thanks for him is first and foremost before starting to complain...

We get to hold hands while watching a movie.

We get to eat dinner together.

We get to load and unload the dishwasher.

We get to ride together to watch the sunset on the horizon if we want to.

We get to take a walk on a trail and observe the occasional owl in a tree as darkness approaches.

We get to place puzzles pieces and make scenes come to life.

We get to observe children and learn from them and give thanks.

We get to plant and rake and mow and garden, and watch our yards thrive and live.

We get to tackle life’s problems together, with Him.

We get to worship together and give thanks for His faithfulness.

We get to order fast food, especially Blizzards, and enjoy our own flavors.

We get to awaken by each other’s side, wash our faces and see another sunrise.

We get to pray big prayers for the lonely, the outcast, the broken and the needy.

We get to give and share and love, without expecting anything in return.

We get to cry tears of sorrow and laugh belly laughs of joy, maybe all in the same day.

We get to skip or dance a few moves, when no one else is looking.

We get to have separate sinks for getting ready, and the same table for dining.

We get to listen without judging, affirm without ridiculing.

We get to text sweet notes and reminders, with emojis of affection.

We get to sleep together and smile as we close our eyes...

Date Night Fun – A Meaningful March – by Marcy Lytle

February and all of the red hearts and chocolate are past, and Easter is coming next month, but here we are stuck in the middle with March. Why not make our dates meaningful, this month? Meaningful means rich and significant, sincere and important. And really nothing in life is much more important than relationship with Him...and with him.

Here are five ideas:

Meaningful conversation: Make a dinner for two together, and actually sit at your table by candlelight and have specific conversation with these five questions: What was the best thing about your day? What do you love most about our daily life together? What would you consider a perfect day, from morning til night? What are five things you couldn't live without? Then really listen to each other's answers as you savor each bite. After dinner, watch a meaningful documentary together and discuss afterwards.

Meaningful drive: Plan a route to make a drive that's rich in visual pleasure, together. Search for murals, blooming plants (and try to identify them), stop at a local restaurant to support them, and purchase something from a local artisan. Finally, enjoy some rich and decadent dessert to talk over all that you saw!

Meaningful celebration: St. Patrick's Day is this month, and he was important in bringing Christianity to Ireland. So plan your date night around all things green. We even shared some of our favorite green things over on the TIPS page! Purchase or plant a green together - make an herb garden, or grow some indoors in a cute planter. Get some greens from the ATM and surprise a fast food waiter with a big green tip. Find a bakery that's selling green iced cookies or a coffee shop with a green drink! And finally, sit near a pond for a while observing green frogs, lily pads, or the green grass beneath your feet.

Meaningful walk: How can a walk be meaningful? I'm glad you asked! Walk with a purpose: make it a point to acknowledge and say hello, how are you, to at least five people passing you on the trail; decide on a specific mileage and make sure you stay the course until you meet that goal; look for something out of the ordinary on the ground, in a tree or in the sky and point it out; when you return home give each other a foot-washing and massage and you're done.

Meaningful connection: Whether you're in the mood or not, make a Facetime date with a couple you haven't seen in a while, maybe one in another town or one that's been distanced because of the pandemic. Tell them what you're going to be snacking on, and ask them to enjoy the same. Plan ahead topics of conversation, what you're going to wear, and set the date. Enjoy.

For Better or Worse - A Big Deal – by Kaelin Scott

My husband is kind of a big deal. And I'm not just saying that because he works for a famous baseball player. I'm really proud of him for all he's accomplished, but I would still be proud of him if he was the custodian at McDonald's. Having his dream job is great, and I obviously want that for him. But what I'm most concerned about is his soul. Let me tell you, my husband absolutely has a heart for God. And that's why I think he's a big deal.

A man of faith is far more valuable than any money, success, fame, or accomplishment. When it comes to a leader for my family, I care more about integrity than what he does for a living. The things that really matter are those that follow us to eternity. Investing in each other's hearts and exemplifying faith to our children are most important.

It doesn't matter if your spouse is the CEO of a billion-dollar corporation or the garbage man driving down the street. If he lives his life for Jesus, then he's a big deal too. If you've got a man of integrity leading your family, you've won the husband lottery. Money and material things might make your life easier here on earth, but they mean nothing when we pass into eternity. There are no favorites in God's eyes, and there will be no upper or lower class in heaven. The blessings we have in this life aren't meant to be our hope. Rather, they are instruments with which we can share God's love with others.

Material success comes and goes. Seasons change along with our circumstances. But there is one thing that remains constant and reliable – our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our hope, regardless of any other circumstance. When He is at the center of your goals and dreams, there is nothing you can't do. It's often when we let go and give Him control that He blesses us beyond our wildest dreams. When we give our marriage, our spouse, and our children to Him, He can use them to do wonderfully amazing things.

In This Together – Our Reality – by Bekah Holland

Sometimes we find ourselves too exhausted and worn out to keep our heads above water. We've been fighting so hard, for so long, that defeat feels like a respite. Sometimes the desire to let the waves crash over us and bury us under is stronger than any memory of love and happiness we can recall.

This is the reality that people in every walk of life, every religion, every age and personality live in every day. People you know. People you love. People who are really good at hiding their pain.

I know this because I am one. And I love many. And I see many more. I wonder sometimes if God hasn't allowed me to experience this because as much as I tried to understand and sympathize with the people in my life who live with depression, as much as I tried to be patient and gentle, I missed the mark over and over again, because I didn't really get it at all.

I have always been incredibly sensitive to things that never made much sense to me. Even as a child, I remember going on a road trip with my family, and my stomach started hurting and while what I was feeling was very physical, I also knew it was more than that. Then about 15 minutes up the road we passed a building and the intensity of what I had been feeling built until I thought I might die. My parents were praying, and while I don't know what was going on inside of that old building on a long stretch of highway, I believe with all my heart it was a battleground. Maybe spiritual. Maybe something else. But I felt it like I was experiencing it. And many more times than I'd care to think about, I've had experience after experience like that, standing in a room full of people who are laughing and joking but I felt a pain, loneliness and hurt that I couldn't quite place.

I've always been a pretty happy go lucky kind of gal. I have come through experiences that should have left me shattered. I've been at peace when I should have been in torment. Now don't get me wrong, I've hurt and cried and broken and been pieced back together many times over. I'm not impervious to pain. But I think God knew I would need the ability to both feel and experience overwhelming pain, and then recover so I could offer comfort. I've struggled with why He made me this way. And I've wondered if I was a mistake. I've felt like a burden while also feeling unseen. I've felt the darkness of those who are buried under the weight of things I can't imagine. It's been a blessing and a curse at times.

*But what I'm still working on is not assuming all of the weight of
my loved one's pain is mine to carry.*

My job is to love and then to release it to the God who sees. To listen to that still small voice, and also to the silence. To sit with others in their pain, share their burden, and then lay it at the foot of the cross where it belongs. That's the hard part. The surrender.

Sometimes this "gift" has been a hindrance in my marriage. Because I knew something was coming that even my husband didn't realize yet. And that put me on edge, fearful of the unknown. And I am far from an expert at knowing how to handle that all the time. Sometimes I try to overcompensate with extra sunshine and pep, which, obviously is more annoying than helpful. Sometimes I just turn inward, hiding from the inevitable.

I love people who fight to live in the light while darkness threatens to suffocate them. It's not just a story for us. It's our reality. It's a day by day, minute by minute fight against the dying of the light. I have often hidden my sensitivity. It's hard to be the kind of vulnerable that leaves people thinking you're a bit looney. I get it. I think it's crazy and I live it.

*But I also trust that the God who set us in motion
has a plan that I may or may not see.*

That He created in me something that while difficult, can also be beautiful. Because I have a miniscule glimpse into what He feels in our pain. In my finite and limited human capacity, I want to shelter and protect my husband and loved ones from their pain. I want to absorb their sadness and darkness and shine light so bright that darkness loses. How much more so, does the creator of our souls want this for us?

I know this isn't my normal chaotic mix of self-deprecation, humor and mess of our real lives. I love to bring lightness and laughter to distract us from the tough stuff. And I still revel in that part of who I am. However, no matter what it looks like from the street view of any of our lives, where there is joy, you'll usually also find pain. And where there is laughter, there have also been tears. And in this coming year, when you're given the chance to see someone right where they are, don't be afraid to get dirty and sit with them in the middle of their mess. Whether that mess is laundry and toys or depression and addiction.

Be the person to see your spouse, or partner or child or neighbor and know that they just need someone to see them, in all their beautiful mess. And *maybe* stand for them while they rest a while before continuing their fight. This is being who Jesus called us to be. It's so much more than preaching from a pulpit or in a stadium or reminding others of the "speck in their eye." It's living and loving and loving some more. No expectations. No requirements. No changing. Just love.

"No matter how dark your night, may you always find enough light to take the next step."

-John Mark Green



ENCOURAGEMENT

Last month, I described my state of being as “wordless.” The intense emotional climate that shook the words out of me has somewhat subsided; but, as shakings often do, it left a mark—one I welcome as a friend. I felt up against an impenetrable wall, and, out of heartache and desperation, wordless prayer awakened in my soul. What I saw and heard around me brought me to my knees, and I began to wonder if love manifested in wordless action could be the most powerful and effective prayer.

I’ve often wondered how we can “pray without ceasing.” We’re admonished to do this, but it seems impossible, unless you’re a monk or a mystic. What about the average person like me? What about people who have no time, busy moms, people who have to work hard all day? I set aside time to read and meet with God and try to be mindful and pray throughout the day, but full attention is often required and it goes by the wayside. Praying without ceasing? Hardly. Worship music helps keep my mind in the right place, but, honestly, these moments, petitions, and songs don’t satisfy my deep longing to hear and be heard. I need more, and prayer *is* so much more.

One of my favorite definitions of prayer is “the living interactive relationship we have with God about what he and I are working on together” (Richard Foster). *Working together*—that sets me on fire! Prayer is a two-way exchange—it’s dynamic, active, and it’s relevant to Now. There are no how, when, or where rules. My devoted, humble heart laid bare is all that’s required. ...*All*? That tiny word contains multitudes: all of my heart, all of my soul, all of my life, all of my willingness, all of my honesty, all that I am and all that I have.

I fall short in so many ways. I’ve wandered off the path, loved the world, wanted what’s not mine; done things I’m ashamed of...my sins are countless. Through it all I’ve experienced both the discipline and the grace of God, and I’m so very grateful for both. My devoted, humble heart laid bare can’t pretend, can’t hide. It screams a wordless prayer. It has nothing to offer except itself, and in return God gives everything. This kind of love, this kind of friendship, is deep and real...beyond words. This God of Love, who *is* love, speaks the language of love: compassion, humility, patience...summed up in 1 Corinthians 13. He clearly says if we love him we keep his commandments, and many of them involve loving. He clearly tells us how to treat one another. He clearly says that if we abide in him we can ask anything.

Abiding, loving, listening and obeying sounds is my end of “working together.” If my heart is inextricably connected to his, then his will is my desire and I really can ask anything. If I “live and move and have my being in Christ,” God-prayers, spoken or unspoken, are born and released into the heavens where all things begin. So, again, I wonder if love manifested in wordless action could be the most powerful and effective prayer? That is, love shown by obeying God’s words; love shown by walking in truth, by doing what he tells me, by loving my neighbor with no restrictions or judgments.

Through this abiding love my whole life becomes a prayer—praying without ceasing. Sometimes words come, but, when there are no words, I believe Christ our intercessor understands and interprets my silent cries to the Father.

This time of year the prayer garden looks bleak. Leafless trees stand naked, exposing what's behind and above. No shade or shelter, no concealment or pretense. Leaves litter the ground, obscuring low-growing plants and specimen rocks, narrowing the pathway. Garden creatures such as lizards, butterflies, and bees hide in their winter homes, waiting out the cold. Where is the lushness of life? Where pulses the garden heart? It's there, hidden where my eyes can't see. The garden will come to life as the season turns and sun and rain drench the earth again. I don't have to say a word.

Ps 38:9 O Lord, my every desire is before You; my groaning is not hidden from You.

Moving Forward – Waiting – by Pam Charro

A close friend recently made a comment that I'm still chewing on.

She said, "Few people realize what a privilege it is to wait on God."

Why would that be true?

If you're like me, waiting is not one of your favorite things to do. Especially here in America, we live in a fast-food society where we want everything NOW. Waiting is uncomfortable and unfamiliar and doesn't always make sense to us.

But the word of God is full of instruction on the value of learning to wait on God:

Isaiah 40:31 says waiting on the Lord renews our strength and gives us wings.

Lamentations 3:25 says the Lord is good to those who wait for him.

Psalm 37:7 says to be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.

Isaiah 30:18 says blessed are all who wait for him.

There are so many more verses about the benefits of learning to wait on God, but I would sum it up to say one main point found in 1 Corinthians 2:9:

*No eye has seen, no ear has heard,
and no mind has imagined the things that God
has prepared for those who love him.*

I don't believe this pertains only to the next life, but to the life we are living right now! Being in the uncomfortable middle forces us to rely on our faith in his goodness to us, and it's the only place we can be where all things are possible. Intentional waiting on God gives him the chance to really show off.

I'm very actively waiting on God for many things right now, and I hope you are, too. As we journey with him, let's enjoy watching just how good he truly is.

The best is yet to come!

Rooted in Love - I Can't Get Comfortable – by Kaelin Scott

You lie down in your bed at the end of a long day, shifting around until you find the perfect position. You're so comfortable that you think you'll never move again. But ten minutes later, your arm falls asleep and you have to roll over to get comfy again.

Comfort never lasts forever, especially on the journey of parenting.

It feels like I just got used to my daughter being four, and now she's already five. And I could swear my son just said his first words yesterday, but he's a constant jabber box and fountain of information. Every time I catch up to time, it runs away from me again. Sometimes I just want to pause life and not let any more of it slip away. I can't even catch my breath before my children are off accomplishing some new milestone, learning to read, and having more birthdays.

It's hard to let go when all I want to do is hold on tight. Our babies don't stay little forever. They outgrow our favorite little outfits, they lose those precious baby teeth, and they eventually ditch their training wheels. I find myself clinging to moments that may never come again, wishing it would all slow down. I don't want things to change, and I don't want my babies to stop needing me. But no season or phase is meant to last forever. Some are exciting and others are bittersweet, yet each is wonderful in its own special way.

Whenever I have the rarity of being comfortable in life, I want to enjoy it to the fullest. Instead of dreading the changes up ahead, knowing that none of this will last too long, I want to live in the moment and make as many memories as I can. I know my little ones won't be little forever. They're already so much more grown-up than I can even believe. But they're little for now, and now is beautiful. I love our days together and the moments we share along the way. Even if change is right around the corner, I've still got today. So I'm going to enjoy it while I can.

Whatever season of life or parenting you're in, it won't last forever. That can make you feel sad, but it's also encouraging. There are so many more wonderful things to come. You might be comfortable with the way things are, and maybe you don't want anything to change. I don't either! But find comfort in knowing that God has already ordained the seasons ahead. He has special surprises and blessings waiting for you. He has already gone ahead of you, and He is walking alongside you. Enjoy today, and look forward to tomorrow!

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Simple Truths – Puzzling – by Marcy Lytle

All of life is a puzzle, isn't it? That's not a new analogy. It's been around for as long as the word puzzle has been here. A puzzle is something that's confusing and broken apart. And that's what life is, right about now, and gets more confusing every day. There's no way to make sense of the government, the viruses, the unrest and prejudice, and more. And yet, that's what we do, because we all like to work puzzles. We especially love it when a puzzle comes together!

We hadn't put together a puzzle in years, but during all of this time at home, we have pulled out a few and completed them. It's quite daunting to start a puzzle, as you lay out all the pieces – many of which look the same color with very little difference. And like most people, I suppose, we gather the edges, then sort the pieces into color groups, and then...we start the puzzle! Depending on how many pieces there are, then a week or a month later, the puzzle is complete and we feel this sense of relief and pride!

Here's what I've learned while puzzling, and I'm sure you can "get the picture" as you read, without my having to explain, as we think about life going forward...

It's so helpful to have a picture of how the puzzle is supposed to look, once it's together. Without that box, the photo on the front, we'd be scrambling a lot longer and become so much more frustrated...and maybe never finish at all.

Light is everything. We turned on every light in the room, including the lamps overhead and across, to shed as much light as possible while we worked. Light helped us see!

If one piece fell off the table, we immediately picked it up because it could get vacuumed up, stepped on and bent, or lost altogether. It was so important that we keep the pieces together, so the completed puzzle wouldn't be missing any part of the picture!

Working together was key, because sometimes the very piece I needed was in his "pile" and vice-versa. And often, it was so exciting to see when little groups we were putting together actually joined into the big picture!

Pausing was also key, because working puzzles is hard work and tedious and can become addicting. However, stopping for a while to rest our eyes, getting up to do life, and stepping away from the concentration – well it often resulted in faster work when we came back to the puzzle. Rest helped so much!

We gravitated toward the easy, first. The puzzle we put together was one of a huge apple pie and lots of colorful pieces surrounding it. Those pieces were the most fun, and the apple pie crust was the hardest part, by far. It took lots more time and effort to put those pieces in, the ones that blended and didn't really stand out, but once we did...OH MY GOSH...it felt so good.

Completion was elation. We smiled, we stood up and patted the puzzle, we gazed at it a while and we shared it on social media to let our friends know of the beauty that came out of the chaos in the beginning!

I'm not going to explain each analogy in detail, but you can see that putting together a puzzle teaches us so much about life as a Body, making sure the Light is near and shining brightly, working together with Others, the importance of Rest and Inclusion, and SO MUCH MORE.

Haven't done a puzzle, lately? We're all pieces of a living puzzle, and thank goodness – there are steady hands and eyes putting each of us into place for the final glorious completion that will blow the minds of those that stay on the table and play their part in the beauty that awaits us all...

Unearthly Thing - Objects in the Mirror May Not be as Bad as They Appear – by Angela Dolbear

It was a good day disguised as a bad day.

I was sure the “morning yuckies,” a debilitating cocktail of brain fog, fatigue, and pain, which I experience every morning due to life with an auto immune disease, would wear off around lunch time, as it generally does.

But it did not. Weakness and joint aches double-teamed me until I tagged out, and surrendered to spending the day lying on the couch. Might sound relaxing, but it’s far from it. It’s frustrating, and it makes me grieve for my health.

But I remembered God’s teaching about rest, and how important it is. It was technically not the Sabbath (which is loosely interpreted by this Gentile gal to mean Sunday), but my joints were not moving well, and taking a shower was looking like the major accomplishment for the day.

So I wrapped my stiff and weary self in my *Nightmare Before Christmas* fleece blanket, reclined the couch back, and turned on my side so I could gaze out the picture window in our living room. And I began to pray.

Prayer is more like talking with God. It’s a privilege, and truly, it’s a necessity.

I started with gratitude. I am so thankful for my husband, for my beautiful home, for God’s constant great provision, especially through the pandemic, and for healing me through the years of all the ailments that scleroderma has done to try to put me on the sidelines, and even tried to take me out of the game.

Anxiety had stepped-up its hold on me, giving me intense, even hostile dreams, and bad sleep in general. The lack of rest is probably the culprit for the current flare-up that has me unmoving, only able to stare out the window.

After a few moments, I quieted my mind, and watched the clouds of a forecasted rainstorm move into my view. The contrast between the bright blue sky and the heavy gray cloud bank was so striking, and reminded me of God’s power and grace, if those attributes could materialize.

*I was beginning to love my time of sequestered stillness.
I told myself I should do this more often.*

I heard a still small voice in my spirit say, “Ask Me.” It was more of a reminder than an invitation.

So I asked Jesus to heal me from anxiety. I asked, standing on the confidence of the long list of healing He has done for me (and for others that I have witnessed).

As I was thinking back through all the instances of healing that Jesus did in the gospel of Luke, which my husband and I had recently finished reading, a sudden silence happened in my spirit.

The low murmuring grinding that I was not aware that was always present in my mind ceased, and there was peace.

My spirit was relieved. It happened so suddenly, that I asked Jesus, "What was that?"

"I healed you," He said.

Throughout the rest of the day, and into the evening, I kept replaying the sudden stopping of the grinding murmur in my spirit. I felt lighter. I kept asking God if it was my anxiety He healed, because I was stunned after being plagued by it for almost three years.

I usually end each day with standing on our back porch waiting for my sweet pup Abby to do her business before we all go to bed. It's the perfect time to reflect on the day, on what happened, and what I could have done differently, and what I have to be grateful for.

On that night of my healing, I looked up at the bright full moon, framed by a few leafless branches from our neighbor's huge oak tree, and marveled at how the moon lit up the clear evening sky. And the sky was full of stars, which are usually hard to see since we live close to the bright city lights downtown Nashville.

And I noticed my spirit was still, more still than it has been since before I had a stroke in March 2018, which is when the anxiety started. The constant inner noise was truly gone.

"You healed my anxiety, huh," I said to God.

I healed your anxiety, He said, with loving authority.

Thank You, Lord. I love You.

I thought about how my perspective on my circumstances changed. And how only God can help me sort through the fragments of the situation, and provide a glimpse of a fuller view of what He is doing. I thought about 1 Corinthians 13:12:

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known."

I love this verse (along with verse 13) in the Amplified translation of the Bible. It helps me dig deeper into its meaning:

"For now [in this time of imperfection] we see in a mirror dimly [a blurred reflection, a riddle, an enigma], but then [when the time of perfection comes we will see reality] face to face. Now I know in part [just in fragments], but then I will know fully, just as I have been fully known [by God]. 13 And now there remain: faith [abiding trust in God and His promises], hope [confident expectation of eternal salvation], love [unselfish love for others growing out of God's love for me], these three [the choicest graces]; but the greatest of these is love."

What I thought started out as no-good-got-nothing-done sick day, turned out to be a mark-it-down-in-the-blessings-journal day (which I made sure I did). A truly good day.

P.S. Every month, I ask God what He would like me to write about in my "Unearthly Thing" column in THYME. He told me to tell my story in the March article, because others needed to hear it. Yet another answer to prayer! He is so good.

Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, all available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction, with an aim toward spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, while inspiring readers to laugh, cry, and crave certain varieties of food. She loves reading, writing and leading worship music with her husband Tim at their church in Nashville, Tennessee. Please drop by and sing-up for news and free goodies at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - All Tangled Up – by Marcy Lytle

We love to take walks, and we walk now more than we ever did before. That's a good thing, for sure! And I've also realized that when I walk, I've often thought more than observed, and that's not a good thing! Thinking gets in the way of seeing, and not seeing gets in the way of marveling at all that's good out in nature! So I put away my phone, I grab his hand, and off we go.

One of our favorite walking trails is near our house, a trail that meanders along a beautiful creek, and it's so pretty in all seasons. I'd say we see something interesting and fresh, every time we take a walk past a coop of goats and chickens, across a bridge, and onto this path that we love so much.

This particular time, up in the tree, we spotted this kite. Apparently, some kid was flying it high, possibly squealing with delight, and then suddenly, that joyful experience most likely turned to sorrowful wails, as Mom or Dad explained that kite flying was over.

There's a field across the path from that tree, and I can just imagine a family picnic was taking place, the parents had purchased or even made kites for the kids to fly, and had even imagined all of the joy that would fill their family time on the lawn. And then, as happens to EVERY SINGLE KID, they don't stay clear of the trees and the kite tangles up, and the party's over.

I stopped to take a picture of this kite stuck in the tree, and you know why? It was because this dead tree, or at least a tree that's dormant in the winter, was unattractive, unassuming, and would never have caught my eye had the colorful kite not been tangled in its branches.

That messed up picnic, wailing child, ruined party, became my focal point for the picture, because of the beauty it left among the lackluster tree without leaves.

I love lessons and thoughts that occur while taking walks, but they don't happen unless I look up and observe. They don't take place if I spend that time walking and choose to complain as I walk. And I miss them all if I'm deep in worry about what's going to happen tomorrow.

Isn't this picture stunning? At least, I think it is. There's nothing so lovely as a pop of color against a black and white, or gray, background.

And we can also learn so many other things from that kite stuck in a tree. We need to stay clear of trees, when we're told to do so. We need to listen to our Father, and obey. We need to let him help us as we soar. And we need to realize that a stuck kite isn't the end of the world, but only a fragmented piece in the beauty of the day...even if it's torn up and no longer flying.

That kid will most likely get another kite, the family will picnic another day, and the kid will become more skilled at listening, flying, and soaring...and those that walk by will then look up and see the tail flying in the wind behind the kite that's flying high against a backdrop of blue...instead of gray.

FRESH THYME - Lonely Times – by Marcy Lytle

I will not even pretend to understand the true meaning of being lonely, but I've certainly tasted it, observed it, and empathized with the lonely. Single folks, I don't know how you do it. It breaks my heart for the elderly. And being in a crowd of people and surrounded by those you love, and still feeling lonely, must be the worst of all. Loneliness is probably one of the most common feelings in so many, since we were first ordered to stay at home and not gather, not touch, and not even be near people.

Of course, for the introvert we said early on – this was a dream come true! But even if we're introverts or extroverts, loneliness can settle in over us like a dark cloud that won't just burst and rain, blow on by, or evaporate. Loneliness, after a while, can smother us.

The places and experiences where I've tasted loneliness sometimes bring with them feelings like:

- Panic – Thoughts race into my mind about being alone in the world, when I hear of someone losing a spouse or a family member to the virus or any other reason.
- Uneasiness – Being alone for too long can result in feeling like the walls are closing in, like we need to escape from being shut in, and all sorts of queasy and uneasy flutters in our stomachs and minds.
- Sadness – If we sit alone for too long, without any input from those that love us, or strangers that need us, or the sun that wants to warm us, we become frowners and downers.
- Sleepiness – Have you ever sat alone, tired of chores, uninterested in creating or reorganizing, and so you just decide to lie down and take a nap? A nap is great, but not all day...
- Despair – If we're lonely for too much and for too long, we may begin to think that loneliness is all there is, and we may begin to despair of the future, of living, and of anything joyful at all.

I'd say I tasted little bites of each of those every once in a while, and I bet many have tasted way too many bites of those feelings, and it's made us all sick. Being lonely is not a part of how we're supposed to live. But going weeks and months without physical contact, face to face conversation, and gatherings of energetic crowds can certainly create lonely times.

So, what have you done? What are we to do? How do we remedy the lonely times that last way too long, while we're still wearing masks and distancing while living?

You've probably settled in on your own solutions, but here are just a few:

- Pour out your heart to Him, and He will lift you up and be near and real, and lead you out...
- Spring is here, so take more walks, plant more flowers, and wave at more people...
- Call a friend and confess your loneliness. Don't sit and pity yourself. Ask and receive...

- Ask a friend to be your partner, in spurring each other daily to move and create and give...
- Recount your blessings, sing your praises, and start reaching out to share...

Loneliness can sometimes swallow us up, and it often swallows up our friends that we haven't talked to in a long time. So if loneliness is not part of your life right now, reach out to someone that comes to mind and call them, text them, send them a gift, or better yet...invite them to sit in your yard or a park...and create connection once again.

FRESH THYME - Sunrise – Wait for It – by Marcy Lytle

I was awake at 3am, wide awake, mind churning. Once in a while that happens, and I really don't like it one bit. And often, I pray or try to think other thoughts, but usually if I'm wide awake – forget it. Nothing works to help me return to a deep sleep that my body so desperately needs. However, this one particular morning, I was able to go back to sleep. What was different?

The panic and the sleeplessness was not different. It's been coming in waves, ever since the pandemic has worn on and on. It heightens sometimes when I watch the news or read entertainment reports. A recent report was about a new film about cannibals...not the kind in other countries in the wild...but like here living among us. What? Words like "another surge" just stand out in my mind. Thoughts about the future for my children and their children, and then there's my own future...as I age with my husband. You know the drill. Your mind starts at A and runs down the hill towards Z, only it's not the happy ABC song you knew as a kid.

A few days ago, I saw an image someone posted of a small person looking up at a big huge sky. It was a sky littered with stars, with a moon in the corner, and it looked absolutely beautiful and in order. And I felt God speak to me these words:

*If I can march the stars out at night, set them in place,
give waters their boundaries and clouds their movement,
then I can make order out of a chaotic world with just one word from my mouth.*

That voice, that moment, completely stilled my heart. In fact, I'd say that my worrisome heart immediately calmed down and the storm exited as quickly as it came. I was so thankful.

But here I was again, about a week later, awake and worried and bothered and burdened. The worst kind of trio in the middle of the night, and it wasn't a trio that was singing a pretty tune. I tried to conjure up that image and that peace again. And He was there with me again, this time reminding me about the sunrise.

I realized that we all (everyone in every country around the world) go to bed at night, close our eyes, and trust... We trust that the sun will rise the next morning, and when we awaken, the stars will be replaced by a few clouds, and the moon by the bigger sun, and light will return. It doesn't matter if you believe in a higher power or the Creator of the Universe...you do this, as well. You go to sleep, knowing that the darkness of the night will give way to the light of the next day.

And guess what? That process will take place without you lifting a finger. In fact, God set in motion the need for our bodies to rest during the darkest part of the 24-hour period of the day. There's got to be a message in that process.

The message to me, and it's a message to you, as well – is this:

No amount of worry can change a thing. (Where have you heard those words before?) There's nothing I can do or say to make the darkness cease once the sun sets. But there is something I can do to usher in the rising sun. And that is...*rest*.

I had picked up all the burdens of the previous day, from my children's concerns, to my dad's health, to the state of the world, to the loneliness in my own soul, and so much more. It was a heavy load and it pressed on my heart so much that it awakened me with heaviness and fear. Yes, I prayed. But more than just words, I felt He wanted me to know. He wanted me to know Him.

He is faithful, and he has been since the beginning of time when he moved over the dark formless earth and spoke into existence all that we see and experience today in the form of the beauty of another day.

I have no idea what today will bring, but I know for certain that night will fall again, and the sun will rise tomorrow and there will be another day. It might be here, or it might be there (which wow – I cannot even comprehend the light that will shine up there!) but there's no use in losing sleep over all of those worries.

Now, I know that's easy to read and hard to do. It's hard for me. But last night it was easier, because that visual of looking at the sky was still with me, the knowledge that darkness couldn't stop the sunrise reminded me, and his gentle voice wooed me back to sleep.

Sunrise. Wait for it. Sleep while it's the darkest, even when you can't see a thing, because the Creator is at work making all things and calling them good as he sends forth the Light.

FRESH THYME - Why I Don't Wear Joggers – by Marcy Lytle

They're on the cover of every magazine, they pop up on my feed, and the influencers on Instagram are wearing them and shouting their praises. So this past Christmas, I asked for a cute set – you know – the kind where the top matches the bottom. The cute jogger that is supposed to be the trend of this change in lifestyle we're all living, more time at home, and not in the office. So I put it on one morning and wore it for a few hours, and then hung it back in the closet. I haven't worn it since.

Why?

- Joggers make me feel frumpy. Yes, that's a word. It means dowdy and old-fashioned. So, maybe that's not the right word. But I felt undressed and slouchy. Yes, that's it. Slouchy. And loose fitting, slouchy clothes make me want to sit around and do nothing, and that's not me.
- Joggers are often loose and baggy. I know, some think that's a good thing. But I like pants that zip. That way I can tell if I've overeaten, I feel like my body parts are in place, and it feels better to me than a relaxed fit. Okay, maybe you're thinking I'm weird. But there's more...
- Joggers are often tight and revealing. I really don't like seeing every dimple in a girl's butt or the outline of her underwear in the tight versions, or the realization that there is no underwear, when walking on a trail behind those out actually jogging. Maybe the tight legs are good for running, but cover your bum. It's not sexy or cute when it wiggles as we run.
- Joggers put on airs. Those that wear joggers appear to be those that are trying to stay healthy by moving and exercising. But just wearing them doesn't mean anything. And wearing them shopping and out to eat and everywhere we go isn't fooling anyone.

Do I sound critical? I'm just being honest about these pants that I see flying off the shelves in every color and style, from tie-dye to open air weave down the side of the leg. I really don't care for them, a lot. Yes, I have a couple pair, but here's how I wear them...

- Joggers are for yard work. I don't mind them when I'm out mowing, as that activity will be starting up all too soon. I like them for planting my garden, because yeah – I can bend and move easily and wear a sloppy tshirt in the safety of my own yard.
- Joggers are for exercise only (in my opinion) – for the gym, for the trail (with bum covered) or for the floor at home. I haven't seen a pair yet that's appealing to wear anywhere else. Not even the cute matchy-matchy sets of tops with bottoms. Nope.
- Joggers are for sick days. Those loose drawstring types are great for sitting on the sofa, watching shows, sipping on hot tea, and resting to get well. That's where joggers thrive and ought to live, and stay.
- Joggers are the exception, not the rule. Instead of drawers or hangers full of these baggy or skin tight clothing items we call outfits, we should have only a couple...not a ton.

If you live and breathe for joggers, good for you. But I don't get it. Maybe you don't get me, either. And that's okay! We're different. I just like to spout off once in a while, and this month of March is my madness about joggers.

I'm excited to buy spring skirts, dresses, cute pastel or khaki pants, and more...to dress up...to sit on the sofa, take a ride in the car, or visit a park. I feel better about myself when all my junk is hidden and pulled in and zipped up and designed with style.

Okay, I'm done...