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For Every Season

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TIPS

The Dressing – Transition to Fall – by Marcy Lytle

Fall may have already arrived where you live, but for us here in Texas, September is still summer in the temperature area...but we're definitely preparing for the transition to the next season! I did buy a few things I'll wear on into fall, but for the most part we still have to dress cool but pretend the temperatures are coming...after a long, hot summer. So what does one wear, as we wait for the first cold front? I've got lots of ideas...

We can definitely switch to fall hues now, and not wait for frost. Greens and browns, even if our sleeves are still short, can be worn as September shows up on our calendars. Or purples and plaids, oranges and reds. Try a new hairstyle with fun clips and ties, as well!

Do you have one of the new denim skirts, yet? They're back, and I like them! This uneven hem one is fun, and it too will look great with boots and a jacket or sweater, after the warmth of September gives way to cool October.

What about some fall jackets? I've had this green one all summer, and paired with graphic tees, jackets are great for September transition. Take off the jacket outdoors, and put it back on for indoors. You'll need several of these for fall wear. I just found one on clearance at H&M and it's just the best!

The elastic ankle cargos are out and I love them. I found a pair in a dusty rose color, and while I can wear them now, they'll be great with navy or browns, or rich colors on top. These are so comfortable, and I found them at a discount store!

I found these printed pattern pants on clearance at Target and snapped them up. They are so comfortable, so scour the aisles now and grab some new pants to cover up those legs when the temperatures fall!

Spanx has pants! I splurged and got a pair and I love the stretch, the fabric (doesn't show panty lines) and the options for these pants for fall! Grab a pair, now, or wait for a sale...

Scarves might be hot around your neck right now, so wear them at your waist...in a fall hue! Caramel or brown, or a bold red, or a rich gold – or a pattern, too!

And purchase some hair clips and ties and try your hair in new hairstyles for the new season! I love the side pony tail tucked back under through the tie...try it!

There you go. Lots of ideas to try as we transition to the new season.

Seven for You – Linger Longer – by the Panel

We all bathe, but some of us linger and relax and create an experience while doing so, and others are in and out quickly, and it's over. We have our own preferences, things to pamper ourselves, and reasons why we bathe...or shower. We thought it would be fun to ask our panel about their own bathroom habits while they stay clean...and maybe have a little fun while doing it! However, it was a hard answer for some, as they just get in and get out! So...after we share some of their answers, we're going to offer some ideas for you that need to linger a bit longer!

I take showers most of the time for convenience, three times a week at the pool locker room after exercise class using my goat milk soap, which is so soothing to skin that's prone to be itchy, dry, and just overall cranky. I cover myself after every shower or bath with my go-to unscented lotion, Alba Botanica Very Emollient Body Lotion. But almost every Sunday evening, I opt for a nice relaxing bath. Sometimes I use lavender Epsom salts and my normal goat milk soap (usually only on my face), but often, especially in the winter time, no soap at all (except my face). I actually enjoy washing my hair in the bathtub better than the shower! Why? I just do. I guess sliding down in the tub to rinse it out is fun? I usually listen to YouTube videos I want to catch up on. Sewing, homesteading, fishing, and building are some of my favorites. God has created some amazingly talented people out there, and I'm thankful that they like to share their lives! Or, depending on the time, I'll start a movie on my tablet and finish it when I go to bed, but I like old, B&W free movies on YouTube. – Debbie

I do use special soaps I find at farmers markets, but do not sing in the shower! Baths are only for when I've overworked myself and need to soak in Epsom salts. - Anita

Call me silly, but I love my shower cap! Of course I don't use it for every shower, but when I do, I smile at the cuteness of it. If you're as old as I am, then you'll remember the shower caps of the 1960s that were a single color - B.o.r.i.n.g. Just got this shower cap during my birthday shopping spree last month. I'm "all-things-flamingos" right now so I'm lovin' this cap! - Gloria

For years, all I had was a shower...no tub. I got used to just taking showers. Shaving my legs was no fun! I just wanted a good hot soak. I was excited to go out of town and was hoping the hotel had a tub but no, just a shower. When I moved to my current place, I was thrilled that it had a tub! I take a shower most of the time but about twice a month, I take a nice hot bath... with bubbles and my yellow ducky... - Cathy

I prefer baths over showers. I like to sit down in the hot water and feel the soak all over. And as for soap, we love shopping for handmade soaps at markets, especially seeking out fall and winter scents. I stay away from ones that have leaves in the soap – those make a mess! But eucalyptus and peppermint, and pumpkin and all the things – yes! I also love to light a candle if I have the time to linger. Showers are only for traveling, when no tub is available...and then I wear a really puffy pink shower cap! - Marcy

I prefer a shower. And I prefer it short and sweet. My column includes a confession, so I'll include a confession here, too. Back in the drought of 2011, I started using buckets in my shower and filled them with water. We had a very smart, resourceful, man at our church recommend this to save on water. I would use the buckets of water to flush the toilet, and I

still do. I never stopped. It doesn't allow the best footage during my showers since I have to step around the buckets, but it does make me feel so good because I know I'm helping to preserve God's natural resource of water. Other than that, I have several shampoos I love, like TRESemme', VO5, and Avalon Organics, all volumizing for my fine hair. I'm not one to spend much time showering. I'd rather get in and out. But our swimming pool is another story! I'll spend lots of time in it. And I have a son that says swimming in the pool is just as good as taking a shower. His wife doesn't agree but sometimes I do, especially during a hot drought. - Carole

I prefer baths over showers. I usually rest and play on my phone. I will do a crossword or listen to YouTube (a sermon, worship music, Pasta Grannies, or Garden Answer). I use Dr. Teal's Epsom salts and products to relieve muscle fatigue. I regard showers as necessary but not enjoyable. Baths are necessary and beneficial to me outside of cleanliness. They are good for my soul and spirit, too. – Laura

If you're like many on our panel, maybe showering or bathing is just a chore. So to get you to linger a little more...here are some ideas along with what the ladies shared above:

- Try hanging a bundle of lavender or eucalyptus from the shower head!
- Ever thought of burning incense to create a mood before you get in the bath? Paddy Wax has the cutest jar of incense sticks that burn right from the kid! And they smell great.
- Buy yourself a PRETTY robe, not one that's threadbare and dull. Something cozy or cute to look forward to wearing after the soak...
- Upgrade your shower head so that the stream is like a rain forest, and you'll want to stay and enjoy.
- Have you tried a silicone body scrubber? Supposedly, they feel really great!
- Cover yourself in a great moisturizer after you step out of the bath, before you don that pretty robe.
- Make your bathtub inviting, with the setting of a spa – plant in the corner, a pretty jar, a candle, your towel folded nicely nearby...all the things!

Cousin Moms – Sass and Attitude – by Kamrin and Charissa

Kids hear things, watch movies, listen to shows, hang out with others, and often pick up habits that perhaps aren't allowed in their homes. It shows up as sass and attitude, neither of which is fun to deal with, as a mom. So we asked our moms to talk about how they deal with those words and those looks and those frustrations...and they were honest in their answers!

Kamrin

Movies and TV shows and all the things our kids watch and hear, we haven't noticed that our kids have picked up any bad language. We do have conversations about words we do hear, when they are occasionally in the movies.

However, we do see attitudes from YouTube videos once in a while. Mindless scrolling seems to cause the kids also to "check out" and they seem irritated or disconnected. That might be more the issue, so far, and I'm thankful...and that's been interesting. So we have cut down with putting parameters on YouTube, they have time limits, and be present with the kids.

We only have one television in the house, so we can hear and see what they're watching. This is important to us. And we've taught them to ask permission before watching something new. In fact, they've even called us when they've gone over to friends' houses and been asked to watch a movie.

Now, we aren't into teen years yet, but are thankful that they are learning early to call Mom and Dad, and I'm praying that sticks!

If we do feel like there is an attitude issue or talking back, we send the kids to their room. Sometimes we also take away the cell phone or ground them from YouTube.

With words, we try to talk more about the attitude behind words and how they're directed toward people. They do hear things at school, and when they were tiny they repeated things. But now, it's definitely more attitude with frustration and anger, especially with the boys. Talking back sometimes occurs with our daughter.

Conversation is the key, and we talk about removing things, and discuss having no friends over, etc.

We try to maintain "innocence" with watching family friendly and kid shows. Bigger movies at the theater, we don't go much.

I just read recently to not just say NO and then administer discipline, but talk and understand where and why with the kids, and listen to them. It's easier to just send them away, but listening to them is valuable. We have seen a huge change when we listen, especially with our youngest. Same with our daughter, and sometimes talking back is not knowing how to express herself.

Charissa

Our girls are at the age where they don't quite know some of the things they say and the meaning behind them, but they're figuring them out. There are many influences around them from school and television, as our two oldest are ages 6 and 4.

The biggest words are "whatever" and "hate," and that is what we're working on currently. Regarding to sass, with having three girls, there will be a lot of that!

We address it, we talk about it. When they started saying *hate*, we tried to point it back to, "Does what you say bring joy to others, and does it reflect Jesus?" If the answer is no, then we shouldn't be using these words. We try to explain instead of just saying NO. Do these words put a smile on someone's face?

Of course, we say one thing and sometimes it goes in one ear and out the other ear!

We do punish for bad language or sass. Sometimes, it's time out. They're older now, so there are not as many spankings, but we also take away television time. The girls enjoy TV and tablet time, so taking that away is effective. And at the same, too much TV and screen time affects their attitude. So we do try to limit that time on the screens, as it often affects their moods.

We talk with them about consequences to their actions of being rude. We emphasize how we want to pick people up and not bring them down. We want our girls to think about this and realize the consequences if they don't obey.

One example was our oldest told her sister that she hated her. Sadie had to write "I'm sorry" about 20 times on a paper and give it to her sister. Writing out what they've done is also a good thing...in the apology process.

In the Kitchen – Oranges and Apples and Smells, Oh My! – by Marcy Lytle

Fall smells. I started them back in August, because they're my fave. And fall colors. All my faves... So for the month of September, we're plating colors and smells and tastes that will make us just want more while the new season arrives. These are all so tasty and not hard at all!

Baked Potato Deluxe

He loves sweet potatoes and I love russet baking potatoes. So for lunch, I packed us both one. Yes, in a thermos because you can cut them in fourths and stack them in!

- Veggies
- Onion
- Sausage
- Pesto
- Potatoes
- Farm Dust (seasoning)

Bake the potatoes while you prepare the toppings. Stir fry the seasoned veggies and onions and sausage, all cut into bite size pieces, in a little butter, until browned and tasty. Stir in the pesto. Open the hot potatoes and top. Eat then, or pack in a thermos for later.

Orange Zested Granola

The smell as this granola cooks, from the orange zest, is the best. And the flavor it adds is so good, as well. If you're not making your own granola, why not?

- 2 teaspoons orange zest (from about 1 1/2 oranges, preferably organic)
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 4 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 1/2 cup raw almonds
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup honey or maple syrup (I used syrup)
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 3/4 cup raisins, preferably golden

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit and line a large, rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. In a small bowl, combine the orange zest and sugar. Use your fingers to rub the zest into the sugar until it's bright orange and very fragrant.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the oats, almonds, salt, cinnamon and orange sugar. Stir to combine. Pour in the olive oil, honey and vanilla, and mix well.

Pour the granola onto your prepared baking sheet. Spread the granola into an even layer. Bake for 19 to 23 minutes, stirring halfway, until the granola is turning lightly golden in color. The granola will crisp up as it cools.

Let the granola cool (completely) before stirring in the raisins and breaking up the granola into chunks as necessary. (I added dark chocolate chips too)

An Apple Flower

This looks good on a plate, and we ended up dipping our popcorn in the caramel sauce as well!

- Large honey crisp apple(s)
- Caramel ice cream topping
- Dark chocolate chips

Cut the apple into slices and fan out on a plate in a circle. Drizzle the caramel sauce and top with chocolate chips. Serve with popcorn for movie night at home.

Smells on the Stove

It's an easy end of the summer season potpourri with just three ingredients, and is great for kitchen aroma as you start your day.

- Rosemary (4 sprigs)
- 2 lemons sliced
- 1 T vanilla

Just place all of the above in water in a pan, and heat to boil, then turn back to simmer.

Steak Bites and Gnocchi

I just subscribed to Stay At Home Chef's meal plan, and this is one of the recipes. So easy, and absolutely delicious. Recipe below is for two, you can adjust for more.

- 6 oz sirloin steak
- 2 t lemon juice
- 1 t olive oil
- 1 t worcesterhire sauce
- 1 t apple cider vinegar
- 1/3 t onion powder, and garlic powder and salt
- 1/4 t black pepper
- 10 oz package dried gnocchi
- 2 t butter
- 2/3 clove garlic crushed
- 2 T parmesan cheese, grated

Dice steak into bite sized pieces. Place in a resealable plastic bag or shallow bowl for marinating. Add in lemon juice, oil, sauce, vinegar and seasonings...toss to coat. Cover or seal and place in fridge for 1-8 hours.

Bring pot of water to boil. Heat a large skillet over med high heat. Cook gnocchi according to package directions, drain and set aside.

Meanwhile, use tongs to add half of steak to skillet, leaving liquid behind. Cook and stir til seared and browned. Remove from skillet and cook the rest of the steak, then return all to skillet.

Add butter and garlic with the steak, let garlic toast 1 minute. Add gnocchi and saute 3-5 min til lightly browned.

Serve hot with the Parmesan cheese for sprinkling.

Corn Dip

This is the recipe from Pioneer Woman and it's easy and so very tasty. We loved it so much. I halved the recipe for just the two of us...

- 8 oz cream cheese room temp
- ½ c sour cream
- ½ c mayo
- 2 10oz pkgs frozen fire roasted corn
- 2 4.5oz cans chopped green chiles
- ½ c jarred jalapenos, chopped
- ½ c jarred salsa
- Salt and black pepper
- 3 c Monterey Jack Cheese, grated
- ¼ c fresh cilantro leaves
- Corn chips for serving

Preheat oven to 375. Stir cream cheese, sour cream and mayo in large bowl til combined. Add the corn, chiles, jalapenos, salsa, s and p, and half the grated cheese, and stir. Place in 9X13 dish and sprinkle remaining cheese. Bake till bubbly and golden about 20 minutes. Sprinkle on cilantro and enjoy with the chips!

S U G A R + Spice - Nails It! – by Angela Dolbear

DIY Manicure at Home

Home manicures are where it's at for me. I have poor circulation in my hands due to an auto-immune disease, which has left me with wounds on my fingers and under my nails. The thought of having a nail tech come at me with sharp metal manicure tools gives me the heebie-jeebies! Also, the increased possibility of any infections that could happen would bring on months of healing, and so much pain.

So, I have learned to give myself manicures at home. My nails don't look as perfect as they do from a trip to a nail salon, but they look nice, and well, manicured. And it's pain-free, as well as free!

My process is simple and provides a good result:

- 1. Make an appointment with yourself.** I have to plan out time for a manicure. A block of 90 uninterrupted minutes is good for a full manicure, which, unfortunately, doesn't happen often as I would like. A period of 60 minutes at the least is needed to make sure nails will be sufficiently dry. **TIP:** If you are short on time, just file, wash and polish nails.
- 2. File nails to desired shape.** Only file dry nails. Using a nail file on wet nails could make them splinter. **TIP:** File the top surface of your nails with a coarse file so the polish will stick better.
- 3. Soak your hands in warm water for a few minutes.** Then slather on a thick lotion, like Aquaphor.
- 4. Push back cuticles with a [manicure stick](#).** Carefully trim any hangnails, but don't trim cuticles. They protect nails from infection.
- 5. Apply a quarter size dollop of an [exfoliator](#),** and massage it over your hands, knuckles, and fingertips.
- 6. Wash hands thoroughly with soap.** Dry nails completely. **TIP:** I like to use dish soap, because it removes all oils and residue from my nails that might make the polish chip.
- 7. Apply a base coat.** FAVORITE: [Seche Clear Base Coat](#).
- 8. Apply two thin coats of nail color,** letting the first coat dry for a few minutes before applying the second coat. **TIP:** Use three strokes on each nail. One on either side of the nail, then down the middle. Then a swipe of color across the tip to prevent chips. **FAVORITE brands:** OPI, Essie, Zoya, People of Color.
- 9. Let the nail color dry for a minute, then apply a top coat.** Don't forget to swipe across the tips of the nails. **FAVORITE:** [Essie Gel Couture Top Coat](#)
- 10. Spray nails with [OPI Rapid Dry Spray](#).** I love this stuff. Not only does it make the polish dry faster, but it smooths out any imperfections I made while applying the polish.
- 11. Relax for 30 minutes, longer if possible.** Watch a show, read, call a friend...let those nails dry!

TIP: I like to paint my nails at the end of the day. That way, any polish that is misapplied to the sides of my nails will come off my skin and cuticles in the shower the next morning. Or, use a narrow stiff paint brush dipped in nail polish remover, to remove polish flubs.

The beauty of blessings to you!

Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). And she loves writing and recording songs with her husband, Tim --listen on [Sound Cloud](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at www.AngelaDolbear.com

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

Every month...so much learnin’...if we just observe and look. Here’s what I learned just last month:

There are now headbands that mimic sunglasses... You know, you raise your glasses on top of your head often, to keep your hair back. So now there are headbands that do the same...check them out. I don’t know what to think.

There’s this candle called Circle of Friends – and it’s SO cute especially when it’s lit – I just got one with four kiddos – for our family.

Walgreens Photo has an option to get your photo printed and hung on a wooden board with a hanger...it’s really cute and affordable!

Ten Thousand Villages has really cute manger scenes...it’s not too early to order one for you or for a gift!

The Dollar Spot and the back to school sections of Target have great ideas for back to school gifts for the littles – including a cute laptop desk and pop-it pencil bag! Surprise the littles you know with a gift and a prayer, for the fall season.

There’s this candle called Ski Trip from St Bernard that is amazing, and great for the upcoming winter season...try it.

Have you tried Scentchips? We recently purchased one of the holders and some of the chips, and it’s so pretty in our bedroom and smells amazing. The covers change out too, with the seasons or to fit your décor!

When is the last time you went out for breakfast, Mexican food? Not just breakfast tacos, but a full menu? It’s good!

We watched *Biggest Little Farm* on Prime Video the other night, for the second time. A good watch!

Having friends over? Just get some gourmet cookies and cut into bitesize pieces for a cookie charcuterie tray!

No blooms for your vases because of the heat? Dusty Miller survives heat and looks great in a vase. And small succulent tea lights look great, right beside! You can find these on Amazon.

Took the girls to a Mary Poppins musical and I found hats and bracelets on line for them. So look before you go to the next big show and grab some bling for the littles in your bunch!

Need a lamp for a shelf and no plug is available? Shop for battery operated lamps. I have several and love them. Just found one at Marshalls!

Have you tried all the freeze-dried candy available now? We’ve purchased it at markets, and it’s good! The kids especially like it! Even Skittles!

Want to place a candle on a shelf but you can't because of the flame? Grab a pretty little decorative votive holder (Target often has these in the Dollar Spot) and insert a battery-operated tea light! Looks so pretty...(pictured on the HOME page – In Each Room)

I got the cutest tiny vacuum that's made for keyboards but I use it to vacuum out my desk drawer! It works great, and recharges on my laptop! Great gift idea, by the way!



HOME

Practical Parenting – Family Bookcase – by Marcy Lytle

Have you ever thought of having one designated bookcase or set of shelves dedicated to family time? Maybe you've got an old bookcase in the garage you're not using, one that could be used for just this! We recently reorganized a book cart we have in our garage for the kids, tossed out all the old, stacked up all the things, and it is our community area for finding "something to do" on those evenings or weekends when just the kids, or the entire family, can pick and choose what they want – and all will have a good time – when they're at our house. It can work for families of all sizes and ages!

Here are some suggestions for items on the family bookcase:

Puzzles – Consider different number of pieces, but especially some 300-piece puzzles that can be put together in one evening. These are great and having a stack of a few puzzles makes for great conversation and fun for all. 8-year old Augie put together five last time he was here!

Games – A few board games can sit on these shelves as well. It can be the family faves, and you can switch them out every few months, so that the games are rotated.

Cards – A box of playing cards of all kinds, like Go Fish, Crazy Eights, UNO, and more are good to have, when the kids feel like playing a game, while taking a break from homework or if the weather is not great for playing outside.

Sketch books and colored pencils – If the family does have time to sit outside, ask each person to grab a sketch pad and colored pencils, and have the entire family all sketch the same thing or different! Maybe you have a gorgeous tree or flower bed, or there's a cool house across the street, or your family pet – pick one and draw!

Color books and crayons – These are always a winner, as well as puzzle books and maze books. Maybe you need the kids to stay busy while you're making dinner or preparing lunches for the next day. Designate "color time" and send the kids to the family bookcase.

Play money and cash register – This is always fun to have available, as well as fake groceries. Let the kids use their imagination as they set up a grocery store and spend and buy.

A craft box – This can be a small bin full of seashells, pipe cleaners, glue sticks, random buttons, popsicle sticks, and stickers, and colored tape. Kids can create and make something cool!

Colored tape and Matchbox cars – If you have some colored duct tape or painter's tape and little cars available, the kids can lay out a grid of highways and roads, and set up a little city for play. So fun!

Of course, books! – Have a variety of books available for the kids to read, again rotating them from time to time...even providing seasonal and holiday ones to go with the calendar.

The rule is one thing off the bookcase at a time. Then it has to be put back before another can be taken off. And at least once a season, the shelves are organized and rotated.

And where should this family bookcase be situated? It can be in the garage, if there's a nice clean space for big pillows or puffy chairs, or a card table and chairs set up. Or in a family room in the house. Or it can even be in the corner or end of a kitchen, if littles need to be in sight while parents are working, etc.

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

I've often wondered how we would all act and feel about ourselves if we could never see ourselves in a mirror. Same for the kids. They'd never see the zits, their crooked teeth, that pudgy in their stomach, or their crazy hair. Yes, we'd still see others, but we wouldn't be able to see our own reflections and linger and look at our imperfections.

Our teens are bombarded with perfect images of bodies, clothes, weight, and more...and then they get up each morning and look in the mirror and can't compete or keep up.

But hey, we have trouble ourselves as their parents with our own images that stare back at us when we look, too!

So what are we to do with these mirrors that reflect back and scream that we are not the "fairest of them all?"

As school is now in session, consider family/parent time once a week where nothing is discussed but self-image. Here are a few topics to tackle.

Weight – Let your teen talk about his/her weight and how they feel about it. Listen, and listen well. If poor eating habits are a problem, let them think of a solution or what they might do, and then offer to help. But don't criticize them, just affirm them. If it's a severe problem with obesity or the opposite of being too thin, then consider getting help and praying together.

Skin – Maybe your teens have issues with their face and need some good skin care. Make it a priority to help them with what they need. One of my friends taught her daughter to call marks on her face (like freckles and pigment issues) marks of beauty. Tell your kids how amazing they look, but how a smile is the best face feature EVER.

Height – He may feel too short or she may feel like she towers over the boys. Height is a big deal to some teens. And genetics can't be changed, and height is what it is. Listen to their concerns. If you too struggled, share how you dealt with it. Affirm the blessings of being either short or tall, and do this often.

Hair – Blue, pink, or what color do they want? Shaved head, or long and stringy? Maybe we can't stand the way they want to wear their hair, or maybe they hate that they don't have hair like her or him. Again, listen. Come to agreements and let go of things you just don't "like" if it's not that big of a deal. If it is, talk to them. Work on things...together.

Attitude – Ask your teens what they see when they look at their expression? Depression? Joy? Hatred? Anger? Contentment? It might even be fun to have family time where everyone practices on their expressions and guesses what emotion they're showing. It's something to think about!

Of course, these things kids see in the mirror are HARD for parents and teens alike. We don't care for some of the ways they present themselves, but often the way they look is really affecting the deeper way of how they feel about themselves period. Loving themselves as they're made and with what they've been gifted in the way of height, hair, skin etc is so

important, and we can help them with this, instead of pointing, complaining or giving looks of disapproval.

It's hard, but listening, loving, and expressing understanding goes a long way with kids of any age...when they feel heard, and validated. And soon, maybe they'll skip the mirror altogether because they're so happy with who they are.

A Night to Remember – The Season to Look – by Marcy Lytle

This photo used for this story is one a friend took, one she posted on Instagram. I loved it so much I asked if I could use it for the magazine, because it's just beautiful. A little kid in a wagon as the sun sets behind him...

If there ever is a season to observe sunset, sunrise, leaves in the air, the smell of rain and more...it's the season of fall. So this month, we're inviting parents to take the kiddos outside on a day when it's still not too cold but just crisp enough...and point to creation...and tell them who made it all.

I have heard that in order to reach those unreached in other countries, before they will accept the idea of Jesus Christ, they have to be told about creation...who made the earth, and all that is in it. Then they are open to Jesus. So interesting.

Maybe our kids are the same way...

Preparation: Get the wagons, or a big blanket, or the bicycles, or just hop in the car – however your family travels - and plan a day/morning/evening to observe. And take some cider or cookies to enjoy while you do.

The sunrise or sunset:

Genesis 1 says And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

As a family, observe the sun and see what the kids know about this big ball of fire. Tell them how it is faithful to rise and set daily, just like God is faithful to be near us daily. He created this big light in the sky to remind us of his faithfulness!

The moon:

Sometimes it's a clear night or sometimes it's cloudy, but clouds that cover the moon don't cause the moon to disappear. It's still there! We can even see it out our windows at night, and sometimes it's full and sometimes it's a sliver! Let's make up a song about the moon! (Let the kids each sing a line of whatever they like!)

Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so.

The trees:

Some are starting to shed their leaves. God made seasons too, and he planted trees that lose their leaves and then put on new ones in the spring. Aren't fall leaves so pretty? Some trees are called evergreens and don't lose their leaves! So many trees, and God made them all. What is your favorite tree? (Collect a few leaves and then everyone at once toss them up and watch them fall.)

So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Birds:

Do you see any birds flying in the sky? Would you like to fly like a bird? There are lots of verses about how God cares for the birds, and if he cares so much for them, how much more does he care for us?

What is your favorite bird and why?

It is important to know who made the world around us, the land on which we walk, the lights in the sky, and who keeps those things all in motion, all spinning, all growing and all of the seasons in order...

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Humans:

Point out the similarities and differences in each person in the family (same nose, different color hair, skin tone, etc.) We are all different in some ways, but the same God created us all. He made us in His image. To worship Him and enjoy his creation.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

The earth and all that's in it, including us, is good, because God made it. There are lots of other voices that don't believe in God as our creator. We have to choose to believe the truth that the God who created us all keeps us all in His loving arms, always and forever...as we sleep, wake, and go about our day.

Let's pray:

Father in Heaven, thank you for all of creation that speaks of your goodness and power in the heavens and in the earth. Thank you that we can see your love across the sky every morning and night, and that you gave us this beautiful world to enjoy. You are a good God and we are your people, and so thankful that You love us forever and always.

An Adage A Day - I Did a Thing – by Carole Gilbert

I did a thing, as they now say. Actually, I did a bad thing. I confess. I did it. But I really didn't mean to. And I'm not writing about this to ask for forgiveness. I've already done that. My daughter and I are both sentimental girls and I had the thought of giving away part of something she had stored at my house. For the moment, I forgot she was saving it all for her daughters. When I brought my idea to her attention, it hurt her because she didn't want any of it given away. For that brief moment I forgot why I was storing it. I didn't mean to hurt her, and I didn't do it on purpose. I would never do that! I believe it was my first true senior moment. That's not an excuse though. But it is sad how "we hurt the ones we love the most." Even unintentionally.

This phrase is used so much. It has even been made into a song. There are several reasons why people "hurt the ones they love the most," one being by accident like my situation. And there are therapeutic remedies listed for this if you google it, but I have yet to find its origin or first source which seems strange since I have heard it for most of my life, and like I mentioned earlier, I am now a senior.

So, I decided I must look at this phrase from a different view. Aren't we so blessed, and so glad God doesn't follow it Himself? He doesn't hurt the ones He loves the most. On the contrary, He loves unbelievably the ones He loves the most. Which is us! God loves us all. And God takes care of the ones He loves.

God took care of Moses when He had him take Israel out of Egypt. God took care of Noah as he built the ark from God's instructions. And we know Abraham took his son, Isaac, to be sacrificed from God's own instructions and God didn't hurt them. He took care of them. These examples, along with others, show and tell us how God loves us so much. He even takes care of us in whatever we go through if we hear and obey. The Bible tells us so. And remember another quote, "Love heals all wounds." God does this too, through His love and forgiveness.

John 3:16-17, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

I asked my daughter to forgive me for my "senior moment" and she did. And I've asked God to forgive me for all my moments and He did. And I've been working so hard to exercise my mind and focus my thoughts on God's ways to maybe prolong any more of those moments.

We must be on guard. And especially through the fall season when we're together more with the ones we love, our family, friends, and siblings. It's easy to hurt someone, even unintentionally. But it's also easy to say we're sorry.

In Each Room – Kitchen Corner – by Marcy Lytle

I have a corner in my kitchen between two big windows, by the breakfast area. Only, we don't use that area for a breakfast area anymore. We opted for two desks under each window, and that left the corner...open. I found this cute small bookshelf that fits perfectly in the corner, and styling it and filling it has been so fun, practical and a great piece of décor, as well.

On top sits a plant and a watering can, and a small "tent" calendar. I found the calendar at Barnes and Noble, and the plant was a gift! It's by the window and just grows and looks so pretty!

One shelf holds cookbooks and our organizing notebook. I love cookbooks, as well as online recipes, too. But cookbooks are the best. I have a huge cabinet full, but on this shelf I place the ones I'm using for the week. The organizing spiral is new. We have categories in it, from vacation ideas to date ideas, to home projects and more...all in one spot...instead of on multiple sheets of paper or notes in our phones.

The middle shelf has a pretty rope basket with a couple of decorative items beside it. In it are magazines I get in the mail or other items of interest that arrive, which I need to read...when I have the time. I often let them pile up and fill the basket, and grab several on weekends or road trips, for reading.

The bottom shelf is for books that were gifted, books I need to read, or journals. I definitely need to go through all of these soon, to donate and decide what to keep. They look at me like little soldiers every morning all lined up and beckoning me and saying, "Pick me. Take 5. Go read." And sometimes, I do.

The very bottom of the bookcase is a closed cabinet where I have seasonal candles and other décor I can pull out when I need to.

And tucked on the sides of two shelves are tea lights in cute small glasses I found in the dollar spot at Target. I love to have these flickering in the early morning when I work.

Every room has a corner. So look in your house and see where you might add some interest and fun shelves to fill this season. Ones to decorate and change out, or not. It's one of my favorite corners in my home...



YOU

Under Pressure – Shepherds – by Debbie Haynes

We all know Psalm 23 and what it says, right?

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

And it's easy to see why God's people needed a shepherd. They couldn't stay on course for any length of time, if left to their own devices. They strayed so easily and got tangled up in things far outside of God's plan of safety. And they so readily accepted the voice of strange gods, ignoring the one true God, the Shepherd, the one who loved them so much.

In other scriptures, we read how God chose men, modeled after himself, to care for his flocks. Ezekiel 34 warns that sheep need protection, food and water...and WOE to earthly shepherd that brings harm to even one sheep. Isaiah 40 says like a shepherd he will tend his flock, in his arm he will gather the lambs and carry them...gently leading.

So, who were the shepherds God chose? Abraham was chosen for fathering the nations! Moses led the Israelites out of bondage to the Promised Land. And David was chosen to be King, and from his lineage came Jesus. All of these men were humble shepherds.

Now, back to Psalm 23:1 “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” This statement compares to John 10 in the New Testament where we read another story about shepherds.

It says if a person climbs over or through a fence instead of going through the gate of a sheep pen, he's up to no good – he's a rustler! In contrast, a shepherd walks up to the gate, the gatekeeper opens the gate, and the sheep inside know the shepherd's voice, as he calls them by name. When the shepherd gets all the sheep out of the pen, they follow as he leads, because they know his voice.

Jesus told his followers this simple story but they didn't get it. So he tried again.

He told them he was the Gate for the sheep and that anyone who “goes through me” will be cared for and will find pasture. But a thief only wants to steal and destroy. However, Jesus came to give real and eternal life, better than they could dream of! He goes on to describe a Good Shepherd – he sacrifices himself for the flock. This is so unlike a hired hand that runs for the hills when he sees a wolf coming.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, he knows his sheep and his sheep know Him. It's the same way that Jesus knows his Father and the Father knows Jesus.

After Jesus spoke, it says in verse 18 that what Jesus said caused a split in the listeners. Some said Jesus was crazy, out of his head, so why bother listening. Others weren't so sure, because, “How can a maniac open blind eyes?”

The world where we live causes many people to become a people of great fear. High anxiety, stress, discouragement and depression rule our minds...as we are bombarded daily with strange voices. So we too need a shepherd, because we have all “gone astray.” We can find ourselves among those that wander, and turn away, substituting things for God.

- Maybe we let our feelings control our faith
- Maybe we feel entitled, deserving of happiness above all else
- Maybe we focus on our own emptiness and failures, instead of allowing him to make us into something perfect and valuable for his kingdom

Once we're off track, we justify our feeling and tie our souls to others, instead of submitting to the Shepherd. We make unhealthy relationships, hold onto trinkets for comfort, or even dabble in the occult.

But our Jehovah Ro'i has provided the GOOD shepherd, we know his voice, and he knows us. He's not a fake! Even when we come with our fears, anxiety, discouragement and failures, he draws us close.

A good prayer to pray:

Father God, you've provided the perfect Shepherd for us all. We pray for those that have strayed to return in humility and repentance, because we know you forgive if we only ask. Help us all to not be blinded by fear but to listen to your voice. We need to know you more, to recognize your voice and follow. We pray that we will keep your word close to our hearts and be held in your loving arms. Amen.

Inner Strength - Home Sweet Home – by Michelle Wyatt

Recently, I discovered a phrase that brings me great peace. “I want to go home.” It’s so heartwarming and comforting to hear my boys say this when I pick them up from their dad’s. It reminds me of the line in *Wizard of Oz*, “There’s no place like home.” I appreciate the sweet simplicity of being, not just at home, but also being present in the moment with my children differently now.

Before, lots of questions would go through my head. Where should I take the boys? How can I make special memories? How can I keep them from getting bored and away from television? Matthew wants to go somewhere every weekend. I can’t always afford to take them somewhere that costs money.

Kids may ask for what I consider big stuff, like a trip to Mt. Playmore, an indoor playground with video arcade games, but at the end of the day spending quality time together as a family is what matters most. For as Matthew wrote on my Mother’s Day card, “I love that my mom plays yo-yo with me.”

Helping my boys find peace with the simple life at home is the next step I’ve taken as their mom. Kids use a lot of extreme words and it can be challenging and tiring to rephrase emotions for them and teach them the middle of the road. Here is an example scenario that happened recently.

“This was the worst day! We didn’t go anywhere!” yelled Matthew. “You mean you are disappointed that we didn’t go anywhere. Remember the good times like when we laughed while playing in the pool and how Brendan cheered you on when you made cool basketball shots.” (We have a cool portable, blow up basketball net that can be used indoors and or at the pool).

Matthew didn’t say anything after that. For him, that means he heard something important and even true.

Reflecting on life with my boys so far, our favorite memories were made at home.

As it says in Psalm 118:24 *This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

Jeremiah 29:11 *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

My boys and I are living out these messages, enjoying the sweet simplicity of quality time at home. If we can do it, you can too!

Healthy Habits – Brave Changes – by Marcy Lytle

Creating healthy habits sometimes takes all of the strength you have and then some, when unhealthy habits have been the norm. And sometimes, we aren't even aware that they're unhealthy, but there are things we just do without thinking that if we stop and think about it – maybe we don't have to do them! So this month of September, let's be brave (yes, it requires bravery to change!) and let go of some things, or add others, so that we feel better in every way.

Let go of hair color – I recently did this and it's nice! No more boxes of hair color or spending bucks at the salon. I just got some good shampoo and conditioner, and I'm going with the gray!

Start walking – If exercise hasn't been on your to-do list, start simply with walking. Get up and go, walk 30 minutes in your neighborhood, and observe the trees.

Let go of your phone – Put it away for a period of time and read a book, or take a nap. Do it.

Start something new – Maybe you've always wanted to write, or bake bread. Make it happen.

Let go of biting those nails – It's hard! But it's time to quit, because hands in the mouth are not healthy!

Start a new regimen of self-care – Find a new moisturizer or try a bold eye shadow!

Let go of staying quiet – Speak up for what you need and desire and want.

Start a new look – Wear your hair up, consider a new style, pick out a new color...

Let go of guilt – Train your mind to put away words and voices that tell you what you're doing is not enough, you need to do more, and all the lies.

Start trusting again – just this time put your trust up there first...and then in others...so that when they disappoint, your trust is still intact.

Let go of comparison – to her things, her looks, her husband and her anything. Give thanks for your blessings.

Start a book, or a podcast, or a series – and see it through to the end instead of stopping out of guilt.

Maybe you read this list and think, "That doesn't require bravery." Oh, but it does. Brave women rise up and decide enough is enough and they get up again and go. They vocalize. They remain strong. And they also rest...so that their lives are balanced instead of out of control...and peace reigns.

Hopeful Heart - Sunset Chaser – by Christina Oberon

Do you share my passion for chasing sunsets? As summer comes to an end, I actively seek out experiencing the sun bid its daily farewell, painting the sky with its mesmerizing hues. The sun setting is one of my favorite things to watch. I've often pondered the thought of losing my sight, contemplating the sadness of never again beholding a sunset, except for those etched in my memories.

Watching sunsets held a special place in my healing journey as well. Those moments when my health was not at its best, I would ask my husband to drive to a high vantage point to watch the sunset, where I was filled with a sense of connection, reflection, and renewal. It provided a therapeutic and calming experience, offering me a chance to momentarily step away from the challenges I was facing. A setting sun is a story painted across the heavens, and I often saw my story within it. It's as if the canvas of the sky becomes a mirror, allowing me to see my own journey mirrored back at me.

There's an allure in deliberately positioning oneself to be part of this magical transition from day to night, especially in places where nature and scenery intertwine in harmony. The beach is a timeless favorite of mine - a canvas where the sun's descent is amplified by rhythmic waves. The combination is unmatched, in my opinion. This pursuit isn't just about observing the sun's descent below the horizon, but also about immersing myself in the colors, mood, and atmosphere that the sunset creates.

Watching a sunset is a meaningful and introspective activity for me - it's a journey of mindfulness. It encourages me to be present in the moment. It fills me with a sense of adventure in my soul and an appreciation for the small yet profound moments in life. It's a way for me to pause and connect with nature, allowing myself to be swept up in the serene and fleeting beauty of the world around me. Somehow, a setting sun has the power to provide contentment and fulfillment within me, while also sparking creativity and inspiration. It's also the time I feel God's boundless love and warm embrace all around me. I feel an intimate connection to something greater.

Just as the sun eventually disappears beyond the horizon, life's moments are transient, and chasing sunsets serves as a reminder for me to cherish and embrace each fleeting experience, to savor each passing chapter, and to embrace the wisdom in this limited time we have on Earth.

In The Moment
By Jennifer Stephens

Sometimes I can't believe my parents allowed me to go to rock concerts when I was a teenager. They were pretty strict. And rock concerts? They tended to have a wild reputation. But I was a good kid, so off I went with friends to the local arena to watch eighties favorites like Bon Jovi, INXS, and Bryan Adams. My teen years were a looonnng time ago and I have no idea what I wore or even who I went with back then. I, like most of us who grew up in a land before cell phone cameras, can't even dig out an old photo to figure it out. Snapping photos wasn't on our minds and even if we wanted to, taking a picture meant dragging along a heavy, bulky camera and nobody wanted to do that – we were too busy singing and dancing to our favorite songs! We had no choice but to be in the moment.

We've come a long way in our ability to capture life's important moments. In my lifetime alone, the art of taking pictures has evolved immensely. My childhood was spent unnecessarily shaking Polaroid photos into existence (Why did we ALL think that was required to develop the picture? Spoiler alert, it wasn't.) and impatiently waiting for mom to switch the detonated flashcubes on the Kodak Instamatic camera before taking the next picture. As a teen I was beyond excited when I'd finally saved enough money to buy my very own pink and purple LeClic camera (go find the 1986 LeClic ad on YouTube and you'll understand the appeal. It wasn't just a camera; it was a fashion statement. Or so I believed.). These early cameras helped document family trips to the Grand Canyon and Disneyworld, the annual forced pose of me standing next to the artificial Christmas tree, and the teenage silliness of a bunch of goofballs on high school band trips.

Looking back at family photo albums, we cringe at the awkward images. In an era when we had to be selective about WHAT we photographed (we only had 24 exposures, so we had to "save" our shots in case we saw something really good later), we also had NO IDEA if the photo we took was even going to be worthy of keeping. Heads are cut off, it's a little blurry, someone has creepy red eyes, and we're not really sure what that one is supposed to be (Is that someone's finger partially covering the lens?! We went from waiting daayyys for our photos to be ready for pickup from the drive up Fotomat store to the magical One Hour Photo option, which returned our memories in a mere sixty minutes.

The 1990's and 2000's brought us into the age of digital cameras. Finally. Now we could peek at an image and redo, redo, redo if needed to get that just right shot, ensuring no one's head is chopped off at a weird angle. Our fancy cameras with giant zoom lenses were filled with beautiful images we could print for preservation in our Creative Memories scrapbooks. Who else spent weekends, cardstock, and stickers creating stacks of embellished albums?

Then, with the blink of an eye, we went from vacationing with a heavy camera strapped around our necks to inconspicuously shoving camera phones into our back pockets ready to catch the most ordinary activities. Awkward, stiff photos of families lined up with arms by their sides have grown into carefully posed pictures with everybody caught mid-laugh while wearing

coordinating outfits. Every image we see turns ordinary people into wannabe models, perched in front of perfectly staged backdrops. The cameras on today's phones have so many features we've all metamorphosed into faux professional photographers. Our pocket-sized screens the chosen canvas to display our art.

But does this ability to take a never-ending number of photos keep us from being IN the moment? Instead of using a camera as a tool to capture the moments of our life, have we become a culture that is missing life's moments in order to snap the perfect picture? Sometimes it seems like we're no longer building an album of memories for our families to revisit together, instead we're busy creating a carefully curated Instagram feed intended to garner likes and comments from mere strangers. Empty photo albums collect dust while our phone's photo storage reaches the thousands (Or is that just me?). And if the phone is damaged? A lifetime of unprinted memories gone (At the very least inaccessible for us non-techy people, until we figure out how to recover them from the invisible "Cloud" where all the things mysteriously end up...). Poof!

In Psalm 118:24 we read, "This is the day the LORD has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it." This day, this moment, it's been created just for us. Let's not become distracted by our desire for the perfect selfie that we miss it. Now don't get me wrong. I'm thankful for the advancements in camera technology. We no longer need to worry about being stuck with blurry cringe-worthy photos. We're no longer limited by only 24 possible pics on a camera roll. We have the ability to capture a million memories at our fingertips. And you better believe if I find myself in close proximity to my favorite celebrity, I'm snapping a photo. One. Then I'll put the camera away.

I want to BE in the moment. Rejoice in the moment. Be GLAD in the moment. Because He made this moment just for us. And that's way more important than an image on Instagram.



MARRIAGE

For Better or Worse - My Husband Is Human – by Kaelin Scott

A key part of marriage is sharing each other's burdens. But I've learned that there's a fine line between sharing burdens and *being* a burden.

I have to admit, I go through a lot of mental struggles. It's quite a battlefield in my mind sometimes. And a lot of times, I depend on my husband to help me fight. The problem, though, is that I often rely on him far too heavily and end up weighing him down.

My husband isn't God. He's not designed to carry all my anxiety and fear and irrational thinking. He has his own stuff to deal with, and he can't take the full weight of mine added onto it. Yes, he's helpful and encouraging as much as anyone can be. But he's still human, and there are limits to his strength.

Realizing that I sometimes put too much on my husband, I've had to shift my instincts. Usually, whatever is on my mind gets blurted out of my mouth. A lot of times unfiltered or without forethought. To put it bluntly, I tend to unload my problems on my husband, which isn't really fair to him. So I've been teaching myself to be mindful of this.

I'm learning to weigh the importance of what I want to tell him, as well as the potential effect it might have on him. Is he already having a rough day at work? Well, then he probably doesn't need to hear about the silly little thing I'm worrying over for no reason. Like I said, he can't possibly bear the weight of all my worries, nor does he need to know every little thought that plagues me, and he certainly doesn't need to know the exact details of all my sin.

My husband is not my savior, Jesus is. So as tempting or convenient as it might be to just unload my struggles on him when I feel desperate or tired or afraid, it's not the right thing to do. What I've been practicing (and it's been a challenge) is holding onto my thoughts. And instead of immediately blurting them out to my husband or expecting him to fix me, I give those thoughts to God first.

I don't know why it's not my first instinct to pray when these thoughts consume me, but I'm really trying to form that habit. Instead of burdening my husband needlessly and selfishly, I'm learning to rely on God more. And then, once I've given my concerns to Him, I'm better able to weigh what I need to share with my husband.

Because here's what I've failed to remember. God can bear the weight of every burden. He can handle my every fear. And He can take my sin and wash it clean. I can come to Him any time, over and over again, and He will take my burdens upon Himself. He will heal me and comfort me and encourage me as only my Heavenly Father can do.

My husband is an amazing man of integrity, truth, and love. He's there for me through thick and thin, full of words of wisdom. He's strong and confident and brave. But he's also a human, just like me. And that's something I have to remember. He's not here so I can unload myself on him and weigh him down. We're both here so we can build each other up as we do life together, sharing each other's burdens and also sharing each other's joy. Especially, the joy.

Date Night Fun – Breakfast for Two – by Marcy Lytle

I am not a lover of normal breakfast food. And I love to eat, first thing when my eyes pop open. However, he loves to have a big breakfast out, whenever we have a chance. And he doesn't enjoy getting up so early on the weekends! So for us, making a purposeful effort to go out for breakfast on a Saturday morning is something we do sometimes...as part of our date time. It can be varied up, and we've got five suggestions for you!

On a restaurant patio – We recently drove to a pretty outdoor mall that had an outside patio with fans, and we chose that for our breakfast date. I ate a snack when I awoke so my stomach wouldn't be growling by the time we got dressed and left, and he got up a little earlier than normal to beat the heat. Eating there at the mall allowed us to take a walk after we ate, around a lake. It was awesome!

On the floor – Whoever gets up first can prepare the space with a blanket and pillows, and pick a morning movie to watch and the menu for breakfast. Then the next time, the other one can prepare! Make whatever you wish, surprising the other one. Serve it on a tray with pretty paper plates and napkins, and dress in your cutest pj's! *Breakfast at Tiffany's* could be a choice of movie!

In the backyard – On your own patio or in the backyard can be the best breakfast spot for a date. Consider a playlist of music while you eat, and enjoy lots of fruit and possibly pancakes on this date. Make it all together in the kitchen, before you carry it outside for your date. Then have some morning dancing to the music before you come back in and get ready for your day!

In the car – Sometimes, getting breakfast on the go while you're headed for a country drive is so fun. Get something you wouldn't normally eat. Perhaps, kolaches might be good, or drive to that bakery you've heard about and never visited, or splurge on donuts from your favorite shop. Pack water, napkins and a morning puzzle (crosswords are fun!) and drive to a pretty lookout as you enjoy breakfast for two.

Coffee shop pastries – My husband LOVES coffee shops, so sometimes we search for a new one and head there. Recently, we found one with a patio and cute vendors set up selling their wares. There was even live music. So keep your eyes open and search your area, to see what's happening at coffee shops near you. People watch. That's always fun. Or plan your next trip, while you eat and sip!

After 40 Years – It Matters – by Marcy Lytle

My husband and I have lots of similar backgrounds; especially that we were both raised by parents that loved God and loved us. However, we were also raised very differently in so many areas, and those differences have sometimes cropped up and caused us struggles. I'm sure that in pre-marital counseling these days, differences are addressed. But we didn't know better back then, and we've just had to learn. For example...

His home was a welcome spot for visitors, any time, without warning, drop-ins and all. I wasn't raised that way. We let people know if we were coming by, and we expected the same courtesy. This didn't cause many problems, but we did discuss it and realized the difference! (I think what I was taught was right...don't we all?)

I thought if I told a lie or said a bad word, I had to ask God's forgiveness right then or I might not go to heaven if I died at that moment. *What?* I know, it was a heavy load to carry, and thankfully Jon learned more of the grace of God and helped me through this difference to peace and not fear.

Another thing we fought about long into the night was his brother. He had an older brother that was a severe street alcoholic, and again my religious upbringing came out when I said this brother wasn't going to heaven (apparently, I had a lot of heaven issues.) Again, we talked, and I realized our differences and things and teachings I missed somehow... Grace is amazing, isn't it?

Just the other day, my husband was cleaning plates from their food into the trash bag, instead of the sink disposal. I asked him not to do that, because trash sits and smells bad if food is in there. He said as a kid, their trash was emptied daily (because they were a family of nine) so that was never an issue. He understood my point.

Jon didn't have a lot of material things, as his parents were missionaries to another country, and often they had to rely on God in the moment, for food on the table. I've never had that experience, but I listen and marvel when he tells me, because I realize that experience established his faith, something I admire in him so much!

I grew up with rituals and routines and those have served me well in running our home, which he too appreciates so much. His life was more laid back with no time schedule, which is nice...but doesn't work too well with kids and time restraints. He has learned from me to make lists, use them, and arrive at places on time.

My gosh, I could write volumes of our differences. And often, those differences can build a wall between a couple if there's no budging, understanding or realization that differences matter, yes. But they don't have to break us. In fact, some of my best friends outside my marriage are women that are way different than me in the way they dress, what they like, and more. Our differences are interesting and fun!

I guess communication is the key. As well as that thing I mentioned, before. Grace. Differences and all.

In This Together – A Bigger Impact – by Bekah Holland

I don't know if I had any idea how much I would change over the years of my marriage. That the person I was when I said I do, is not the same person I am 17 years later. Not even close. Maybe that's part of why divorce is so prevalent.

We embarked on this journey together, young and blissfully unaware of the toll of paying bills and planning our future, that losing, having, and raising babies and all 12 billion middle of the night diaper changes, or the loss of dreams, loss of jobs, and all of the other things, and we honestly had no idea things were going to be as hard as they were. I think (whatever that's worth), the best relationships are the ones that while we both grow and change, we choose to keep falling in love with the person our partner becomes each day. Like, I can assure you that my husband had NO idea that 15 years down the road that he'd be trying to figure out whether to offer a hug or just throw chocolate at me from a distance while I cry on the laundry room floor. He also probably didn't anticipate that he'd need to be able to differentiate my normal sleep deprived silliness from my completely hysterical get this girl a straight jacket kind of exhaustion. I mean, I don't even always know how to tell the difference. So he's just winging it, like most of us.

And I didn't know that I could both look longingly at the man sleeping next to me every night and three minutes after he starts snoring, I'm looking, well, probably a little homicidal. Sort of the way you can get all sappy watching your babies sleep but if they even twitch, you are silently army crawling out of the room praying to God almighty that they didn't see you and will stay asleep! On the other hand, I also didn't anticipate that when my world came crashing down, he would stand for me while I didn't have the strength, or will, protecting me when he could, speaking truth when all I could hear were lies, and there were probably some tossing tacos and tequila at me moments, in hopes of quieting the hangry and overwhelmed person he found sobbing under his haven't-worn-them-in-decades suit jackets portion of our closet. He is a champ, y'all. Seriously.

But we've learned, are learning, albeit slowly, how to love not only the person we walked down the aisle with, but also the person they are working to become, and all the places in between. When we were still in our all brand new and shiny phase of marriage, I got my undies in a bunch because after telling him that I needed to hear him say I'm pretty (because given my INability to read minds means that he can think it all day and I have no idea), and he agreed. Which sounds like a great thing, however I thought his writing himself reminders on sticky notes was indicative of how little he thought about me. Now, please excuse my veering into a narcissistic, it's all about me, self-centered little world. Because I KNOW. I really do. That girl was an idiot. That girl had also not experienced walking into the kitchen without remembering what for, while still able to sing every lyric of "Ice Ice Baby." Almost two decades later, this much less young girl, knows exactly what that's like because it happens a minimum of three times a day. I also now think that his writing reminders are such a thoughtful and romantic thing. He heard me. He put thought to action. He showed me I was a priority. These are the things I notice more, now.

I used to primarily see the differences between us, like he hates mornings and morning people and I'm no longer capable of human interaction by 9pm. And he approaches every single thing in life with his logical, fully functioning brain, while I am more of the crunchy-granola-barefoot-roll-with-the-punches-my-kids-drank-out-of-the-dog-bowl-and-I-only-sort-of-care kind of person who loves to plan but regularly just flutter from thing to thing until it's okay-ish to move on to the next.

How did we end up picking each other while being opposites in basically every way? I thank Newark Airport for that little love connection. But honestly, it's just him and me fighting for/with the other and the choices we make each morning (afternoon, evening, 2am...you get the point) to keep loving the other, even when we sometimes don't really like them. But we choose. Some days, that's easy. Because he is notorious for finding things I've mentioned but never planned on buying, and throwing them in an Amazon cart and pressing the "buy now" button...partly to make me smile and partly because I make a darn good gumbo, approved by Cajuns and all, and he loves me for it). But some days are fraught with kids fighting and stacks of bills, and snoring(him) and whining(me) and fighting with the kids. And those days are freaking hard, y'all. Those are the days that we have to remember that we need our person in our corner, pushing us from behind, walking beside us and even dragging us kicking and screaming when we need it, and vice versa.

So here's your reminder. Keep loving big and forgiving bigger. Keep growing and learning and doing better once you know better and love your person while they do the same. Because the person we're all working to become is a much better version than the newer, younger, less wrinkled model you started out with. Well, a little wiser at least. Be the change you want to see in the world around you. Support your partner's changing, too. And watch those little changes make a bigger impact not only on those around you, but their impact on you as well.

"Love is a verb. Not a constant state of enthusiasm." Esther Perel



ENCOURAGEMENT

Simple Truths – Are You Having Fun? – by Marcy Lytle

There's a song by this same title, and it's one of my favorite songs ever! You must take a listen to the lyrics and then answer the question yourself, "Are you having any fun?" In fact, here are the lyrics of my favorite part:

*Hey
Fellows with a million smackers
And nervous indigestion
Rich fellows
Eating milk and crackers
I'll ask you one question

Are you havin' any fun?
What y'gettin' out o' livin'?
Who cares for what you've got
If you're not havin' any fun?*

It's a question we need to ask ourselves from time to time in this rat race we're all running. With prices so high, schedules so busy, life throwing curveballs, children that need us, aging parents, and the list goes on...and it's a long list. Before we know it, it's Christmas time and the fall has blown by and all we have is a pile of leaves against our front door and no time to sweep them! And so...having fun hasn't really been on the calendar, because there are no funds, there's no time, and we're too tired!

The truth is, if we're not having any fun, then that means stress is winning!

So how can we slow down, and put fun back into our schedules so that we don't have indigestion, and we're not buried under all the things we have and those things that have us?

Have a conversation with the family or your spouse, or a friend. Get input from each other about what's missing from the family/relationship and make a list. This is a good place to start. Maybe it's movie night, having friends over, taking a weekend trip, etc. Everyone's idea of having fun differs, so each person needs to be heard!

Look at your present schedule and budget. Are work hours unreasonable? Are the kids in too many extracurricular activities? Are there any funds available, and if so, how much can be set aside for fun?

If the two things above have already caused stress, then take a break and breathe. Consider asking a friend to look at those lists and give their input on how to create fun where there is none.

Let go of the guilt. Working hard is necessary, having things is nice, and working out and giving kids what they want is okay...but not if it's all sent your entire family on a hamster wheel and you can't get off!

So truth be told, there needs to be time for:

- Walks to nowhere (this is fun, when you notice the sun, the trees and the leaves!)
- Family dinners around the table (this is fun, when dinners are easy – so lighten up and make them easy!)
- Worship and quiet time (yes, this is fun because loads are lifted!)
- Cuddling on the sofa with snacks and watching a movie (of course, this is fun!)
- Getaways (to a zoo, an overnight stay at a hotel, to a small town to walk the square, or just to a bowling alley!)

Those are five suggestions, but hopefully you've come up with fun that you desire, and that you now have your list going...

Are you having any fun? I hope so.

Rooted in Love - Duck Dog In Training – by Kaelin Scott

At the beginning of this year, we got a puppy named Hank. A silver lab with the cutest floppy ears. He's our first dog as a family, so you can imagine how enamored we all were (and still are). Hank's a perfect dog for the ranch. He loves running and playing and swimming, and he's always up for some fun.

Besides being a great family pet, we're also training Hank to be a hunting dog. He has a duck dummy that he loves to retrieve, especially out on the water. We throw it as far as we can and watch him go splashing out to get it, so fast and agile as he swims.

Sometimes, to make it more challenging, we throw the dummy into long grass when Hank isn't looking. Then we tell him "hunt" and give him verbal commands and hand signals to help him find it. A lot of times he finds it quick and easy, but other times it takes him several minutes. No matter how long it takes, though, he eventually finds what he's looking for. And he looks so proud when he brings it back to us like a prize.

Watching Hank search for his duck makes me think about life, how sometimes I'm like him. Searching and searching for something but not knowing where it is. Spinning in circles, in over my head. Trying to figure out God's plan for me all at once.

But just like Hank, sometimes I'm not supposed to know where I'm going. I'm supposed to listen to my Father's commands. Go where He leads me, one step at a time. He doesn't always reveal things to me plain and simple. In fact, He usually doesn't. Most of the time, His plan is a total mystery. But it's not called faith for nothing. The point is to trust Him, listen to Him, and obey Him. Without knowing the destination, taking the first step. Going where He calls me, believing that He knows best.

It's so hard sometimes, not knowing the answers. I wish I could figure it all out and see where I'm going. I want it all to make sense. But that's not how it works. I have to learn patience, because I can't obey Him if I'm always trying to rush Him. I can't do what He's called me to if I'm too eager for what's ahead.

Each moment has a purpose. I can be used wherever I am, but I have to slow down and keep my eyes open for those opportunities. And I have to be in tune with His voice.

Firmly Planted – Relax - by Dina Cavazos

I recently heard something on my daily devotional, [Lectio 365](#), that immediately made me think long and deep. The narrator said that the late (great) Dallas Willard was once asked what one word he would use to best describe Jesus. His answer was “relaxed.” She went on to point out that even though Jesus had only three short years to change the world, he made time to party with his friends, sit with children, and spend time alone talking with his Father. That’s a readjusting thought for sure.

I’ve written about my to-do lists and feeling like I’m always behind and never caught up. I wonder if Jesus had to-do lists. I’ll bet he did; but I’d also bet that he never felt “behind and never caught up.” Why? *Because he was relaxed*, my ruminations pointedly answered. I, on the other hand, could not describe my state of being as relaxed. Oh, there are moments: floating in the STP, drinking a mimosa (or two), watching a movie in my comfy bed, reading, good prayer times, etc., but in between those relaxed moments I could be hurrying to an appointment, worrying about loved ones, fretting about a situation, planning my next project, praying desperate prayers, etc. etc. etc.

*What would it take for me to be relaxed
through this unpredictable life of
busyness, heartache, troubles, and pain?*

My dive into the deep waters of a relaxed Jesus led me to a pearl that I will treasure and hold close. This pearl is the simple truth that I can only relax by completely trusting in Jesus, just as he completely trusted in the Father. He lives in me; I’m alive in him; his love is an unquenchable fire; he has overcome the world. What is there to fear and fret about? I, in my human frailty, must value this pearl and believe its message. I will hold it close and commit to trust in Jesus until the day I’ll truly and forever relax with him.

Unearthly Thing - For A Little While – by Angela Dolbear

Whenever something is being transformed or remodeled, say a kitchen or a bathroom, the first step in the transformation is to tear out the old stuff. Some of the home improvement shows call this process “Demo Day.” What is left behind looks vacant and messy. We don’t panic though. We know what the finished product will look like. But we must live with the mess for a little while.

Likewise, a true spiritual transformation includes a period of chaos and mess. I can’t think of a time when I was truly changed without going through a difficult season. It’s like a “soul” remodel - out with the old to make room for the new.

I’ve been reading one of the great Christian allegorical novels, [Hinds Feet on High Places, by Hannah Hurnard](#), for the past few weeks. It’s a short book, but I am reading it slowly, so I don’t miss any of the lessons on spiritual wisdom. This is my second time through this little literary gem, and I’m learning so much again.

The main character is a young woman named Much-Afraid who wants the Good Shepherd to transform her deformed twisted feet into hinds’ feet, and lead her to the High Places. Her transformation involves a long journey with many trials along the way. She is helped along by her only two companions, Sorrow and Suffering. The Good Shepherd is also always there at the first breath of her prayer to Him, helping her as He changes her.

Likewise, several people in the Bible endured trials and tribulations which were not a consequence of their own wrongdoing, such as the Apostle Paul, Job, Joseph, and Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. Whenever I read about Lazarus, I feel bad for him. He got to see Heaven for four days (however length of time that is in Heaven), and then he was called back to Earth. To me, that is a terrible tribulation.

When Jesus sent His disciples across the Sea of Galilee, a violent storm threatened them. They were afraid the tumultuous waves would overtake their boat and drown them. These experienced fishermen feared for their lives in the storm. But then Jesus came walking on the water, calming the storm with just His words.

The Bible teacher G. Campbell Morgan said of this story, “He is coming over the very waves you are most afraid of. The very waves that threaten to buffet and break you to pieces are the pavement for His blessed feet.”

Yes! I love that.

Through each of these tribulations, the people were transformed, and God was glorified. Trials accomplish God’s will in us, and in His Kingdom.

First Peter, chapter 1 says, “So be truly glad [about your salvation]. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while” ([read the full chapter here](#)).

For a little while.

In view of eternity, life on Earth is for a little while. Eternity can be spent in Heaven with God, if Jesus is your personal Lord and Savior.

In Heaven there are no trials. Everything is new. There is no pain. No illness. No menopause (HALLELUJAH!). No auto-immune diseases (double HALLELUJAH!).

Without Jesus, eternity is spent in Hell. Jesus talked a lot about Hell. It is a real place that sounds so horrible, filled with pain and torment for all eternity.

How about it? Have you asked Jesus into your heart? If you do it now, you can be sure that when your short time on earth is over, you will spend eternity in Heaven with God. And with me! We will have a blast!

I know Heaven will be beyond anything I could ever imagine on Earth. But I know God. I have spent many years being transformed like Much-Afraid. I have many more to go (I think). But I know for certain that God is good. I have witnessed and experienced His goodness.

I read in Greg Laurie's daily devotional on July 26, 2023, "Sometimes the very things we fear the most are the tools that God will use in our lives to bring us closer to Him."

God is so good. I will say it again and again.

Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her novels are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN--listen to their music on [Sound Cloud](#). Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!

Moving Forward – Disappointment – by Pam Charro

No matter how long I walk with God, I continually find myself facing disappointment with my life. I'm in a season of processing many hurts and disappointments now, so it seems good to share what that looks like for me, and I hope it blesses you.

One of the most important aspects of this season, for me, is raw honesty with God. He knows that life is hard and I know he can handle it when I tell him how I feel. It doesn't mean I'm ungrateful for the good in my life or that my faith isn't where it needs to be. In fact, it takes great faith to spend time with God in such a time as this, and there is powerful potential for closer intimacy to result from it.

I heard a wise person once say,

"Disappointment and discouragement are like a car with a flat tire.
It doesn't mean the entire car isn't any good,
but you aren't going to get very far until you deal with it."

I like this analogy and I think it's very accurate.

Another important part of walking through disappointment is sacrificing all of the time that is needed to complete it. It takes discipline to show up for something that I don't feel like doing, similar to keeping a doctor's appointment. But I know that the alternative is not getting the medicine that I need so I can feel better. God has been patient with me in this area, but I am the one who will eventually fall apart if I don't do it.

Another vital part of successfully navigating through disappointment has been burying myself in God's Word, and choosing to believe it, no matter what. What healing I have found, what a reminder of security, when I get into the Bible. It is the greatest cure when I feel hurt and alone. And, as Peter once said when he was in a hard place, where else would I go? I know He has the words of life.

And, finally, having released all of my hurts in spending precious time with God and his word, I am ready once again to surrender all of it to him. I can say those words before I have put in the time and tears, but it doesn't really seem to be effective for me until all of the painful emotion has been brought out first. I must be bathed in his kindness and compassion for as long as it takes before I am able to be fully restored and surrendered to whatever lies ahead. Because he has been so faithful to me in this process in the past, I can be confident as I am about to go through it again.

I don't want to be ambivalent in my intimacy with God, and I don't want any bitterness from life's hurts and disappointments. I know that I am the weak one in this relationship, and I'm so glad he is okay with that, and so ready to make me strong again.



ReplyForward



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME – September Calm

Don't you think that September has to be one of those months that is so full, goes by so fast, and then all of a sudden Christmas is here? I do. And September is one of those months that I look at my to-do list, all the things fall related, think about schedules, and so many things. It helps me to have a plan to start tackling things that maybe I've put off all summer, things I need to get on the calendar now before everyone is so busy, and just an outline to work from so that I actually enjoy the coming holidays instead of panic.

I thought it might be fun to share my September list with you, and it might help you as well...as you make your plans for the transition to the next season.

- Plan family gatherings – this is a must, because our kids are so busy. Getting our holiday times on the calendar now helps us all, so that it's set and the rest of our calendar can be filled in.
- Clean all closets – If you're like me, as you start shopping the closets start to fill up, so I like to clear out a space to organize and keep track of what I've bought and for whom. It's fun, when it's all organized and ready!
- Check wrapping paper stash – I have an entire closet set aside for gift wrap and décor, and I leave it until late summer to organize after last year's holiday season. It's fun to now go back and organize and set it all up, ready for the coming months.
- Make a list of holiday fun – If you don't do this, your calendar will become full and fun will slip away! Start looking ahead to markets, concerts, movies, weekend getaways, etc. and get tickets, schedule these events, invite friends, etc. NOW. Place on the calendar so you can look forward with a smile.
- Collect recipes – All the ads, magazines, commercials, emails, etc. start sending out delicious recipes for cookies, boards, meals and more. I love collecting these in a folder so that I have some new ones to try for October, November and December!
- Get rid of stuff – I'm currently going through my clothes closet and making a donation pile of clothes I don't wear anymore, and doing the same in my kitchen – going through cabinets and spices, etc. that have expired, to toss. I love to start fresh with the new season of fall, with space and organization that brings me calm...
- Look around – One of my favorite things to do once fall arrives is to redecorate my spaces. But before I purchase new things, I like to look around at what I have stored in cabinets, put away from last year, or just on shelves...things I can repurpose or use or reposition. And I look at photos on line and in magazines, for inspiration.
- Fill a tote – I have a tote by my desk that I keep a good book inside, a to-do list pad, pen, maybe a magazine or two – all for grabbing on my way out the door when I have errands. I love to make time, even just 20 minutes, to stop under a shade tree, sip or snack, while I take a few minutes to read, pray, or enjoy something out of that tote!
- Check your candles – If you don't have some fall and winter scents awaiting you in the house, then look for sales and go get some new candles! Kirklands usually has a sale on their fall scents, and they're wonderful. The discount stores have affordable ones, and Paddy Wax are awesome candles to order! Or visit a farmers market and purchase one handmade!

- That weekend away – You’ve marked in on the calendar, hopefully. You will need it, even if it’s just down the road. Book an Airbnb for a couple of nights. Or plan a couple of day trips away from the city to small town markets, or to walk a square, or attend a festival. There will be plenty to choose from as the fall temps arrive.

Those are just a few things, but having them written out, as a template to use, for a new season that gets too busy and too full helps! After all, we’re headed toward “all is calm...all is bright” and it won’t be either if our minds are full and our space is a mess. Enjoy making your own list, just work from it as you can, and see if it doesn’t help your mind clear, your body rest, and your heart sing as you look forward to the new season.

And if sadness looms because of loss or disaster or discouragement, please ask for help, get prayer, and most of all ask your Father for joy this coming season and for his help in making your list toward calm. He’s so willing to inspire you and fill you with hope.

FRESH THYME - The Dust Is Settling – by Marcy Lytle

As a child, I think I would describe my life as a bookshelf full of neat and orderly things... We went to church on the weekends, school on the weekdays, my parents were home and attentive, and my view of God was wrapped up in a neat package full of “doing good” and “being good,” both of which I tried to do and be. I quickly asked forgiveness if my parents were mad at me, I knew our family was living *right* because we went to church, and we all got along with each other. My brother and I played games together often, and all of life was full of rituals, routines and rich provision. Yes, I’ll say rich, because I don’t remember ever lacking anything.

Fast forward to adulthood and all the things on these shelves were shaken, literally so much that they fell off the shelves and dust flew everywhere. Because none of those neat little orderly things on the shelves had ever been moved! So you can imagine the dust around the edges, so to speak!

As a newly married couple, we encountered financial struggles and all sorts of troubles, ones that didn’t fit into the notebooks I’d had aligned for me on the shelves. We gave to ensure provision, because that’s how we thought things worked. We prayed for protection, and demanded it from God, only we were burglarized multiple times. I could go on...

But the biggest swirl of dust that started up and has continued to cause me so many sneezes (spiritually speaking) has been the theology on grief and death. My brother and his wife lost their first child. Later, a best friend lost her husband in a horrible freaky accident. Another friend lost her husband as well, and both of these friends began to question, as did I, and these questions became my norm, badgering me, pecking at me, and settling in on me like a wet blanket of nasty dust turned caky clay...

“Does God decide when we die, or can we be taken out by the ‘enemy’?”

“If we make a mistake and don’t do something right, do we bring about an early death?”

“Are we really in God’s hands and when it’s our time to die, it is He who takes us?”

Those questions floated and caused fear in me for decades. I had no shelf or book or package in which to place these questions or the answers. What were the answers? If the first two were true, then that brought so much fear...I mean really lots of fear...for me and those I love. How could peace be found in Christ if we have to walk such a thin line, or if there’s this snake-like creature waiting to bring us to death with his poison?

Last month I wrote about the practice of casting my cares on Him and how it’s helped me so much. Another thing I’ve been doing is reading more about the character of God from the beginning of his Word until the end. A constant pursuit of the ones made in his image to bring them into his loving arms...that’s my Father!

So last week I decided that I could cast these questions into his arms as well. You see, not having an answer or place to shelve this unrest caused me angst daily in my mind. Swirls of

confusion and doubt and onslaughts of fearful thoughts constantly were a cloud of dust above me, and it has not been pleasant or easy to walk in peace...at all.

But I've come to the conclusion that He can handle those questions; that He is a loving God, and there's nothing or no one that can "take me or mine out" until He says so. And if he says so, then He is bigger than the grief and the pain that will follow...and His peace is enough.

This is NOTHING new. I've heard this all of my life, but somehow my heart had been wounded by grief and loss and invasion and I floundered, wondering if death too could just show up on my doorstep uninvited.

Truth be told, those thoughts do still start to swirl still sometimes...but I've had a measure of peace like never before as I exit my home each morning, look up and see the sun (so faithful to appear every morning)...and I immediately cast out and empty my mind from all that worries me. And realizing that God is for me and not against me (again, nothing new) has settled the dust, it's quit swirling, and I'm convinced it's being wiped away...just like those tears that he will wipe away once and for all one day.

I feel like I'm just beginning to realize that the shaking of my shelf has been a good thing all of my life. Those neat packages were self-made and combustible. His peace is a lifetime of getting to know Him and eternal. And he loves me like crazy.

Hope this helps you too, if the dust is swirling and your shelves are shaking...

FRESH THYME – The Others – by Marcy Lytle

I remember when my kids were teens, some of their friends took trips in the summer for a week in Africa or some other faraway place, to be immersed in a different culture and serve. I'm sure some of those experiences forever changed those kids...or maybe not. But I do know that visiting other cultures, different than our own, is good in so many ways. And we can do it, even in our own hometowns!

A while back, we visited an Asian supermarket – the big kinds with all sorts of stores and eateries. It was huge. I bought a scarf in one of the stores. It was fun to look at the food options as well, as I'm not a big Asian food cook at all. We save that for eating out. But my eyes were wide open to the possibilities, should I ever choose to try a dish at home.

There's a big Mexican market we went to just before we celebrated Christmas in July, because I was looking for more things for my table as we celebrated Mexican style. I found a little game using a dice that looks like a Dreidel. And drinks for the kids to try. And we stopped at a Mexican bakery for some of their amazing pastries (and churros!).

Also recently, we were in San Antonio visiting the old market square and I had forgotten how fun (and inexpensive) shopping there is! We came away with LOTS of goodies for our table, and I found a really cool "circle of friends" candle.

Those are just a couple of other cultures we can visit just down the road from where we live...to expand our tastes and our wonder and even meet new friends. There's a Cuban store just around the corner.

But maybe less obvious is visiting other cultures that differ from us economically. Our church visits a homeless community to serve and have dinner with the folks there, once a month. I remember serving a homeless shelter in California years ago. I found it uncomfortable, to be honest.

Perhaps hanging with the rich and famous is just as uncomfortable in another way. I don't have any rich and famous friends, but I've been at parties or social gatherings that were a far cry from where I normally live. I found myself marveling (and sometimes envying) what there was and what I saw.

What about hanging out with those with different types of families than our own? My kids always wanted us to hang with other families that had kids their same ages, but that was almost impossible to find! I observe my own kids now with a group of friends that are couples with kids, couples sans kids, and even singles, and I think it's so cool!

It's really tempting to stay in a cocoon of just what matters to us and our little world. I do it, way too often. And it's a stretch and uncomfortable to be among "different" or "them" or "those" but we must. It stretches us, it makes us kind individuals, it reveals our hearts, and it might just knit us together with new friends, that look different, talk in another language, or serve another kind of meal at their table.

Even just walking outside in our yards at night after neighbors are home from work, watering their yards, or seeing neighbors walk by our front door is one small way we can wave, strike up a conversation and get to know someone that doesn't live anything at all like we do. And how beautiful that can be!

Other places, other people, and other anything than the norm is good and right and makes life so rich, doesn't it?

FRESH THYME – What’s Your Favorite? – by Marcy Lytle

There are 24 hours in a day, and sometimes those go by and we hardly realize what we’ve done or who we’ve seen or where we’ve gone because we’re SO BUSY, or completely overwhelmed, or underappreciated, or full of anxiety, or maybe depressed...and if someone were to ask, “What’s your favorite time of the day?” we might not have an answer!

Lately, I’ve been stopping to notice things, and I’ve come to realize I have lots of favorite times of the days. Maybe if I share mine, it will prompt you to take note and think about how you spend every 24 hours and if you’re observing the favorites or not:

I love the moment I step outside for a walk and see the sun coming up in the sky. I used to not even look at it and just put my head down and move forward, thinking of my long to-do list, including “walking.” I just got it done, and got back to work. Now, I purposefully look up and around and see what He’s created each morning for us – and I love that time of day!

I love the moment my husband walks in the door if he’s been gone at work all day. Seeing his truck pull in the driveway, hearing the click of the key as he turns the knob, and seeing his tired face makes me sigh, give thanks, and welcome him with open arms. I love that time of day!

I enjoy each every day when I get in bed after my bath. I have a few minutes to scroll my phone, laugh at funny videos, or observe what my friends and kids have been up to...all of which warms my heart. I love this time of day (night!)

I love the time of day when we are done with work, we are headed to the movie, and I’ve got water bottles in a bag, a sweater on my arm, and I know for the next couple of hours I’m going to be leaning back engrossed in another story, another world, another place or time. I love this time of day!

I love the time of day when I’m completely dressed. I feel like I’ve really accomplished something, like creating art almost, when I’ve found the shoes, the outfit, the bag and the jewelry to put together in an ensemble I feel good wearing! It’s a little thing, but I love that time of day to get dressed!

I love the time of day when it’s just before sunset and we’re on the highway and the lights start to come on, and tail lights are visible, and the cityscape is starting to fade, but yet there’s still enough light to see...as the moon starts to appear. I don’t know why, but it’s my favorite time of day to be out and about!

Finally, I love the time of day when the kitchen is clean, everything is put away, the counters are wiped, and yet the aroma of what was just baked or cooked lingers (unless it’s fish!) There’s this sign of gratitude and pleasure at knowing we had food to eat, a place to create a meal, and how pretty the room looks when all is back in its place.

So, what’s your favorite time of day? Pause to consider, and see if you can make your own list of your favorites, just for fun!