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Online Women's Magazine | thymemag.com

November 2023



TIPS

The Dressing – Those November Looks – by Marcy Lytle

November is that month where we start to have events on our calendar to look forward to, family gatherings to attend, and lots of shopping and running errands. While loungewear is everywhere, I don't have a lot of it. I do have a couple of sets. But what I love about November is that I can finally start wearing warmer clothing, try out different shoes, and put together fun seasonal looks. Here are some ideas for you!

Fall florals – If you have a floral blouse in fall hues, lucky you! Wear it now, and throw on a sweater over top, and you've got a look that can be dressed up or down, depending on where you're going about town!

Oversized sweater – I absolutely love this sweater I found on Amazon, at the recommendation of a friend. It's the softest, it's a bit oversized and works great with a tuck, and I purchased gray – because all of the accessories in my closet can be added for a new look!

Loafers and low socks – Have you tried this trend? I love loafers. And adding some cute socks I found at Walmart make me happy! Check out the loafers where you shop, then add some socks, and wear them with wide legs or skinny!

A Simple Sweatshirt – Stay Wilde has the cutest sweatshirts, and I recently found this one with a great reminder on the front. They have so many colors and so many sayings you can pick to wear, to lift your mood and the mood of those that see you coming!

A Market Find – This pink sweater is so fun, and I found it on sale at a seasonal market. Do you ever shop them for clothes? I can't link this one, but it's bright, it's cozy, and it's a look I will wear now...and all through the winter season.

Green and Blue – Are there fall combos you love to wear? I found this green sweater with bell sleeves at a discount store, and I love it. Then I got these splurge earrings on line, and realized the two pair together well! One of my favorite looks!

A Complete Ensemble – I love it when my top and my pants and my bag all come together in a one cohesive fun look! These cargo pants pair well with this wonderful gray cowl neck/turtleneck from Clover and Co. Then the bag...well it's one of my faves...from Amazon. Holds so much and looks so cute.

Whatever your favorite pieces are, put together those seasonal looks by shopping your closet, stopping at a market or a discount store, or order yourself something cute and new that feels good and looks even better!

Seven for You – Simplified and Calm – by the Panel of Women

Simplicity is a buzz word, and it has been since Covid. Covid forced us to simplify our lives as we all slowed down because we had to. We stayed in because we wanted to stay safe from the virus. But now, has life become crazy busy again, or not? We asked our panel to share ways they have simplified their lives and kept it simple, from the practical to the spiritual. And we asked for one simple hack or tip for all of us, as we enter the busiest time and season of the year!

There are several things I can think of that keep life simple for me. Routine: A general routine to a week brings me peace. After son is at school, this signals time with Jesus. A couple hours later I run errands, exercise, possibly a home chore, and lunch I have a part time job (bookkeeping), then I start the dinner process, and more home chores. After dinner I may need to attend a meeting or event, finish up work, or watch *Wheel of Fortune*, surf social media, read. I also say, "No." I do this so that I can protect my routine and my peace. No, I cannot be a part of the PTSA; no, I cannot attend your Gala; etc.

I don't clean that much. Dust doesn't bother me. I want things to be sanitary in my bathroom and in my kitchen. I don't care if the living room is messy or dusty. I occasionally and I promise I clean before I have company. But I don't really put lots of cleaning into my routine. And it keeps me peaceful.

I make a meal plan EVERY SINGLE WEEK. Who wants to hit 3 pm and have to decide what's for dinner? That's my definition of NON-peaceful. I LOVE my meal planner, and I use it every week. I will include a picture of it. It has tear-out pages, so the list of what we are having for dinner that week (and any meetings/events that we have to be at) is on the front of the fridge all the time.

We have a family text thread that is specifically for all of us to send our work schedules to. No chatting, no memes, just our schedules. This way we know if we can call our daughter who is a night-shift nurse, or attend a meeting while someone else picks up the kid from his after-school activity, etc.

And as for holidays...I don't get fussy. Paper plates are fine with me. Clearance wrapping paper from last year is fine with me. I keep my routine so that I don't get out of whack! I had been in an unhealthy routine of "doing it all" at Christmas because my kids had been little for so long and I became bitter. We talked and came up with a plan to share the work. We drew names and passed out money. We each shopped for ONE person and wrapped our OWN gifts. Mrs. Claus was much happier! - Laura

Covid simplified my life as it did everyone's. I've always been the kind that never stopped from the time I got up until I went to bed but life came to a halt during 2020. I couldn't babysit my grandchildren or do anything else I loved to do so I turned to writing more, reflecting more, and resting more. I'm back to babysitting but I still spend time just sitting and reflecting, which leads to more to write about. And one thing I still do that I really enjoy is the resting part and it helps to refresh me. I can't do this every day, but I try to do it at least two to three times a week and it's simply to sit down to eat lunch and watch a movie. I usually take a short Power Nap during this time also.

For the holidays, I simplify my life by cooking early and freezing it. I mix up my cornbread stuffing and freeze it for Thanksgiving and Christmas in about October. It's ready to defrost and cook and I've read freezing it even helps the spices to add more flavor. Of course, pies and some other desserts can be premade, along with some other dishes, and frozen. This really helps me feel less stressed during the holidays. I love my freezer and my family teases me about it. They always ask jokingly, "Did this come from the freezer, Mom?" Even if it's something that couldn't possibly have been in the freezer. – Carole

One way I've simplified my life is through walking and observing. Covid forced us outside to walk a lot more, and we've continued that habit. I try to keep my phone in my pocket and my eyes turned upward to observe His handiwork and listen to the sounds of nature and to His voice. This has calmed my spirit many mornings and set the tone for the day.

I've also continued using curbside. For me, it helps me to make my meal/grocery list and shop all in one sit-down event at my laptop. I feel it saves me money, as I don't browse all the other stuff on the shelves at the store. And I'd rather spend my time out shopping in a store other than the grocery store (like Marshalls!)

One simple hack we started last year with Christmas prep was moving our dining table and making our living room bigger. No sit-down for the 10 of us, only buffet. This allowed us to move our sofa back and enlarge the sitting area. And I set gifts in little piles around the room instead of all under the tree. It looked spacious and pretty! I also don't use gift tags, but a nice bold marker and just write the name on the wrapped box. - Marcy

For the past two-plus years, I've dealt with a daughter who was very sick and almost didn't make it, as well as my own ill health. It's times like this that make you look at your life, your health and emotional needs, and well, everything.

I try to avoid stress these days. I have learned to say "No" when the situation or person might cause my stress level to go up. I choose my diet carefully to avoid stress on my body. I look for happiness in little things like my plants, my family, my dog, and the wildlife around me. I've edited the things I own and have donated what I no longer need. Donating the excess in my home makes me happy and gives me a sense of peace that maybe someone else will find enjoyment out of them. I buy used items and clothes to give them purpose and then donate them back when I'm done. My dad told my mom that the rule of thumb should be that for everything you bring into the home, one thing has to go. It's this motto that keeps things simple for me and stops the clutter. Simplifying my life, especially as I get older, makes the most sense...being simply happy with less...less junk food, less stuff, less stress. – Cathy

I only have my whole family home for Christmas every other year. This allows them to visit their in-laws or do their own thing at their home. Of course, I want to send them all presents. However, the cost of shipping is outrageous. So, I have turned to Amazon to simplify the gifting process. We pay for Amazon prime monthly. This buys us free shipping on most items that we order through the year plus some other Amazon services. So, I am able to send presents out of state with no shipping costs. And, the Amazon Prime payment pays for itself with the money that is saved by getting free shipping.

The Thanksgiving/Christmas hack I have discovered is buying a turkey breast instead of a whole turkey. A whole turkey is usually big and hard to handle compared to a turkey breast. Also, if you have a small group you don't need as much turkey. It simply works! - Gina

I've read several books on simplifying life and there is one principle that continues to be useful. When I am contemplating a new purchase I ask myself if I currently have an item that is already fulfilling the purpose. For example, the picture I included is from a recent gathering where several of us brought food in casserole dishes. My friend had a nifty insulated casserole dish carrier with a handle. It was quite functional and helpful. I don't have one, but made a carrier out of what I already had. I put warmed clay tiles in the bottom of my red carrier and wrapped my dish in a beach towel. It served the purpose and I didn't have to buy and then store the legitimate carrier. I could buy the cute carrier but I don't want to own one. Not having to own things brings me a sense of freedom. I want to use what I have to get the job done. Do I need the precious rain coat I saw online? Nope, my current raincoat is doing the job it needs to do. In my garden the goal is beauty. So yes, after the brutal summer I do need to freshen up with a few new plants. Do I need new jeans? Thankfully, the ones in the closet still fit and look good enough. (If following the current fashion trends is important to you this philosophy on clothes probably doesn't work.) The books *The More of Less* and *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* changed me and our home and definitely brought me more peace.

It is with a touch of sadness that we have given up on having a sit-down family Christmas dinner. The mental image of the Norman Rockwell Christmas family dinner table spread with wonderful food has to be released. Although the obstacle of seating everyone was a factor, the main movement toward a more simple approach is six little people, six and under. For the near future we will do appetizers and boards served from the kitchen island with family congregating in different rooms to be together. I keep reminding myself that the season is here to service us ...we don't serve the season. - Shelley

Simplifying our lives might look different in every home. Your pets may consume a chunk of your money, whereas she wouldn't spend a dime to house pets. Maybe she doesn't spend a penny at salons but would rather DIY all of her pampering, but pampering is a treat for you that you gladly spend dollars on. We are all different, and anything that simplifies us personally and makes our lives easier, more peaceful and works for our family is great! No need to compare...but only to breathe...

Cousin Moms – Stirring Up Thanks – by the Cousins

As a parent, it might be one of the hardest tasks ever...teaching our kids to be grateful. Can it even be taught, or does it have to be observed and then imitated...and then it sinks into our hearts? I don't know the answer, but I know it's necessary to train our kids this time of year (and all year) to give thanks for all things, in every circumstance, so that they can see and taste the goodness of God in their lives and never forget. And when they do, hopefully they will then give. So we asked our moms of the littles what they do to stir up thanks in their kiddos this season.

Charissa

Thanksgiving and Christmas are almost here, and I cannot believe it! And being thankful and loving, and all of the true meanings of the seasons are awesome to celebrate. So what do we do as parents to create a sense of thankful hearts?

My girls are ages 5 and 7, and an infant! We do try to be thankful every single day, not just at Thanksgiving. We do this especially when they're fighting over a toy, or who got what, or if they go to a birthday party and see something they really want. Or perhaps that friend has something they don't have and our girls say, "That's not fair." We take time to pause and remind them of what they do have and what God has given them. We give thanks for a roof over our heads, food in the pantry, and a family that loves us. We remind them that so many do not have even those basic needs. Thinking of all the families in the current war overseas, we often take for granted our lives here. So we try to take those moments of jealousy or bitterness and teach the girls that we need to instead be thankful for what we have.

About twice a year, usually before their birthdays and before Christmas, we go through toys and package up ones to donate. We talk during that time as well, about the opportunity to bless others with what we have. That is one practical way we put our words in to actions by learning to give what we have, to experience the joy of giving.

Another holiday activity we do is Operation Christmas Child. Every year our church does a packing party, where we write letters and fill shoe boxes for gifts for the kids. And every year, the girls want one of the gifts we are giving away. Another teaching moment! We again remind them that we are giving and sharing the love of Jesus with others. So we try to involve our family in projects to give thanks and give to others.

I would love at some point be able to serve food to the homeless, like I did when I was younger. And as Christmas approaches, we try to not be overwhelmed with gift buying and parties and functions. We did have an advent calendar last year, and every night we read a bit of the bible story of Christmas. An advent is a great way to countdown to Christmas, to keep it true.

Kamrin

From the end of September, through October and November, I get so excited, as it's the start of all the holidays things! We love to create new traditions and true "getting away from it all" events

to make memories. It might be a pumpkin patch, looking at lights, and all the things! It's my favorite time of the year!

So we used to have the kids set up a nativity, as we had this cool wooden set where we hid the star each night...and then we read part of the Christmas story. But as the kids have gotten older, we found a tree that is the family tree of Christ. We read a bible story each night of a family in the family tree of Christ. Sometimes we didn't finish all of them, because we were busy, and that happens! I do love it because we love presenting who Christ is, not just his birth, and how we are part of his family! All the lineage of Christ is amazing and encourages us to read the Bible.

We don't really do Santa totally, but we just teach that it's the heart behind Santa and giving gifts. We do put out cookies, but the kids know that we are Santa. Santa is fun and a part of the spirit of Christmas, but we don't want to be lost in the shuffle of Santa or Elf on the Shelf.

We do clean the kids' rooms before Christmas, to share yes – but also to make room for the new. Sometimes they just want a bigger house and a second room for more (yes, they have asked for that!) So then we have a talk about being grateful for what we have. This is hard because they feel disloyal to the person that gave it to them when they part with a gift. But we talk about donating and sharing with others to bless them. We have put things on FB marketplace for free, for other parents to grab. One time our daughter wanted to get rid of her dolls and accessories, and she wanted to sell them. But at Christmas, we ended up giving them to a friend of mine for her 2year old daughter. Getting the photos of her daughter's face opening the gift was the coolest thing ever. I showed my daughter, too, how keeping things and stewarding them and then giving them is such a blessing. I will cherish this forever. That little girl was so excited.

Do we do all of this perfectly? No. I can get lost in the extravaganza of the season, which is wonderful! WE love blessing our children with gifts and activities, but we try to have balance and teach them to be grateful. Last year we ended up with Covid on Thanksgiving, and didn't have a full meal. It was so hard for me personally, as I love this tradition with my family. But we sat around the table and gave thanks for food and that we were getting well. So though it wasn't big, we loved the little things as well. WE weren't dressed up, we were in our pajamas, but it was still special and we were present and grateful.

The holidays are hard and stressful, with financial and family tensions and illness, and we've had it all! But it's important as parents to do our best to be grateful and have joy in the little things, throughout the season. And whether they get one present or 40, the kids will follow our example of gratefulness, not the perfect memories or gifts. It's okay to pivot each year when surprises arrive, because memories will happen in all of it! Just bring joy!

In the Kitchen – Your Christmas List – by Marcy Lytle

We're going to change it up this month, because it's most likely you have your staple Thanksgiving recipes ready to go, you're going to use simple recipes leading up to Turkey Day to alleviate stress, and what you really might enjoy is someone else making your Christmas wish list you...regarding things you might love to have for your kitchen!

We've put together a list of a dozen kitchen things that are awesome. So if you need some ideas for yourself or the others in your family or on your list, here you go:

The Meat Chopper – This gadget has been a game changer for me. It's great for breaking up ground meat when you're cooking. I just keep mine out on the counter, because I use it so much!

A Pretty Olive Oil Bottle – If your olive oil bottle is just the one from the store, you need one that's pretty, one you can sit by the stove where you use it all the time, one that goes with your décor. We found this one on Amazon.

Rolling Bins – I've mentioned these before, but I can't praise them enough. These might be something you wouldn't buy for yourself, but your family might buy for you! Lakeside Collections has these, and they fit nicely (be sure and measure) under a cabinet and hold a lot...and they roll out! A no-brainer win/win.

Lazy Susan trays – These have enhanced my refrigerator organization immensely. I use them for all the jars...keeps them organized...and all I have to do is twirl and select. They're great in the pantry too for canned goods and small jars. Seriously, one of my faves!

Baskets for the Top – I found three of these cloth baskets with handles (the handles look pretty) that fit perfectly on top of the fridge! No more clutter up there! One holds coffee my husband receives monthly in his coffee club, one holds plastic bowls with lids, and the other is for miscellaneous. Out of sight in the baskets, and the baskets are so pretty!

New Tea Towels – I've tried a lot. Some are too thick, some are too thin, some don't feel good, all sorts of issues with towels! But I recently found the perfect tea towels that I love in pattern and texture! So pretty, and a great idea to update your stash.

Cookbook – Yes! Maybe you find your inspiration from your phone, laptop, or elsewhere...but having a new cookbook is a treat! I have one called *Boards, Platters and More* that I love. It's by Taste of Home. I love the photos and ideas for boards, but it includes the recipes for all the little snacks and bites, as well! A great resource for the winter months ahead!

Kitchen Scents – Ask for candles! Kirklands always has such fragrant ones for the season. They also go on sale quite often! If you're not burning a candle first thing when you get up in the morning, to enjoy while you make your coffee and get going...you're missing out! Don't like to burn candles? Try ScentChips – and one of their seasonal covers!

Label Maker – We just received one of these by a fluke from somewhere, and it's come in so handy. I would have never thought to buy one. It's great for labeling jars, folders, cabinet shelves, and more. And it's fun to use!

Teapot – Maybe you have an old one stashed away, or yours is not pretty and decorative. Ask for one that goes with your décor, or one that sparks joy, or one that's beautiful and practical...and keep it sitting out so you'll actually drink that cup of tea and sit down, and relax.

Clear glasses – not for drinking, but for making parfaits. They're the easiest and quickest and cutest snack/dessert to make in a pinch. Layer fruit, cake or muffins, and Cool Whip with shaved chocolate over top. It looks pretty through the glasses, and it's a great way to end the week with those little bits and pieces of things you have leftover to eat! Be creative and layer away!

Tiny Tent Calendar – I have this on a shelf in the kitchen and it's great for looking at, to see what day it is, and I love flipping each month. Takes up hardly any space at all and it's so cute. Found at Barnes and Noble.

TRIED AND TRUE – LAST MONTH’S LEARNING

Ever heard of the term “theadwife?” Look it up. The terms that surface these days...

Try creamy lime cilantro dressing over your tamales next time you eat them. Divine.

We tried a large avocado from a Cuban store and didn’t like it...too bland.

My husband says the spicy chicken sandwich from Culvers is tasty!

There’s a monopoly game with a World War II theme and pieces. Great gift idea!

Did you know that long ago, some churches required patrons to pay to get a pew up front? Geez...

A yummy snack for the theater is pretzel rods, nuts and dark chocolate, with a side of peanut butter for dipping.

At Marshalls recently I found large seasonal platter sets for \$4.99 – it’s a favorite stop for fun table décor!

There’s an iconic Mexican restaurant in our town that serves saltine crackers with salsa – try it!

A simple parfait dessert is great any time of year, using the fruit that’s in season. Layer it with Cool Whip in a clear glass and top with a couple of bites of dark chocolate. Lindt 70% is my fave!

If you like reading glasses, Amazon has some cute fashionable ones – the Oprah style – that I love. I’ll link here!

I just renewed my library card and hope to get going back often! Libraries are great places to hang out in the cold months...to read!

Did you know that a little pickle juice tastes good in salsa? Add some to your next batch you make or buy!

Looking for a new cookbook? *The Cook’s Book* by Bri McKoy is more like a guide/cookbook for the chef in you or a friend that wants a full resource! I love it.

World Market has LOTS more food items now, from around the world. From super long Italian pasta and old-world coffee, to apricot tarts in a box!

If you visit fall markets, treat yourself to some handmade soap in winter scents, like peppermint or eucalyptus! Or consider these for stocking gifts!

Have you tried Auntie Anne’s pretzel dogs (in the frozen section)? They’re a fast bake and really tasty!

Ever shop the clearance jewelry at Earthbound (store found in malls)? I recently found some fun buys, and they're all so unique.

A fun snack to take to the movies instead of buying popcorn there is sliced apples, caramel sauce and dark chocolate chips. Carry in your big, dip and enjoy.

Need an idea for pumpkins for November...that aren't Halloweenish? Buy small white fake pumpkins at a craft store (I found some at Target). Fill a bowl with water and drizzle in nail polish in pretty colors. Swirl your pumpkin, set to dry – so pretty!

SUGAR + Spice - To Dye For – by Angela Dolbear

DIY Home Hair Coloring

If you are looking for a mono-chromatic hair color refresh, or to tame your roots, and want to save some cash and time, consider coloring your hair at home. I have been coloring my own hair at home for the past fifteen years.

My hair color has gone from dark brown, to brown black, to black, to blue black, and now to wine red. I had highlighted hair for so long, and I'm still over it. So single-tone hair is good for me.

If you are going darker or staying close to your own color, it's a straightforward process. Going lighter, or to an entirely different hair color is when I would advise going to a salon or seeking advice from a professional hair colorist.

For example, when I decided I was done having glamorous black hair like Bettie Page, I had to strip off the black dye before recoloring my color to red. I have a good friend and hair stylist I sought help from. Stripping hair dye is not an easy task. It damages your hair, and the chemicals smell bad! So, make careful consideration of your color choice.

Which hair color to use?

Stay away from the box dyes that are available in the supermarket or drugstores. They are loaded with harsh chemicals like formaldehyde, and usually dry hair out. Beauty supply stores, such as Sally Beauty, are an excellent place to purchase hair color and the tools needed for coloring. I shop online and use their rewards program to save money.

My current favorite brand is Wella. Ion and Age Beautiful are good too.

Madison Reed has good reviews. I believe they will send a kit with all the hair coloring tools necessary along with the hair color.

What tools do I need?

Here's my list:

- An old sheet or towels for the floor
- Old towels for the counter
- Old t-shirt/sweatshirt for yourself (I have old sweats I wear too; cause drips happen!)
- Vaseline (I'll explain in a minute)
- A bottle or bowl to mix the dye. I use a hair coloring bowl with a hair coloring brush from Sally. So much easier.
- Gloves – I wash and reuse a pair of Playtex dishwashing gloves. Make sure the gloves fit snug so you can grip and maneuver the brush or bottle well.
- An old washcloth, moistened

Tips:

1. Before I start to color my hair, I apply a generous layer of Vaseline on my face, ears and neck, to keep excess dye from settling into my skin. Be careful not to apply Vaseline to the hair on the sides of your face, or else the dye may not take.
2. Read the instructions carefully. Different hair colors need a 1:1 or 1:2 ratio of color to developer.
3. Take your time, go slow. Go section by section of hair, so all your hair is covered.
4. Use a wide tooth comb to make sure the color is evenly distributed on your scalp and hair.
5. Because my roots tell me my hair is almost entirely silver now, which is very color-resistant hair, after I apply the dye, I put a plastic shower cap over my head to help the dye activate and permeate my hair. If the temperature is cool, I will add a wool beanie I use specifically for hair coloring, on top of the shower cap. Heat helps activate the dye.
6. When rinsing out hair color, follow the brand instructions. I usually rinse well with cool water, then apply a [color sealer conditioner](#) for a few minutes. Rinse that and apply a good nourishing conditioner and leave it on for a few minutes.

Notes about Color:

- There are permanent and semi-permanent hair dye. It just depends on what your coloring goals are. Cream versus liquid is just a matter of consistency preference.
- Developer -- If you are purchasing your color from a beauty supply, you will need to purchase developer as well as your chosen color. 20 Volume developer is the norm for regular permanent hair color. Anything stronger than 20 is not advised by this home hair-colorist, or you could end up with over-processed, orange-tinted hair (been there, done that!). Consult your favorite salon colorist at that point. I try to purchase the same brand developer as the color I have chosen.
- Mix it up! I use 3 different colors (red, red-brown, and burgundy) from Wella to achieve the hair color I want. I use a measuring spoon to make sure the color mixture is consistent.
- Usually, the staff at beauty supply stores are knowledgeable about hair coloring techniques if you have questions. Sally Beauty.com has online help available also.

The beauty of blessings to you!

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



HOME

Practical Parenting – Encouragement with Fries, Please – by Marcy Lytle

We recently had the family over to try out a French fry spread on our table. Basically, we had tons of fries spread out with all sorts of dips, and served sliders as well. But the “theme” of the night was encouragement and we had activities to go with our fries. This can be done with the immediate family, extended family, or even friends during the holidays!

Prepare the food:

Buy at least three kinds of frozen fries

Line your table with brown butcher paper

Consider some small plastic cups for all the dips (you can buy or make your own dips – we did a mix of both)

For the sliders, make it easy like pulled pork in the crockpot, or just turkey and cheese!

Tip: After all the fries are cooked, line baking sheets with racks and place fries out on those. Keep in oven at 200 degrees til guests arrive – your fries will stay crisp and warm!

Prepare the activities:

Type and print questions to go under each plate, questions to ask about each other like: What is Dad’s favorite thing to eat for breakfast? Where did Mom work in college? What TV show is that kid’s fave? These should all be questions to get to know each other better.

After dinner, plan a time to sit and compliment one another – taking turns. It can be as simple as liking her shoes, or the way he sings, or anything! Something nice!

Ask what’s on the top of each person’s prayer list; then pray together before everyone goes home.

The dips:

Fry Dip – This is an easy one to make and so good

Pesto stirred into mayo – another easy one

BBQ sauce (just purchase your fave)

Honey mustard

Spicy ketchup

Cilantro lime mayo

Google “French fry dips” and find your own recipes – and make ahead.

This activity takes a little preparation but is so fun to put together and to participate in. It could be a new tradition for you and yours in the fall season, or even for a Christmas dinner, because it can be varied up and changed to fit your particular family! Kids love fries, and having different dips to try makes the meal a blast. And kids love to be affirmed, and to guess the answers to questions, so it's interactive. Family time, with food and fun – all wrapped up in a dinner where everyone goes to bed full of food and encouragement. The best night ever.

HOME – I Don't Do Teenagers – It's Noisy Out There

We just watched a movie called *Flora and Son*, about a single mom with a teen boy who both are in daily turmoil with each other. The mom is angry because of the way her life has turned out, and the boy is just as disappointed in both his parents. He hears his mom belittle him, his dad is disinterested, the girl at school doesn't notice him, and he begins to lose himself in music. All the noise of his world is loud and it hurts his ears and heart.

Our kids live in a noisy world. Especially when they're at school and among their peers. So our homes need to be a place where we create an atmosphere of truth and peace. And if we are not at peace ourselves, this will translate to more noise to our teens that they will want to shut out and run from.

The noises they hear:

Loud language of cursing and anger – It's on the sports field, in the hallways, among adults and peers alike. It's on social media, and the force behind it is anger. Shouts and outbursts toward others can become so loud that our teens become desensitized to it all. But we can offer words of encouragement, faith, and love when they step over the threshold at home.

Inside head thoughts – These are the worst. Self-image and what they think of themselves is huge. They may not voice these thoughts out loud, but they're screaming inside – words of self-hate, disappointment in themselves and name calling, and labels they hear in their heads and wear in the way they walk and shuffle around. This noise happens when they start to believe lies. But we can speak the truth of who they are daily, with words of affirmation and praise from their Father.

Musical lyrics – Music reigns, doesn't it? Taylor Swift alone was a loud voice this year, with her Eras Tour. Music is everywhere. Other bands and raps and songs and tunes have words that send messages, often ones that are sexual and suggestive, of all sorts of things that can shout to our kids that to be loved they must be this or do that. But we can talk to our kids, listen to music with them, guide them to find the good stuff...and instruct them on how to compare what they hear with the Word. And to turn away from lyrics that suggest evil.

Fashion cries – Does it really cry? Well there are signs everywhere that say "must-haves" for the season. And our teens look around and they hear the cries of what's in and what's cool and the latest image to portray. Fashion is fun, but not when it's wrapped up in identity. So we can encourage our kids in their own look, and train them to be proud of what they wear that they enjoy, not what others dictate or say. Help them and communicate about the image of Christ and how that is even reflected in the way we dress.

Our voices – We are the loudest sound they hear here, once they come back home from their sports, their classes, their friends' houses, and all the places that are noisy and loud. And if at home they hear complaining and bickering and fighting too, this fifth noise will become a source of anxiety and fear. Home will no longer be a safe place, but another experience that brings them pain and hurt, a place where they'll want to cover their ears. But we can cultivate a home of

thanksgiving and praise to the One that loves us all, and do this often with our kids as they see us live a life of peace with God.

It might be a good thing this season to observe the noises your entire family hears daily, watch your kids and see how they're walking, talking, and feeling about themselves and others...and you. Pray together, hug each other, and speak and live as people that love God and love others...and listen to the truth above the din of the noise.

An Adage a Day - Great Minds – by Carole Gilbert

We don't plan this but recently my husband and I have started to dress as twinsies. It's just by happenstance when this occurs. But it's gotten so much so that others notice. You know what they say, "Great minds think alike." Not that my husband and I have great minds and they don't think alike but; for us, I think we do when we think together. Couldn't that also be thinking alike?

To be honest, my husband and I are total opposites. I know God put us together for this reason because we complement each other perfectly. Don't get me wrong, we've had our downs, but I will say the ups far outnumber our downs. And I'm so thankful to God for my husband. No one else would put up with me like he does. He listens to me beef about politics and every other thing I think is wrong in our world. He loves everything I cook (well, almost everything) and supports my every idea. And I know to not talk too much since it gets me worked up and he'd rather not see that, and to only give him leftovers once from a meal I cooked. I can freeze any left after that and give it to him at a later date and he thinks it's just fine. We know each other so well and respect each other's likes and dislikes. We're twinsies in more ways than just dress.

The quote, "Great minds think alike" originated in the 17th century. It has come to be thought of as a proverb, probably from its wisdom since its meaning first referred to two people having the same thought at the same time so they must be very smart people. But it also has an ironically controversial meaning since it can refer to two people with normal amounts of wisdom having the same thought or idea at the same time just because.

Thomas Paine, one of our founding fathers in the USA, said in the 1792 political pamphlet *The Rights of Man, edition 2*: "I do not believe that any two men, on what are called doctrinal points, think alike who think at all. It is only those who have not thought that appear to agree."

This quote may be talking about politics, but I believe it is referring to what my husband and I are doing when we walk out as twinsies. You see, it's not always that we dress this way because of our great minds, but that we're really not thinking about it at all. I do believe we have great minds, though, more so my husband. But I also know we don't always use them.

Paul explains to us what the wisest way is to use our thinking when he tells us to go to God in prayer and let Him guard our hearts and minds.

Philippians 4:8, "*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*"

I love my husband and I love my Lord, God, and I'm so thankful to God; first for putting our great minds together, and then for my husband for being the better half of our great minds. I'm thankful that God gave us two heads together and that two heads are better than one. I know that was God's intended purpose for us all along. What are you thankful for?

In Each Room – November Guest Bath – by Marcy Lytle

Your family is coming over more this time of year, or maybe you're hosting Friendsgiving or visits with friends because it's getting colder and darker earlier. They're going to be using your guest bathroom, and it's that time of year when it was just Halloween and now it's the month of Thanksgiving...so maybe you want your guest bathroom to be inviting and warm and cozy. Here are some suggestions just for you:

Visit the Dollar Spot at Target and get a few things for a shelf or the counter. Maybe an elevated tray, a few pumpkins (yes, they're great for November), a tiny wreath, and a candle. Group them in odd numbers wherever you display them and make them pretty.

- Consider a new hand towel, one in fall hues like orange or dark yellow, or even brown. Have at least two available, to trade one out while the other one is being washed. World Market has such pretty ones.
- Shower curtains are fun to change out, if you wish. We recently opted for one that I've been able to keep up for every season. But there are fun ones with leaves on them, or squirrels or owls...all in shades of autumn. Check Amazon for a fun one.
- If you have a cabinet with doors, take them off and display the shelves without the doors! One can be used for just décor and a sticky light to illuminate the pretties. Or set a basket and roll the towels and cloths inside for guests to use.
- What's your soap dispenser look like? There are SO MANY pretty ones found at discount stores, very affordable, to switch out for this month only. And even add a scented soap bar for the bathtub or shower, one you might find at World Market or at a booth in a fall market outdoors. Pecan or pumpkin scents, or something with orange!
- Is the back of the toilet available for a small basket to hold extra rolls, and room freshener? It seems the Dollar Spot always has these too! This way guests don't have to open drawers and cabinets to find what they need.
- Finally, check those rugs. How old are they? Could you switch one to a fall/autumn hue to go with the rest of the room?

Stand back and see if your guest bath is now inviting and pretty, full of nice scents, and up to date with the time of year...because in a few weeks...you'll want to switch to Christmas...won't you?

A Night to Remember – Cultivate – by Marcy Lytle

Do your kids know the word cultivate? To cultivate means to prepare the land for gardening. So if we cultivate, we must be expecting to grow something, right? But why does the land need to be prepared? It's a good lesson for spring planting, but also a necessary one for fall thanks giving. Kids need to know this word, what it means, and how to cultivate their own heart's garden so that thanksgiving pops up instead of complaining.

Preparation: You'll need a day a pot of dirt (with a big rock hidden). A small watering can and a few seeds will be nice, as well as directions on how to plant (maybe a seed packet that has them). Pansies are a good suggestion, if you want to actually plant something to watch it grow!

Who knows what cultivate means? (Tell the kids if no one knows.)

So we need to cultivate dirt before we plant something to grow.

What happens if we plant or throw seeds on ground that is nothing but rock, but the plant needs soil?

There's a verse in the bible that says seed planted on rocks is stolen by birds and nothing grows.

Having a thankful heart doesn't just grow either. We can have lots of things, like toys and clothes and even friends, but if our heart isn't full of good soil for growing thanks...it will just be hard like rocks.

(Check the dirt in your pot for rocks – find it – toss it).

If we are mad and always wanting our way and no one to touch OUR stuff; and we're angry with our siblings or family, this is a rock that will choke out any good seed of thanks!

Let's check the soil again, which should have good nutrients – be the right kind of soil for the plant - and be easily broken up with our hands (ask the kids to feel the soil.)

The way the garden of our hearts is broken up is by experiencing God's love. He loved us so much that he gave his only Son to die for us, so that we can live forever, and he forgives everything wrong attitude or thought we have. Let's examine our hearts to see if we need our soil broken up. (Pause to pray together). Does anyone need to ask anyone else to forgive them? This prepares the soil for thanks.

Now, let's dig a hole and plant the seeds according to the directions. The right depth, the right spacing, the right watering. (Open the seed packet, read the instructions, plants a few seeds.)

When we open our hearts and ask Jesus to come and live there, we are preparing our soil for good growth – a thankful heart. And Jesus comes and plants his truth, his love, his goodness, and his mercy.

Now, let's cover the seeds and water them. What do you think will happen if we never water this pot? (The seeds won't grow.) Plants need water, and the right amount of sun.

We water our hearts by prayer, praise, reading the Word, and all the things God tells us to do makes us strong in Him. He then starts the growing process that then...

Produces a thankful heart!

These pansies or flowers we plant have to be tended to, watched, cared for and all the things...and hopefully the plants will grow. But we know that sometimes our weather is harsh, we forget to water, or seeds are just bad...but that never happens with Jesus.

When we believe and receive Him in our hearts, ask forgiveness of our sins, and invite him to remove all the things that make our soil hard and rocky...we then have space to grow a thankful heart.

What does a thankful heart look like?

It causes us to complain less, love more, and observe God's blessings.

Prayer:

God, thank you for this lesson on soil and seeds. We invite you in to heal our hearts, remove hard rocks, and plant your lovingkindness deep down so that a beautiful thankful plant can emerge with arms reaching out to your Son. We are thankful for your love, and we ask you to water us and makes us strong against wind and rain, as we thank you daily for everything...instead of complaining about anything. Amen.

Tiny Living - Parenting Solo – by Leyanne Enterline

Shout out to single parents, because it sure is tough doing things alone!

My hubby typically travels five days out of the week; he does have a month off in the winter and a few months off in the summer, so he is here some of the time! But, wow, when he's not at home and I wear all of the hats - living tiny gets tough for sure.

He's usually gone through a weekend, so all those weekend sports activities I become the cheerleader, Uber driver and vending machine! I love watching the boys play, but co-parenting is highly recommended when possible!

I feel that tiny living and solo parenting combined are somewhat of a challenge. Yes, a small space has some advantages, but at the moment I'm seeing the negatives. I would love the extra help in the cooking breakfast, lunch and dinner - and then hand washing every dish after every meal. The kiddos have become great dish washers and dish dryers, though! They're also getting better about making their own gourmet breakfast and at least a simple lunch. Ladies, watch out! I've got some good hubbies in the making.

The laundry is still done at my parents' house, so the back and forth with all the stinky sport clothing is a bit of time burden. Then, I either bring the kiddos with me over there, which can turn into a long visit with my parents, or leave the boys at home, hoping they can get some more chores or school work done. I know that I could simplify things by perhaps eating more meals out, but with food allergies and how expensive things are now, we just try to eat more at home. And then...the whole cycle of hand washing begins. Once my oldest starts driving, I may have to put him on laundry duty of going back and forth a couple times a week!

Speaking of food, though, I am pretty proud of my tiny garden. Because of my small space inside, I can't really keep plants, which I wish I could! But every now and then, I find a space to grow a little project! This time, I had some celery, cut off the top and used it for a meal, then placed the bottom part in a bowl of water. I changed out the water every day and placed it on a window sill. In about two weeks, it was making new leaves and the stalk was ready to be planted. It's now in a little pot outdoors and I'm looking forward to having my own celery that I don't have to go to the store to buy! We also get fresh okra, tomatoes, and spinach. The garden is my little project to get me out of the tiny space - and a money saver on the grocery bill!

Hats off again, to the solo parents. I feel ya! It's exhausting some days! But the days are long and the years are short! I will choose joy in this crazy season of life!

Remember. Love grows best in tiny spaces.



YOU

Under Pressure – Thanksgiving Wins – by Debbie Haynes

There is a driving force within each of us that is stronger than most anything else that we fight against. And that is pride. It's an enemy of our soul and; yet, it's one of the hardest things to eliminate.

The Bible is clear that pride is not something God likes. We are told in I John 2 that all that is in the world (including the pride of life) is not of the Father. And in *The Message* translation it says:

Don't love the world's way; don't love its goods.

The love of the world squeezes out love for the Father.

Maybe we find it easy to stay away from recognizable sins (i.e. murder) but pride is often a motivator behind even the good that we do for others.

Author C.S. Lewis had this to say,

"For pride is a spiritual cancer; it eats up the very possibility of love, contentment, and even common sense..." "A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you're looking down you can't see anything that's above you."

A great missionary, Andrew Murray wrote,

"Pride must die in me, else nothing of heaven can live in me."

And Jonathan Edwards wrote,

"Pride is the worst viper in the human heart! It is the greatest disturber of the soul's peace, and of sweet communion with Christ."

The Bible tells us of the story between the proud and arrogant giant Goliath and the humble young boy David. One was blinded and motivated by his own pride and the other fully aware of his own limitations as he said,

"The Lord will deliver you into my hands."

And we know how that story ended. Proudful Goliath was brought down by the humility and profound faith of a young boy.

I awoke one morning with the impression that pride and thanksgiving cannot co-exist in the same heart. One or the other rules us, because the actions we carry out and our chosen allegiances will demonstrate what's in our hearts.

So, I asked God to help me focus on things for which I was thankful. Mostly they were tangible things like home, family, food, shelter and clothing. But there is much more. I realized *pride* is related to me. What I want, what I need, what I deserve. But *thanksgiving* is directed above and is completely focused on Him.

God promises in Isaiah 41 that he is with us and we are not to fear or be dismayed. He is God and will strengthen us, help us and uphold us with his right hand of righteousness.

Some ways to help us decrease so that he can increase are:

- Give thanks to God for he is good, and his love endures forever. (Psalm 107:1)
- Give to the Lord thanks due Him and sing praise to his name. (Psalm 7:17)
- Give thanks in everything, for this is his will. (I Thessalonians 5:18)
- Give thanks with our requests, and do not be anxious at all. (Philippians 4:6)
- Give thanks and let God's peace rule our hearts...not pride. (Colossians 3:15)

Maybe it sounds simple and easy, but when we put our pride down and direct our attention upward toward Him, a song emerges. Hope and courage arises.

Several decades ago I wrote a song, and my pride told me it was not up to my standards and beneath me...probably a throw-away song...an embarrassment.

But here are the lyrics, simple and true. Sing them in your own voice and heart, and pick up your own stone of faith.

Oh give thanks, oh give thanks, unto the Lord

Oh give thanks, oh give thanks, for he is good

Oh give thanks, oh give thanks, unto the Lord Most High

For His mercy endures forever

Inner Strength – Ralphie – by Michelle Wyatt

I was having dinner at Chili's with my boys, and it turned into a moment for my son Matthew to grieve. I know his cries, and this particular night there was clearly something wrong. It was intense with tears...big tears.

I asked Matthew, "What's wrong?"

He sadly answered, "I miss JJ."

JJ was our dog that passed away a few years ago. JJ was 15 years old, and my son was about six. JJ passed away close to when my mom passed away and Matthew was very close to my mom.

I put my arms around Matthew while he shed his tears. When we got home, Matthew went to his room and brought out his stuffed animal named Ralphie. He said it reminded him of JJ. JJ was a Schnauzer that had black fur, and Ralphie was a husky with white and gray fur. In this case, though, appearances didn't matter. Ralphie was soft, cute and comforting, which is what Matthew needed. And this wasn't the first time that Matthew cried over missing JJ.

Each time Matthew is sad, he finds something different that comforts him. Matthew is actually not the only one that loves stuffed animals. I'd say it runs in our family. For me, it's a stuffed dog named Spot, my dad's dog. My dad passed away about 17 years ago. We were extremely close. And Spot has stayed on my bed ever since Dad has been gone. His fur isn't soft like before and there is a limb missing. To me, that's proof of how much he's been loved over the years.

Before Spot, I had given my dad a stuffed animal named Perky the Penguin. Giving a stuffed animal to my dad became our thing that made each other happy. In fact, I was crushed when we lost Perky during one of our family vacations, as it had brought my dad and I much comfort together.

Speaking of playing with a stuffed animal, on that day that Matthew found Ralphie he took him to the pool. Ralphie floated along while Matthew, Brenden, and I swam. Matthew flipped Ralphie into the air, occasionally dove with him underwater, and didn't worry about getting him wet because he knew I could wash and dry him and he'd be as good as new. Before we left to go back home, I squeezed as much water out of Ralphie as I could. Then Matthew wrapped his stuffed dog in a towel so cutely, and we headed to the house. Matthew put Ralphie in a safe place until I was able to wash him. I could tell that time with Ralphie meant a lot to Matthew, as his face beamed with joy.

In summary, the grieving process is personal. There's no time limit and everyone is triggered and shows their emotions differently. Our coping skills are just as different, as to what makes us feel better.

Stuffed animals may be one coping object or skill, for Matthew and me. What is one of yours?

A Hopeful Heart - Forgiveness is Free – by Christina Oberon

Forgiveness has no price tag, yet we grapple with forgiving others for perceived wrongs and, crucially, ourselves for failures.

Even though we know that for a person to earn God's forgiveness, they must also be willing to forgive others, forgiveness can be challenging because it involves letting go of negative emotions tied to a hurtful experience. It takes time and introspection to navigate those feelings and find a path to forgiveness.

Embarking on the journey of self-forgiveness is no small feat—it's a vital catalyst for personal growth. It entails acknowledgment of one's mistakes, a commitment to taking the lessons from them, and the understanding that perfection eludes us all. In this action of self-compassion, we can extend gentleness and understanding to ourselves. The most formidable forgiveness often lies in self-reflection and self-discovery leading to the realization that, often, it is ourselves we must forgive above all others.

Forgiveness can set us free if hurt, pride or anger is tied to an experience. When we focus on understanding the other person's perspective, practice empathy, and recognize that forgiveness is more about your emotional well-being than condoning the actions, it can be easier to move into a forgiving space. It's a gradual process, so we should be patient with ourselves. Forgiveness isn't just a gift to others; it's a gift to ourselves.

At the tender age of eight, I endured a traumatic experience—a heavy load silently shouldered for nearly three decades. Only later did I grasp the weight of a burden not meant for me, leading to a deliberate choice: to forgive. The shackles of guilt, shame, resentment, and fear, which had haunted me, were finally unclasped, offering a liberating sense of freedom. Forgiveness became the key to consigning that event to my past, liberating precious space for the gifts of the present. This decision unfolded in what I believe to be God's perfect timing.

"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Matthew 6:14-15

Forgiveness may be free, but its value is immeasurable.

Who will you forgive today?

Healthy Habits – Make it Different – by Marcy Lytle

One of the things that keeps me sane and balanced and happy is that my weekends and my weeknights are different from my weekdays. Of course, we all have different work schedules and life commitments, but there has to be a separation at some point of work and play, or we crumble. If our lives are full of work and chores and doing for others 24/7, seven a days a week, the joy of living dwindles and we become lost in the chaos. But there are some tips on how to separate work from play, and make sure they don't cross over into a mixed up and tiresome way of living.

This is how I separate out my life. So hopefully, it will inspire you to consider doing the same so that this season is one of joy and peace.

Sit down and make a list of all the things you “have” to do, like cleaning the house, buying groceries, getting your work done, washing the clothes, running errands, making dinners...all the things that are “required” of you on a daily/weekly basis.

Use a paper calendar to set these things up on days of the week, so that you can see it right there in front of you. If you have a full time job outside the home, then these chores will have to be done in the evenings or on the weekends. However, scheduling them out enables you to dictate when they are done.

After you've filled in the calendar with all of the things you're required to do...then rearrange and move things so that you have time to play. Maybe Monday is a hard work day, so leave Monday night blank for a night at the movies. Then Tuesday night you make your grocery list and fold laundry...but leave 9-10pm for a show on TV without distraction. Then work out the rest of the calendar.

If you observe that you have NO down time on that calendar, no time to rest or play, then ask for help...somewhere...or see if you can dole out some of your items to others...or cross them off altogether.

The key is to observe your life, make your lists of what you do, and write it out on a calendar so you can see how to spend your time.

For me, I work hard M-F during the day, trying my best to do no chores at night or on the weekend (except clean up dishes after we eat.) This makes for hard days, but it's what I prefer. I have lots of energy from sunup til sundown, but I don't want to be washing clothes at night, or cleaning toilets.

I have myself on a schedule that Fridays are for cleaning, I wash two days a week, I make my grocery list another day of the week, and I try to do a clean-out of one thing (like the fridge, a closet, etc.) once a week or every other week. This leaves the nights for puzzles, movies, walks, and shopping. It frees the weekend for trips, festivals, markets and more.

Of course, life is not a scheduled out event, but rather one with surprises and turns. But taking the time to write down what we do, when we do it, and see it all in little boxes on a calendar helps us keep ourselves with time to play, apart from the time we work...hopefully.

If there's not some separation of work and play, where we make work life different from play life, they will blend together like that big pile of laundry that we never want to even look at or put away...because it's just too high.

Make your lists, get you a cool calendar, and separate your work life from your play life by arranging and settling those things into place...the best you can. And when one week is crazy and nutty, that's okay. Get back on track the next...and see if that separation doesn't make you look forward to the weekend once again!

Life Right Now - Like a Cactus By Jennifer Stephens

I want to be like a cactus. They seem to have this thing called life figured out! I only know that because after our recent road trip driving down old Route 66 through the dry southwest desert, I noticed cacti all over the place...so I did a little research on the prickly plant (and by research, I mean I went down Google's rabbit hole of information). My extensive, um, research, uncovered several cactus characteristics we could all learn from.

Let's start with their appearance. Each one has its own unique look. Some are tall and spindly. Others are short and stubby and a few even have colorful blossoms. They might grow a tad lopsided or look a little wonky. Does the cactus care? Of course not! The cactus doesn't stare at its reflection in disgust critiquing every perceived flaw. And one cactus isn't judging another cactus because it doesn't look the way it's "supposed" to look. Isn't that how we should be with each other? We shouldn't look down on somebody that looks different – too much "this" or not enough "that." And we shouldn't beat ourselves up with negative self-talk either (Guilty!). Like the spiky spines that protect cactus from predators, God gives us the guardrails needed to protect ourselves from damage. We should fill ourselves with things like kindness, goodness, patience, self-control, and love. It's how we look on the inside that matters. It's living with compassion and integrity.

Then there's the extreme desert weather. I'm confident that I would not last long outside in the dry barren heat! But a cactus can. Cacti survive the harshest conditions (Some live over 200 years!) by storing water in their stems and roots. Their useful spines provide shade from the sun (in the desert, even the teeniest shade helps) and collect miniscule water droplets carried with the wind. If any part of the cactus is damaged, or stressed, it can bounce back by growing new stems or roots. Is that possible for us too? Can we survive all that life throws our way, whether it's a minor inconvenience or major catastrophe? Do we fall apart or fall towards God? It's how we overcome obstacles and meet challenges that matters. It's being adaptable, self-reliant, and resilient.

A half-hearted scroll through our social media feeds can easily exacerbate the idea that we need to achieve an unreachable level of success in an unreasonable amount of time. With each refresh of the screen, we're peering into somebody else's fabulous vacation and perfectly decorated house. We wonder why THEY already got to do that thing we've been striving towards. It can be a gut-punch to our self-esteem. We feel left out, like life is passing us by. Does a cactus compare its progress to another? Nope. Cacti are known for their slow growth. Cacti actually REQUIRE rest in order to grow! They patiently wait for the right conditions, some taking years to produce flowers or fruit. Progress takes time. Taking care of our own well-being is essential. It's how we continue moving forward; trusting God's plan for our lives, that matters. We can (We will!) eventually reach our goals. It's about persistence and perseverance.

Yep, cacti have it figured out. They don't expect someone else to swoop in and rescue them from adversity. Instead, they've adapted to their circumstance and learned exactly how to not only exist, but to THRIVE in the conditions they've been planted in. We can live that way too.

Actively relying on God gives me the strength to overcome whatever challenges stand in the way. He shows me how to live with integrity, self-reliance, resiliency, and perseverance. Like a cactus. And I want to be like a cactus.

"You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you,

in a dry and parched land where there is no water.” Psalm 63:1



MARRIAGE

Date Night Fun – How Can This be Romantic? – by Marcy Lytle

November might be one of the busiest months of the year, next to December. But then again, for some couples, every month is crazy busy and date night slips away under the long to-do list of groceries, household chores, taking kids here and there, tending to aging parents, all the things. So this month, what if we showed you how doing the necessities can also be romantic, if you do them together:

Dinner and a Walk around Costco: We recently did this with our son and his wife. Of course, dinner was fun and good – BBQ. But then we walked around that huge box store with eyes wide open to observe and try new things. This made it fun and conversational, and yes...right next to each other...side by side. We found some cool new frozen fruit cups to try, as well as a jug of maple syrup. In our conversation, he didn't realize that I use syrup in homemade granola. Then heading home, we can always whip up one of our goodies or sit down and enjoy some bites.

While the Kids are at Practice: Maybe the kids have music lessons, football practice, or theater club...or any other thing where car driving in the evening is a must. One of you pack a thermos and a basket with snacks, and while the kids are doing their thing – enjoy your things. If you can stay in the car, have your date there with music playing in the background. Car dates, even squeezed in on a weeknight, are some of the best. Lean back the seats and even get a quick nap while holding his hand.

Visiting the Facility: This might be the most depressing yet necessary action of a couple with aging parents, even if they're not in a facility. We love our parents, but the pain of seeing them decline is heart-breaking like nothing else. Go together to see him/her. After you leave, hold each other and pray, cast that care on Him, cry hard. Then leave those cares with Him, because he cares for you, and head for coffee or a treat on the way home. Don't discuss the pain any more, but rather give thanks and do a little puzzle – something that's a mess that you can make sense of when it's through.

Those Piles of Laundry – The kids are in bed, or you're both done with dinner, and there they sit – those clothes that need to be put away. Or the dishes in the kitchen. Put on music loud and clear, and dance every 15 minutes. Swing that towel from the laundry, or the kitchen, and swirl it to the music. No talking allowed, at all. Just glances and stolen kisses and then...when it's all done...fall onto the sofa and watch a quick movie or show. Smile wide and big because those chores are done.

Bills and Lists – One of you needs to pay the bills on line or check the statements and emails, or open envelopes and sort mail. The other needs to make the grocery list, because the pantry is empty and everyone's hungry. Set up shop right by each other, laptops or papers or whatever. Breathe. Have your favorite beverage nearby – maybe a hot cider for November? Both of these tasks can be a bit stressful, so reach over and give each other shoulder rubs. Take a break and rub each other's feet. And opt for a hot bath or shower together when the lists are done.

We've had to do hard things many times, or our list of must-dos call us to attention. And sometimes those things have just made us tired and mad and distanced us for the evening. But sometimes...we get romantic anyway, and the night is pleasant and fun. That Costco run last night – we might do it again real soon! And the dessert we enjoyed was sorbet in fruit cups, from the frozen section – so good!

For Better or Worse - Let Me Show You – by Kaelin Scott

One of the things I love about being a wife is the safety I feel with my husband. Whenever we go somewhere together, I don't worry about things like flat tires, because I know he can handle it easily. I trust him to take care of me and our children, and I know he'll protect us at all costs. He is our provider and he keeps us secure.

He also ensures I'm prepared to face tough situations when he's not there, and that's something I appreciate too. When I met my husband, I didn't know how to change a flat tire. In fact, I didn't even know how to check the air pressure in a tire. I honestly didn't even know that was a thing. Embarrassing, I know, but I was totally unprepared.

My husband taught me how to do all those things, because he wanted me to be able to handle certain situations. He taught me how to change a tire and maintain the proper air pressure. He showed me how to check the oil and all the fluid levels. He taught me how to do many things I'd never even thought of before.

Now when I go somewhere without him, I'm confident in my ability to take care of things. I might not be as relaxed when I'm traveling alone, but I don't have to worry as much because I'm prepared. What a wonderful gift my husband gave me!

Part of the beauty of marriage is being there for one another while also helping each other grow. There are things we can do for each other that would be harder by ourselves, and there are ways we make each other stronger and better. We're a team. We complement each other in so many ways. Where I am lacking, he steps up, and I do the same for him. And when neither of us knows what to do, we figure it out together. I don't think that kind of lifelong partnership can be found anywhere else, and it certainly is a blessing.

After 40 Years – Still Building – by Marcy Lytle

Maybe some couples feel like they're on the decline after a certain number of years of marriage and "settle" into the fact that they're getting older, growing apart, and all the things. However, that doesn't have to be the case! There's a couple I follow on Instagram that are in their 80s and still dancing! I love that. And lately, we've found that we're still building!

We bought a new picnic table that was quite the ordeal to order and have delivered. But it finally came and we unboxed it together, carried each piece from the garage to the backyard, and then we started. I read the instructions, gathered the pieces and handed them to this handy husband of mine as he built the table. Sure, I could have sat inside the house, but I wanted to be a part of the process, and it was so fun. It took us several days to put this huge table together. We then got extra gravel spread to level the ground underneath. While Jon tightened the bolts for the final piece of the table, I watered plants nearby.

I enjoyed building that table with him. I love watching him do what he loves to do and is good at, and he appreciates all the help of handing him the tools, reading the instructions, and even grabbing us both a glass of water. We feel so accomplished after the build!

We also bought one-year old Camp his own table and chairs for his birthday, on a much smaller and easier scale. No tools needed, but we still had to read the instructions and use what was in the box to put the cutest table and chair set together for Camp. Yes, Jon could have done it on his own while I did something else in the house, but it was FUN doing it together. We held things together, shared the big plastic screws, and marveled at the versatility of the table (it makes a desk/sofa/table and bookcase!)

I enjoyed building this table, too, with him. We sat on the floor one evening and chatted while we built, and thought together of the fun Camp will have when he plays with it. We felt so accomplished after the build!

All couples do things separately, and that's healthy. And often we just figure that's "his" thing or this is "my" thing, but still building together is one of those things we love to do together. We plan trips together, sitting with the laptop, researching itineraries and googling maps. Yes, I'm quicker at it and could do it alone, but he loves to observe and have input and see what's out there, and help me with the maps.

I guess the point of this story is that growing apart doesn't have to be how we as couples end up, but rather we can grow closer. When the kids are little, we often have to separate for games or practices, and we want him to go off and build that thing so we can get caught up on chores but...

When the kids are gone and it's just us two again, it's nice to still be building together, planning together and then standing up and looking at where we went or what we built and saying, "Wow. That was fun. What's next?"

I don't know what we'll build next, but we have a list...and I can't wait.

In This Together – Do As I Say – by Bekah Holland

I've been thinking...as women, most of us were raised in a world in which our job is to keep people happy. We don't learn that pleasing everyone isn't attainable. And we can try, Lord knows I have. We can do everything under the sun to make people like us. We can pour into those around us in hopes of not only building them up, but also maybe just a tiny bit to feel loved and valued. But guess what? It's never going to be enough. We, as a human, wife, mother, daughter, friend, leader, no matter how hard we try, and no matter how great our intentions are, we are never going to get it all right. Someone isn't going to like us. They won't like our parenting style or our latest Instagram post. Maybe we're too loud or too quiet or too us. And we can keep trying; emptying ourselves out, walking on eggshells to try to make things easier for others. But no matter how hard we try, it's never going to be enough for someone. Or maybe too much.

And then what?

Well, then you and I have a choice. We can keep trying to be everything to everyone, sure. Knock yourself out. And some people will love that about you. But some will not. Now I'm going to share a little secret with you.....it doesn't matter. This is my kryptonite, so rest assured I'm talking to myself more than anyone else. I am a people pleaser, a peacemaker, an empath, trying to live in an overcomplicated and painful world. Let me just tell you that this is not a winning combination. Crazy, yes. Exhausting? Big YES. Helpful? Meh.

Sometimes I think we just need to hear some things that make us stop running in the hamster wheel of life. We're bombarded day in and day out with so many conflicting messages. Be kind and compassionate, but don't be a doormat. Be gentle, but don't forget to fight back when it matters. Be healthy, but don't be annoying about it. Get married, have 2.5 kids, with a yard and a mortgage but don't have them at me. And definitely don't ever admit that you sometimes wonder if you ran away, how long you might have before your kids or your husband can't find the remote or don't know how to order take out and track you down like a pack of hungry hyenas. Work hard, but not so hard that you neglect your family, or leave dishes in the sink or forget to move the laundry from the washer to the dryer. Again, I think you get my point here.

But here are some things that won't hear as much. You are enough. Right where you are, as you are, with all the meltdowns-cereal for dinner-yes again -you-didn't-wash-your-clothes-so-now-you-get-to-be-the-smelly-kid-serial-killer-podcast-listening-Jesus-loving-very-tired-self. You. Are. Enough. You are enough when things are somehow floating along without too many surprises. You are still enough when you have to take a step back, set boundaries and stick to them.

Now this is where it gets a little harder. For me, anyway. Am I really enough? Even when I've been the peacemaking, errand runner, meal planning, eggshell walking person for so long that no one knows how to function without me in that box? Maybe. But what if I change directions and set some boundaries and ask for help? Am I enough then? Logically, of course I am. But my heart and my head sometimes get wound a little too tight, and I start basing my value on what I can do for others. When I read these words, it sounds dumb. Obviously my people love me (I'm pretty sure most of the time even like me). But when I have to stop and fill my own cup, and set down the stacks of never ending to do lists, and the same people have to pick up the slack, do they still value me? Some(all)times, I feel the need to justify myself, or my motives. So I start trying to quantify the mental load. Maybe, I think, if I can just explain the 2134 tabs open in my brain at all times, managing school and work schedules, days off, rides, extra-curricular

activities, who needs to be where when, birthdays, likes and dislikes, being the appointment maker and keeper, meal planning, shopping and cooking while not forgetting that your daughter would like to live on hummus, bagels and cream cheese, your son's aversion to anything spicier than salt, and the single brand of coffee your husband drinks, while staying somewhere close to a budget, and...Why didn't anyone tell me we were down to our last roll of toilet paper before I needed some? And, and, and on and on forever on repeat until I die.

But it doesn't matter if I justify myself, or can come close to painting a somewhat accurate portrayal of my life. Because I've learned through experience that you can either voluntarily choose to set some things down or you can wait until it all comes crashing down and you're forced to stop and re-evaluate, likely at a very inopportune time, because breakdowns don't normally fit into your schedule.. And then you get to add re-building your sense of self, along with picking up the pieces of all of your shattered good intentions while you're at it.

I will say, that this is more of a "do as I say, not as I do" situation. Because I'm still working on it. And sometimes I forget and have to remind myself of all of these things. Again. So if you are struggling today, or yesterday, or every day, know that you aren't alone. And if you failed at it yesterday, tomorrow is another chance to try. On repeat until we run out of chances and get to ask God the important stuff, like, how did mosquitos survive the flood and clear up all those conspiracy theories you've wondered about. All we can really do is keep on trying to do better than the day before and being a little light in someone else's darkness while walking through our own. Maybe we'll even find ourselves along the way.



ENCOURAGEMENT

Simple Truths – Social Etiquette – by Marcy Lytle

I wasn't what you'd call "cultured" by any means when I was growing up, I didn't attend any sort of manners class, and didn't even learn proper table setting...and maybe many of us didn't...or did! But as I've aged I've picked up some habits I wish I'd learned earlier, I'm drawn to etiquette posts on Instagram, and I'm still learning (yes, at my age) some social etiquette practices that are good to know! It seems these graces are missing in lots of settings among all ages of people, so I thought I'd list some I'd include if I were teaching a class on etiquette. Some could care less about it, but I find it fascinating and interesting the things we do, and don't do, when entertaining and visiting with others, or just out and about in the world.

1. We can look folks in the eye when we're talking to them, especially those that are cashiers at the stores we frequent, and ask how they're doing. I've seen many seem so surprised and grateful and then proceed to answer me. And I don't mind listening!
2. We can take a hostess gift if we're invited over for dinner at someone's house (if it's our first time) and it doesn't have to be expensive. A seasonal candle is a great idea.
3. We can leave carts, tables, and other things we use free of our trash and mess. There's nothing more non-appetizing than waiting for a table only to see the people leave their mess behind...or to grab a cart that has opened wrappers and used tissues inside.
4. We can be the first one to greet, invite, talk, etc. instead of playing the game of "If they say something to me, I'll speak to them." Or "I've invited them over, now it's their turn." I've done this. It's tacky.
5. We can treat airbnb's and other vacation houses as if the homes are ours, and leave them in better condition when we leave than when we arrived. This helps our portfolio on their site, as we are seen as excellent guests.
6. We can answer texts and emails in a timely manner, because all too often they slip into oblivion and we don't even answer at all. That person is left wondering why...
7. We can put our phone away while waiting in line, in the off chance someone around us might need a hand; or we might compliment their shoes, or any kind of interaction at all. Interaction is good!
8. We can fold our napkin and place it in our lap at the table and learn a bit of good manners when eating (I'm enjoying mykameier on Instagram – she's an etiquette teacher!) out, at home with guests, or even when serving others. All of the eating in front of the television has made us slobs!
9. We can also grab our cups and bags from the theater seats when we exit, after the credits roll. It's just rude to leave it all strewn across the seats and on the floor. Isn't it?
10. We can look up, wave, and even say, "Have a nice day" on our walks that we all take now often...ever since Covid. Wearing earbuds and whisking by without a glance at those who pass by? Well, it's nicer to acknowledge and smile.
11. We can hang with those not in our "circle" of friends, someone of a different color, another age, or economic status, or just not like us. This will increase our hearts ten times over.
12. We can stop griping about the next generation, cursing the cars around us, and complaining about those we attend church or school events with and spread kindness and prayer.

Do I do all of these? No, way. And I bet we could all add another dozen to this list. I do try to notice where I'm lacking and work on a few things at a time...because kindness and consideration still go a long way in loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Firmly Planted - Chimes Speak a Good Word- Dina Cavazos

I love the sound of chimes—especially those tuned to musical notes that sing out in subtle song. Reverberating through the garden into my ear, my soul is touched and my mind wonders at the physics of sound. I'm awed that God would give us such a gift.

I have several chimes hanging from trees and the pergola in my backyard prayer garden. Right now, as I sit outside on this joyfully beautiful day, they're sending out their melodious sounds in the gentle wind. The high and low tones harmonize into a symphonic euphony. I close my eyes to listen, then the wind changes and I hear an isolated lilting melody—high and tinkling. It fades to nothing until the wind picks up again, bringing a sound from the other side in insistent mid-tones.

The musical language of chimes is universal and timeless. Like the sound of babies crying. Race, color, country, culture...these man-made divisions disappear where chimes and babes are concerned. Their sounds are heard and felt by all mankind in the same wordless way, even if not completely understood. While everyone knows a baby crying means distress of some kind: it's hungry, wet, sleepy, uncomfortable or unhappy in some way, the sound of chimes has no real meaning (that we know of...). Nevertheless, they speak a personal word to me—a word I find difficult to put on paper because words are so inadequate. But I will try.

I hear the chimes joining together as the voices of God's people in prayer all over the world. Praises and thanksgiving rise up as the gentle wind blows. Sometimes exuberant praise resounds. But when the winds blow stronger, like the turbulence of tragedy and change, the chimes cry out a clanging rhapsody—like my prayers. I don't know how to pray. I don't know God's will. I don't know what's best. Like chimes moved by the wind in haphazard but wondrous sound, my prayers, your prayers—all true heart prayers of God's people—are a pleasing sound in heavenly places. And when I must articulate, there are timeless, universal words that have been spoken for ages. They are written in a book. They are Wisdom, they are Life, they are a dependable guide: have courage, trust God, walk humbly, love mercy, ask believing, be thankful.

This is a good word I hear the chimes ringing out in the gentle breeze on this joyfully beautiful day.

Moving Forward – Clumsy – by Pam Charro

Have you seen that music video by Fergie called "Clumsy?"

I've watched it several times and always find it very entertaining. Not just because it's cute and well-directed, but also because this gorgeous woman isn't afraid to show everyone how awkward it can be to fall head-over-heels for someone. Even the "beautiful people" aren't always immune to life's less-than-graceful seasons.

I can definitely relate! I have not felt very smooth or impressive in my endeavors since before Covid. Life has thrown numerous curveballs my way during the past several years, and, while it's caused me tremendous growth, I really miss the girl who appeared more confident and poised. Becoming new at so much has definitely made me feel a bit, well .. klutzy.

But it also occurs to me what a privilege it has been to be forced to jump into so much newness. How much fun would life really be if I were always prepared for the next thing? Pretty boring, I bet. Being stretched is absolutely a part of fulfillment, and it keeps us and life interesting.

Maybe there will come a day when I will encounter a less gawky version of myself. But, in the meantime, I will learn to give myself grace as I become this new woman, and I'll laugh on purpose as often as possible when I realize how cloddish I may appear. Hopefully I can put my pride aside and love the moment I'm in, while also helping others to see that it's okay - and kind of cute and endearing - to be a little clumsy.

Rooted in Love - Impossible Dream – by Kaelin Scott

I've always had this dream of becoming a bestselling author. Ever since I was a little kid, I wanted to write books. Now I'm writing books, and I still dream of being a bestseller.

As I've gotten older, though, I've realized that being a bestseller isn't that likely. There are a lot of books in the world, and getting mine noticed is nearly impossible. I'll probably never top any charts or see my books on bestseller lists.

But I still dream about it.

Why? Why do I keep dreaming about something that will probably never happen? Because I have faith.

I know that God gave me this dream for a reason. He instilled the passion for writing inside me, and He's the one who inspires my stories. He gave me this gift, and it would be such a waste for me not to use it. I could never stop writing, even if I knew for certain that I would never write a bestseller. Because it's what I love. It's part of who I am.

Maybe God won't lead me to bestseller status, but He can use my words for wonderful purposes. My writing can touch people's hearts. It can show them His love. It can reach hurting hearts and bring them hope. And those things are so much more rewarding than having a bestselling book.

If I gave up on my dream just because it seemed impossible, that wouldn't be faith. Sometimes we have to go without knowing what awaits us, trusting that God will work it all out. He has a purpose. Even if I never reach that goal, I won't stop writing. I won't stop dreaming. It probably won't ever happen, and that's okay because I can still enjoy the journey. I can still use my gift for good, measuring success as pleasing my Father.

Having a dream that seems impossible makes me strive to do better. If I was complacent in my writing, I would never grow. But it's that dream that keeps me hungry. It makes me want to be the best writer I can be. Even if I don't ever become a bestseller, I'll be happy in knowing I did my best. Besides, what if I *did* get to see that dream come true? Wouldn't that be something? With God all things are possible, but only if we have faith.

If you have a big dream – maybe an impossible dream – don't give up on it. Don't ever stop reaching for those stars. Even if that dream never fully comes true, so many beautiful things can happen because of your persistence. Things that matter so much more.

And remember that faith makes the impossible possible, so we should never give up hope.

Unearthly Thing - Sacred Sticky-Note- by Angela Dolbear

The glaring red numbers on my bedside clock read 5:03 AM. It's still dark out. I should be sleeping. It's been only four hours since I fell asleep. But my mind is up and pacing the floor, so to speak.

"Trust in God," I silently remind myself.

My brain doesn't listen. I feel like she is running around my house, flailing her little brain arms, crying out, "What if...what if...WHAT IF!" like I imagine Paul Revere did on his famous ride, racing through the town yelling out, the "British are coming! The British are coming!"

"Trust," I grunt, grieved that I am here again, trudging around Worry Mountain.

I am doubly disgusted that I am lying in my bed worrying about finances. I thought I had conquered this mountain a long time ago. Only this time, the anxious thoughts come back stronger.

A wave of panic crashes down on me over our dwindling savings account, which are funds set aside to pay our income tax in April. I must throw my leg over the side of the bed to steady myself. In true menopausal fashion, a hot flash ignites. I'm tired, sweaty, and panicked over nothing I should worry about.

"Oh Lord, please help."

My mind fills with the image of the wrinkled sticky-note taped to my computer monitor where I write every day. On it is written, "Jesus said, 'Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in GOD, and trust also in ME,' – John 14:1."

Ahhh, God's Word. It washes the panic away, and I feel ashamed, foolish, and relieved. I instantly stopped the train of thoughts that derailed me. DON'T LET YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED, I reprimand my brain.

I focus on more of God's word. When Jesus was being tempted in the wilderness by the devil while He was fasting, He used the Word of God to conquer the assault. He said out loud, "It is written..." three times, quoting verses from the Book of Deuteronomy. As the Creator, Jesus could have smote the devil into oblivion, but He chose to use His Word to gain victory. So powerful.

I need to remember to speak the Word to my worries. And to quit worrying. I can testify to so many blessings of provision that God has lavished on me over the years. He always takes care of me, no matter what it is. Always. Every time.

I fluff my pillow, and pull my blanket back up, now that the hot flash has passed, and confess my lack of faith to the Lord, apologizing to Him profusely. I ask for wisdom and a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit to help me to trust God completely.

My brain removes her imaginary red Converse high tops she wore for running amuck, like the big hairy space monster in the old Bugs Bunny cartoons. Brain crawls back into her bed inside my skull. Now she is quiet.

In my soul, I hear a still small voice whisper, "Grace" to me. Then, I fell asleep.

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

Author's note: To promote accuracy in journalism, the big hairy monster in the Bugs Bunny cartoons, named Gossamer, wore white high-top tennis shoes. I just thought you should know. --AD

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



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - Embrace Your Space – by Marcy Lytle

There are countless numbers of us that won't invite others to our homes because we don't feel we have one that is pretty enough, clean enough, up to date enough, or any number of reasons. There are also countless numbers of us that wake up each day and look in the mirror, in our closets, and determine that we are too fat, too old, too something...and we exit our homes feeling "less than" before we even begin our day. And finally, there are countless numbers of us that flounder in our faith and walk with God because of what others say, what we have read, what we hear in our heads. We worry that God himself is also displeased with who we are.

I'm working on embracing my space in all of the above areas because there's so much freedom in doing so, freedom we're missing out on, and freedom He wants us to have...I believe.

Our home isn't large (if I compare to most of my friends), it's not new, and the ground beneath it shifts so cracks appear and then close up on our walls...depending on the rainfall and time of year. But I'm finally reaching out to have friends over once again, even with a recent purchase of a large picnic table to hold more family and friends. My space is cozy, warm, and I hope inviting. It's an extension of who I am in the way I decorate. And those cracks are there...even though we tried to get help with painters to cover them up...they are there to stay it seems. But this space is where we live, and if I embrace it to the fullest it becomes alive with a welcoming spirit for all. And if the visitors focus on the cracks, then so be it. It will give us all something to talk about.

My body isn't young any more, but it's not ancient either. I look in the mirror and see all sorts of flaws, some that have been with me my entire life. I don't love my teeth, my hair is thinning, and I'd rather photograph myself frontwards than to the side...because the flat stomach is no longer flat. Yes, I try to eat healthy and exercise, but I'm not going to pursue perfection through potions, lotions, lifts and tucks. I don't want to spend my time that way, but rather embrace who I am now...at this age in the race of life. I remember having the thought as my parents aged and as I looked on them with pain as their bodies started to fail and seeing them as runners. Long distance runners are going to have shin splints, wobbly legs and so much more...as they approach the finish line. Hopefully, I've got a long ways to go, but I've been running a long time and I want to embrace those things that show the wear and tear of a strong woman that endures. Yes, I want to be the best version of me, but part of that best is embracing the decade in which I now reside...

And finally, that God space with me and Him. Wow, this is a hard one for me. It seems whatever sinks in as a kid is hard to shake or move as an adult, no matter your age. Just last night I read a devo in a tiny book that was one page long and something that was written about God sent me reeling and completely off my rocker for a bit. It presented a view of God that hurt my heart and my psyche and all sorts of things. I let it ruin my peace. And that's not okay. Yes, we are to continue to learn and to grow and to prosper in our walk with Christ, always leaning in and listening and obeying. But we can't let everyone else's theology or knowledge be our standard or how we process our salvation. I need simple. I need the simplicity of God loves me, sent his Son to die for me and now lives so that I can live, loving him with all my heart and

others as myself. I can't handle a lot of "tack-ons" in my faith. And I believe this space is where God wants me to be for now, and to be at peace.

So what's invading your space, as you live in your home, catch a glimpse of yourself in the mirror, or sit down to have quiet time with God? I sometimes feel like my day can become like the old video game Space Invaders where you have to shoot down all the aliens. And I'm pretty sure that's not the life He intended to give us when he set us free to worship him. Embrace your space. I'm trying my best to do that, and it feels pretty good...and right...too. And if my space needs a refresh, I can trust that He will show me just how and when and I won't feel anxious or "less than" when He does...but happy and excited at what He has in store.

And this photo of this cute home? It's not mine. But isn't it cute? Take a photo of your house, give thanks, and embrace your own cuteness in whatever way YOU like.

Simple Truths – Gentle Whispers – by Marcy Lytle

Do you ever feel like you have selective hearing when it comes to listening? Of course we know that kids do, right? They “tune” us out if we seem to be telling them for the umpteenth time to clean their room. Or maybe a spouse is busy; and even answers us, while their ears are tuned elsewhere. And they don’t really hear what we said at all. It’s maddening for the talker and for the listener, because later things are said like, “I never heard you,” or “That’s not what you said.”

Sometimes I feel like I have selective hearing even with God. Like I hear him well, I think, when it comes to that nudge to encourage someone else. Or I love hearing Him talk to me while I’m walking, or when it comes to praying for this or that. But ...when it has to do with my self-image, I’m often really hard on myself and feel as though even if God spoke, I wouldn’t listen because of my own stubbornness or pride. Can you relate?

Maybe I’m not doing enough

Maybe I’m not good enough

Maybe I’m not giving enough

These are the thoughts that sometimes circle around like a cowboy on a horse with a rope waiting to toss it and hook it around my neck, tackle me and tie me up...off to the slaughter.

But even as I type this out, I know that as believers and as His creation, we are created in His image, so why should our self-image ever be debasing and critical? Those are not His thoughts. Yes, He disciplines, but not by attacking our character. So when I go there, with those thoughts of no self-worth, I can quickly turn away because that’s not His voice.

And I’m realizing that I can trust my Father to gently take me face in his hands and turn my ears toward him when I’m not listening, as he actually whispers (not screams) of his lovingkindness he wants me to see in my life and the lives of others.

So today, I had a moment of self-deprecation, because I was struggling with the same old habits I always struggle with in times of stress. And I started down that path of thinking God was upset with me, maybe I’m not hearing his voice, and yeah – maybe I have selective hearing because I’m too busy, too prideful, or any number of other “too” descriptions.

God loves me. He loves you. And while he’s always at work refining and molding and gently carving and even breaking, we are in his hands, and we do hear his voice. It’s the voice that lifts up, encourages, and draws us in...never away.

So if my ears are tuned out today, I trust that he will tune me in, and we’ll both be singing lovely melodies before the day is over.

Thank God it’s Friday, and thank goodness for God’s gentle whispers...like when the moon hangs there reminding us all that He’s the light in the darkness and doesn’t sleep.

FRESH THYME - Those Fall Markets – by Marcy Lytle

It's one of our favorite things to do, attend markets. And while some things are more expensive, it's still fun to shop and support local farmers, artisans and even kids. We recently attended a market with all kid vendors! It's so fun to have a tote especially for markets, to fill. And it's also great to take a cooler along, in case we find things we want that need to stay chilled until we return home. It seems fall markets are the best, because so many pop up for the holiday season. I've been to so many! Here's a list of the best things to buy at the markets:

- Jarred pickles and jams – The crunchiest pickles are from the markets and so good in flavor. We always pick dill, but there are usually a variety of pickles on tables and they're delicious! Jams that are homemade make the best spreads for cold mornings when biscuits are waiting to be eaten! Stock up on several for the holiday season.
- Fresh pecans – There's nothing bigger or prettier than pecans fresh from the orchards instead of those that have traveled and sat and grown dark, waiting to find their way to grocery store shelves. Buy them. Make pies and cookies and all the things with pecans, or the nut that's more common in your area. They're amazing.
- Homemade pasta – Texas Gourmet Pasta is our favorite here where I live, and they show up at all the markets. Their pasta is OUTSTANDING, and we love buying boxes of it. The shape even fits great down in a stocking, for gifts! There are so many flavors and all so tasty.
- Fresh produce – Whatever is in season, buy it. Find recipes and ways to use it. Roast the veggies on a Sunday and use for meals all week. Fill your fruit drawer and eat your picks instead of dessert. Or layer the fruit as a parfait with Cool Whip. Fresh is fantastic. Try a new veggie you've never eaten!
- Candles – There are so many candle makers at our markets and often the handmade ones smell the best. Ask question, if the scent throws well, how they're made...all the things you cannot ask in a store. One girl we bought from had used handmade bowls for her vessel for the candles inside. Some people are so creative!
- Coffee – My husband LOVES to purchase coffee from different vendors at markets. So many good ones to try, and our kids always end up with a bag or two under the tree. Usually they have samples to try before you buy, so drink it and enjoy!
- Freeze dried candy – This is showing up at all of our markets and it's actually tasty! We bought bags for the kids for back to school, and they loved it. See if your market is selling this fall. Grab bags for the kids' stockings.
- Handmade soap – All the scents – oh my – they're heavenly. We started using handmade soap instead of store bought decades ago and have never looked back. Yes, they're pricey, but hey – to each his own indulgence and this is ours!
- Meal or side mixes in bags – You're going to be busy this season and you'll need some quick meals. Some booths have meals or mixes in bags – for soups, dips, mac/cheese, red beans and rice, all sorts of ones that are good. Stock up on a few to have on hand for guests or nights when you're too tired to gather all the ingredients. Treat yourself.

Some booths I steer away from, stay clear of and just don't buy. I don't trust handmade medical creams and potions. Clothes are fun sometimes, but be careful and inspect well – because you

probably can't return. I have bought a few things that were great, but I'm super selective. Jewelry can be tricky – inspect to see if it's well made.

Tip: If you feel like you get sucked into buying more than you want, because you feel sorry for the vendor or they pitifully ask and try to sell, walk at a distance down the rows glancing, instead of up close. Then go back to the booths you're seriously considering.

Have fun – tell us what you get!