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For Every Season

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TIPS

Seven for You - Meals to Take – by the Panel

If you're like me, you've been asked often to deliver a meal to a friend in need. And also, maybe you're like me in that you stress out over this simple yet loving task. What to make that's an easy transport, what dish to take (aluminum pans or your own and then get it back), or whether it's just easier to order food to be delivered for this friend! And then there's the showing up, what to say, whether to stay or not, and all the things. So we asked, and now we're sharing our own tips/tricks/recipes for those meals to take...

I do have a go-to meal and it's so easy, versatile and yummy.

I slice the meat off of a rotisserie chicken (so the family doesn't have to deal with the mess), make rice pilaf (jasmine rice, onion, celery, sauteed in butter, add a packet of (Lipton style) dry chicken noodle soup mix and water and cook 15-20 minutes), a bag of pre-washed salad kit with dressing and, cookies. It serves a lot of people, and can be eaten as-is as a stand-alone meal, or made into sandwiches for lunches, or made into soup with the leftovers.

We have also used this same meal for hosting receptions for the family at church following the funeral services. In this case, we have the grocery store pre-chop the chicken into traditional pieces and slice the breast, then put it on catering trays. Then we just have to cook the rice and dress the salad. I definitely send the food in disposables so the family doesn't have to keep track of dishes. I've done porch-drop offs for the past few years .- Debbie

I don't do this often, but when a co-worker's wife was bedridden I asked if I could get them a meal. He asked for a meal from a locally owned restaurant so I ordered and paid and he picked it up. That was easy! - Anita

Sometimes we pick up BBQ because they usually also provide paper plates and napkins, bread and pickles, and all the things. There are usually sides and different choices of meats to fit all taste buds, even the littles in the bunch. I'd personally rather do this than prepare a meal. That stresses me out! I find out what time is best and drop off the food – never stepping inside – as I don't want the friend to feel pressure to get dressed, clean the house, and all of that... And as a side note, I don't like meals being delivered to me. But that's just me! - Marcy

When taking food to a family or person I will try and ask them for suggestions. If none are given, I normally will make lasagna with salad and bread. I feel it's similar to spaghetti and easy to put in an aluminum foil container so the family doesn't have to worry about returning a dish to me. As far as delivery, I go by what the person wants. I have had people say just leave in a container by the door or I just drop off and don't stay. However, there are times when the person wants me to come in - I just try to discern what I should do!

Sometimes I do give a gift card if it's suggested, as long as I know where to get one from. These days, with all the food delivery services, I guess it's easier for people to be able to order their food and have it delivered when it's convenient for them.

I have also taken food that is suggested to me that I don't cook. Like pizza or BBQ. Those two items are easy to transport from restaurant to someone's house.

I think people probably appreciate not having to return dishes; so unless I really know the person and see them a lot, I always use containers I don't need back. I feel that makes it better for them. Since we are taking food, they more than likely are going through something and don't need the added stress about returning dishes! - Melissa

I usually take smothered pork chops. The "smother" includes onions, sliced potatoes, and gravy. So I'll also include buttered green peas as a side. Extras often include heat and serve rolls, and a pan of brownies. I do my best not to send anything that would need to be returned, so I definitely utilize disposable Tupperware and tin pans. Even if I want to use a quality glass dish to bake the pork chops, I will transfer it all into a disposable dish before I leave the house. The trickiest part of taking meals is when the people I want to help have dietary restrictions that I am not used to. But it's still important to try!

Smothered pork chops:

4 thick cut bone-in pork chops, heavily salted and peppered, then coated in flour (that has also been heavily salted and peppered).

Brown each side of the pork chop in a mixture of oil and butter in a cast iron skillet. The pork chop needs to be really brown, not just tan. It takes time, so be patient to get the right color. Transfer browned pork chops into a heavy glass baking dish. Put 3 T of leftover dipping flour in the bottom of the glass pan with the chops. Discard remaining seasoned flour.

Slowly pour 3 c of chicken broth into the cast iron skillet, scraping up the browned bits from the pan. Pour this over the pork chops, making sure to whisk the extra flour in the bottom of the pan into the broth. This broth will become your gravy as it cooks.

Wash and slice (peel if desired) 4 medium potatoes and slice one onion (I like the yellow sweet onion, but white onions work, too). Layer these potatoes and onions on top of your pork chops, taking the time to salt and pepper between each layer. I also like to use onion and garlic powder in this step, but any savory herb or seasoning that you enjoy can be used.

Cover the entire dish very tightly with heavy duty foil. You don't want steam to get out. Bake the dish for 2.5 hours at 300 degrees. This slow cooking makes the pork extremely tender.

Tip: when you think you've used too much salt, you most likely have not. No one enjoys bland gravy and potatoes! - Laura

I have a couple of recipes that have always been my go-to dishes when I needed to take something to someone, depending on the circumstance. If it's a meal for someone who had a baby or for someone after surgery, I take my chicken spaghetti. It's an easy dish put altogether in an oblong aluminum pan. I like the throw away pans because they don't have to be returned, making it easier on the recipient. And to make it a full meal all I need to do is add salad and bread, preferably garlic bread. Of course, all in throw away containers.

For funerals, I like to do something totally different. This was done for me many years ago and it was so helpful I decided to do it too. When that time comes, I go to the store and buy paper plates, plastic cups, silverware, and paper towels or napkins for about 20-30 people. These are items not everyone keeps on hand, especially in the large amount they may need when family

and friends come by, and they are so helpful to have. With these I get rolls for sliders like Hawaiian or potato rolls, lunch meat, maybe bread, mayonnaise and mustard, chips, water, and two-liter drinks, and a dessert like cookies.

There have been a few occasions where I took both the meal and paper goods with lunch items. It all depends on what they might have and might need. I always check with the person involved or family to see. – Carole

When I'm asked to take a meal, I usually take pasta, a salad and bread. I love to transport it in the tins I find at the Dollar Tree with lids. Recently, a mom asked for a rotisserie chicken, which was easy! I added a couple of sides, placed it all in a bag and dropped it off. I often respond to Meal Trains set up for others, and I like it when they have specifics listed, so it's easier to know when, where, and how. – Vicki

My menu for providing food is usually on a case by case basis. Are there children in the home, food allergies, food preferences? If all of those things are standard, then my preference is to take in a big container of homemade soup. I then make or buy all things to go with it. When I make and take tortilla soup, I buy chips, guacamole, queso, flour tortillas, salsa, and some type of salad along with a simple dessert. If I take chicken and rice soup, I include a salad, biscuits or cornbread, Instapot green beans, and dessert. I use the inexpensive Rubbermaid containers so that they do not have to be returned.

I also ask the family if they would like me to leave it at the door or ring the bell. I seldom go inside. I do mention that if they would like to visit, I would love for them to call me. I remember people dropping off food when I had my children and staying way too long. I felt I needed to pick up the house and get dressed for them when I didn't feel like getting dressed. I should have spoken up and set better boundaries.

Lastly, if it is food for a new baby and there are siblings in the home, I try to take in some simple gifts for the older children. - Shelley

A few other good ideas:

- What about a loaf of freshly baked bread, homemade, or from a bakery with butter and jam?
- Or charcuterie boxes for the person or individuals with fruit, crackers, cheese, olives, nuts and dark chocolate?
- It could be that the person needs groceries, so a pickup and delivery might be awesome.
- A breakfast casserole or a tray of bagels and toppings for a dinner breakfast!

The Dressing – Transition Time – by Marcy Lytle

Spring arrives this month, and often it's still super cool outside. But...it's fun to start shopping and gathering, donating and deciding, and all the things for our spring wardrobe. I personally found some cute dresses and shoes for the new season! I've never ordered shoes from Shein before, but I found three pair that fit perfectly and are oh so comfy. So here are some other finds you might want to consider as the season starts to change...

Slingbacks – These fasten very uniquely on the side, and I love the gold buckles. Paired with a neutral bag for spring, these go with just about anything! (Like my rhyme?) Supposedly, slingbacks are a thing, so see if you like a pair you see out there!

Square toe/Velcro – These are just elegant and oh, so pretty. They Velcro shut! I haven't worn them all day yet to see if they stay or not. But just to a wedding or somewhere to get dressed up, or even with jeans, these will elevate the most casual outfit!

Square toe patterned – I LOVE this pattern and the heel, and the toe! I can't wait to pair this with jeans and a tee, with a jacket, for date night. I'm so serious. The square toe is the way to go...

Sneakers – Just happened upon these at Walmart; then tried them on, and they were in my cart! They're super cute with skirts or t-shirt dresses, which is my fave for spring. And one can never go wrong with black and white!

Striped dress – Stripes are in, and this dress can be worn everywhere – to lunch, to church, out to dinner – styled SO MANY ways. With a belt, with heels, with sneakers. I can't wait to try it out with all sorts of accessories, and maybe a tee over top!

Loose and comfy – This came a bit big, but I didn't return it because of the comfort. Belted with a brown belt...well I love that. Loose and free, well I love that too. And the material is cool and soft.

Navy t-shirt dress – Who doesn't need one of these for spring/summer? The pockets too! I love this dress and always like to purchase a new t-shirt look each spring season. This dress is great for trips, for the beach, for a car or plane ride, shopping, all the things. Add a big tote and sneakers, and you're off!

*Tips for shopping at Shein:

- It takes a WHILE to browse, so enjoy the hunt. There are SO MANY pieces to look at.
- Blouses or loose-fitting options are best for online shopping.
- I usually size up, but look at the size guide before ordering.
- The shoes fit true-to-size.

No, they're not HIGH quality, but they're just as good as Target or local shopping, I've found. No issues with washing them either...but I'm careful what I buy.

Cousin Moms – Spring Cleaning – by Charissa and Kamrin

It's that time of year when we all clean up, don't we? Well, moms are always cleaning up, but possibly in March, when the kids are on break, the entire family says, "Enough is enough!" And it's then that things get a refresh. Items out of place find a home. And donations are made. We asked the cousin moms to share their organization and cleanup tips with their kids, and they have some great ideas!

Kamrin

When it comes to organizing and cleaning, it's so vital that everything has a place. One thing I've learned that if that doesn't happen things end up on our island and that becomes a "catch all." So I've learned that during spring cleaning time, we clean cabinets and drawers. And if there are things stacked our island, it's usually because we don't have a place for it! This happens during the spring, right before school starts, and right after Christmas with all the new things.

During spring, we clean out what we don't use, and we make space for all the new things.

One thing we do is clean our closets. A good rule I've learned and teach the kids – if you haven't worn in six months or it doesn't fit – toss it.

Rule! Look at all the stuff on counters of surfaces and put it away. If there's no space for it, make a space, and get rid of stuff!

Next, we have designated spots for the kids.

1. Our craft or catchall closet in the hall
2. Our walls in the kitchen for backpack for jackets and backpacks.
3. Our pantry.

In our closet, there are three baskets – one for each kid. Crafts and colors and markers, slime ingredients, sketching and play dough – this worked for them each to have a basket that was labeled. If it was too full, we got rid of things. Each kid also has a craft mat they use on our island that they keep clean and put away.

Our wall we just re-did, with a digital calendar. There are mementos of our family as décor, and now we added double hooks – two for each kid. One for backpack and one for jacket. This works better than one hook for both! We love it in the center of the house for easy accessibility and for packing lunches. The kids know where their packs and jackets go – easy!

Our pantry (always reorganizing this!) Each of us has our own basket for snacks. Treats or snacks go in their own baskets, which is also helpful in packing lunches. No arguing on whose snacks belong to who! It always helps me with shopping. My husband and I also have our own baskets! Again, when it gets too full, we clean it out! I do better with buying groceries because I can see what's there or not!

Spring cleaning also includes getting ready for summer!

Rule! Bins and baskets are awesome – each one having their own!

Charissa

We just moved into our new home and I'm still trying to find creative spaces of organization and all of that! We definitely decluttered before moving. But there are a few areas where we keep things organized, with the kids.

First, we did build in a mud room nook and bench, and it has three baskets underneath the bench and several hooks above. This area organizes the jackets and backpacks every day. This way everything is ready to go each morning! Underneath the bench in the baskets, one belongs to each of our girls. If I see items on the floor I place in the girls' baskets. Once a week, the girls have to empty and put the things where they belong. If it's not put away, we get to give it away – because it's not important enough to keep! We are trying to teach them to place their items away, not on the floor.

Secondly, we have a pantry for the first time! We have built-in shelves and some great organizers. One of the lower shelves has plastic containers for the girls' snacks. This way, there's not, "Mommy, can you get me this?" because they can grab their own snacks there, and from the fridge. This helps the girls become more self-sufficient. There is also a cabinet for their dishes and silverware that is their height. This helps me greatly!

Thirdly, the girls have lots of toys and small items, Barbie accessories and dolls. I have found that baskets are a huge help in hiding the clutter, as well as bookshelves. Some baskets are full of puzzles, others are full of Barbie clothes, and another is Playdough. Each basket can be pulled out to play with specific toys.

The last thing I'd like to add is with young kids, we have a lot of things that fall on the floor like mud, food, and "stuff" – and we were always sweeping so much! We invested in a robot vacuum that we send out, and it vacuums our home. This has been worth every penny! It keeps our house so tidy! So, if you don't have a dog to lick up the crumbs, get a robot!

In the Kitchen - Serve it Up – by Marcy Lytle

It's March, and Easter is happening late in the month, there's also Spring Break, the temperatures are sometimes warm...so we will be making lots of meals for all the hungry mouths in our families. The following have been good and something new I've tried this last month...for the two of us...and for the many of us. Enjoy.

Parmesan Chicken Sliders

We served these recently when we had friends over, and they tasted SO GOOD. And they're really easy to put together!

Ingredients:

- 24 oz frozen breaded chicken tenders
- 1 pkg Hawaiian sweet rolls
- 14 slices provolone, divided
- 1 jar 24 oz marinara sauce

Topping:

- ½ cup butter cubed
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 t crushed red pepper flakes
- ¼ c grated parmesan
- 2 T minced fresh basil

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375. Prepare tenders according to package directions. Meanwhile without separating rolls, cut horizontally in half, arrange bottom half on 13X9 greased dish. Place 8 cheese slices over roll bottoms, overlapping as needed. Bake til cheese melts, 3-5 min.

Layer rolls with half of the sauce, the tenders, remaining sauce and remaining 6 cheese slices. Replace top half of rolls.

For topping, microwave the butter, garlic powder and pepper flakes, covered, on high, stirring occasionally, til butter is melted. Pour over rolls and sprinkle with Parm. Bake uncovered until golden brown and heated through, about 20-25 minutes. Sprinkle with basil before serving.

Pesto Pizza

I loved, loved this. Easy to make, and it was so, so good.

- Pizza dough –for a 12 in crust
- 1 ½ c broccoli (small pieces)
- ¼ c goat cheese
- ¼ c almonds chopped

- ½ lemon
- About 1 T olive oil to grease baking sheet
- Jarred pesto
- S&P to taste

Prepare pizza dough according to instructions. Preheat oven to temp on dough (usually 450 degrees). Grease a large backing sheet and add dough to the sheet. Place in oven about 5 min then remove.

Top pizza crust with pesto, spoon it over, leaving about ¾ inch of crust on the edges. Add broccoli, cheese, lemon slices (thin), and chopped almonds. Ensure all are evenly distributed.

Cook another 15 min til the crust is golden.

Remove from oven and add toppings as desired, like red pepper flakes, a squeeze of lemon juice or an extra drizzle of olive oil.

Chicken and Bacon Rollups

An easy recipe to make on a Sunday night and enjoy for the next few day in lunches. Tasty and cute, as well! Next time, I might add some pecans in the mix!

- 1 can (9 ¾ oz) chunk white chicken, drained
- 1 carton (8 oz) spreadable garden veggie cream cheese
- 1 cup salsa, divided
- 4 (or more) slices bacon, fully cooked and crumbled
- 6 flour tortillas (8 in) room temp

Mix chicken, cream cheese, ½ c salsa and bacon, spread over tortillas. Roll up tightly and wrap. Refrigerate at least an hour. Just before serving, unwrap and cut into slices. Serve with remaining salsa.

Chili topped in bliss

Tuna Melt

It's our favorite tuna sandwich, and we make it often. I bet I've included it before, another month, in the magazine. But it's worth a repeat.

- Tuna
- Mayo
- Chopped onion (just a little)
- Lots of chopped pickles
- Seasoned salt
- Bread

- Deli deluxe American cheese slices

Drain the tuna, add mayo and seasoned salt to your consistency and taste. Toss in the onion and lots of pickles. Spread on bread, add the cheese, and grill.

Of course, serve with Fritos.

Grilled Cheese Board

Sometimes a cute board with simple things brings a smile and causes everyone to enjoy the meal!

- Grilled cheese
- Potato chips
- Pickles
- Grapes
- Dip/salsa of your choice
- Green apples
- Caramel sauce
- Dark chocolate chips

Arrange all the things on a board except for the grilled cheese, save it for last. Grill the cheese sandwiches until crispy, and cut them into fourths...for dipping. Sit down for a movie, eat, and enjoy.

Oatmeal Bread

A great loaf and easy to make, and the family will slice and eat it all week long! It's good for sandwiches or toast or just with butter!

- 1 c plus 2 T skim milk (I just used 2%)
- 1 c regular uncooked oatmeal
- 2 ½ T honey
- 1 pkg dry yeast
- 3 ½ c flour
- 2 T butter
- 1 ¼ t salt
- ¼ cup warm water
- ½ cup chopped pecans

Scald milk (just til bubble form on the edge of pan), add butter, salt, honey and stir til butter melts. Let it cool to about 110degrees.

Combine yeast and warm water in a large bowl and let it stand 5 minutes. Add milk mix, 2 c flour, oatmeal, pecans. Stir in enough of remaining flour to make a soft dough.

Turn dough out onto lightly floured surface, knead til smooth and elastic, about 8 minutes.

Place dough in large bowl coated with cooking spray. Turn dough to grease top. Cover and let rise in a warm place, free from drafts for about an hour.

Punch dough down. Cover and let stand 10 minutes. Turn out on to lightly floured surface, roll into a 15X9 rectangle, then roll up in jellyroll fashion, beginning at narrow edge.

Pinch seams and ends to seal. Place the roll with seam side down in 9X5X3 greased loaf pan.

Cover and let rise 50 min til dough doubles in size.

Preheat oven to 375. Bake bread for 40-45 min til loaf sounds hollow when tapped.

Remove and cool on a wire rack.

Rio Ramen (from the vault)

I made this recipe a lot when we were first married and it's written in a spiral I made way back when. We decided to make it again recently, and we still love it so much!

- Two pkgs beef ramen noodles (this recipe is for two)
- 1 lb ground beef
- Grated cheese
- Shredded lettuce
- Tomato
- Avocado
- Salsa

Brown the meat, add in the seasoning packets from two ramen pouches to flavor the meat. Drain. Meanwhile, boil noodles and drain.

Lay the noodles in a shallow bowl. Top with the meat and cheese. Add the rest of the toppings.

It's sort of like a taco salad with noodles! It's SO GOOD!

SUGAR + Spice - Drugstore Delights – by Angela Dolbear

I love high-end beauty products—the packaging is usually beautiful, the scents are lovely, the textures are spot on. But I am not a beauty snob. I have a few tried and true staples on my make-up desk that can be purchased at any Walgreens, Target or even on Amazon.

I don't like heavy foundation because it ends up sitting in my pores and wrinkles, accentuating them instead of camouflaging them. A few weeks ago, I read a recommendation for [L'Oreal Paris Infallible Up to 24H Fresh Wear Foundation in a Powder](#) as an excellent foundation, especially for older women, so I gave it a try. The formula is light and creamy and goes on so smoothly. I don't know if it would stay on for 24 hours, since I washed it off before bedtime. I love the evenness it provides my skin. It also comes with a high-quality make-up sponge in its own compartment under the makeup. So convenient!

Although I have stacks and stacks of super high-end eyeshadow palettes, and I am grateful for them all and for the fact I did not pay full price for any of them (thank you Ipsy!), I still reach for the [Wet n Wild Color Icon 5-Pan Eyeshadow Palette - 0.21oz](#) . I have the “Forget-Me-Not” palette. I love how the color story works well together whether I use all the shades or just two. I often use the shimmery ivory color as a blending shade with my high-end eyeshadows because I like how light it is and adds just a hint of shimmer.

[NYX Professional Makeup Epic Ink Waterproof Eyeliner](#) is an exceptional liquid felt-tip eyeliner. It looks as good and works as hard as any of the high-end eyeliners I use. It goes smoothly and dries quickly with an opaque finish.

In order to get free shipping on a shopping trip to Ulta.com, I added a [Wet n Wild COLOR ICON MULTI-STICK](#) in my cart in a beautiful blue shade called ‘Not so calm.’ I thought it might be fun to play with. I put a light swipe of the blue on the water line of my eyes, very close to my lashes on a day that my eyes were red from allergies. It made my eyes pop and look bright. The blue shade blended into my skin after a while, but still added a brightness to my eyes. I have searched down the other colors and have had fun mixing them as eyeliners, or smudges of eyeshadow. So fun!

Budget Bonus -- Most of these links go to Target.com, which will give you additional savings of 5% if you sign up for their Red Circle discount.

The beauty of blessings to you!

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

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

What did you learn in the month of February? What new chocolates do you love? Where do you get the best Italian food? Did you learn to snow ski? Well, I share every month little tidbits of what I’ve learned, noticed or liked. Here’s my last month haul of learnin’:

If you want watch an interesting docudrama, we enjoyed *Under the Fig Trees*, about Tunisian fig pickers. You can find it on several streams.

A friend told me this. I’m doing it. To clear photos on your phone without the stress of clearing thousands at a time...search in photos by date. For example, I started on January 29. The photos you took on that date pop up. Delete what you want, then do that each day! Manageable and works!

Open your blinds just before sunrise and watch the shadows appear in your yard and the brightness shines. Makes your whole day.

Have you considered a square wreath? I found a really pretty one on Amazon! Add lights...or not.

If you have fine hair, which I do, a product by Briogeo is a nice spray in conditioner that really thickens and feels good and smells great. You can find it at Sephora.

If you have a patio and a crossbeam, try adding a curtain that blows and just adds so much to the atmosphere. Hang tablecloth weights to keep it from blowing too crazily!

A GREAT gift idea (or get for yourself) is a road trip bag – add car pillow, blanket, word search books, cokes, peanuts...whatever you know the person enjoys. Our kids gave us one at Christmas and we love it!

If you need a small lamp and there’s no plug where you want to place the lamp, this one has three settings and is SO pretty, adding ambience and enough light to read! I got a pack of two! It recharges at my laptop when the light goes low...

Don’t forget to shop the clearance racks this time of year...looking for deals. I found this puffer bag for \$10 at Target in a mint green – great for spring!

Sometimes prepared food is still cost effective if you don’t eat the bulk bag. Our store sells peeled cuties in a plastic container, just the amount we will eat. If I buy the large bag of cuties, they go to waste because we don’t get to them all! And the peeled ones – well we eat those! (Dipped in dark chocolate is divine...)

Make your own granola? I do, too. I recently started storing a small scoop inside the jar – convenient and a game changer! If you don’t make your own granola, try it – it’s the best!

You know those sidewalks that look like tiny pebbles? That’s called exposed aggregate (learned this from my husband!)

I know perfume is personal, but I just recently tried Hinoke Sesame parfum by dilo – and I absolutely love it!



HOME

Practical Parenting – Ironing on Patches – by Marcy Lytle

We had the kids over one evening and 10 year old Ayla brought a Christmas gift with her that filled the evening! Her 8 year old brother watched and then he wanted to do the same, which he did later when he got home. So this is a very fun idea for your kids, if they're of the age where you can supervise them as they create...and boy is it fun! I hadn't ironed on patches in decades! This would be a great spring break activity...or summer...or fun at birthday party!

The equipment (all from Amazon):

- Patches
- Iron
- Ironing pad
- A jean jacket or a duffle bag or jeans, or something on which to iron the patches.

Amazon has so many cute patches. Ayla was able to find a big bunch she liked with little characters and flowers and animals, etc. Then Augie found his own bunch he liked...and they both got letter iron-ons as well.

It was so fun picking where to place the patches. Ayla tried different placements before actually doing the ironing. We had a discussion about the iron, and I sat right by her when she used it. You do need to help the kids, for sure, because the iron is hot.

The heating pad is a must as it sets underneath the fabric to give it cushion and to help the ironing process go smoothly.

Ayla picked a jean jacket and her dance class bag, so she chose different "themes" for each. Augie had a jacket he picked later and wore it out to eat when the family met for dinner.

We worked on the floor, where we had plenty of space to spread out all the patches and the items.

The best thing is it only takes 30 seconds to press the patch in place – totally doable for kids (and impatient parents!)

The kids felt so proud of their work and I was amazed at how well everything adhered and looked. We reminded the kids to wash their items inside out to keep the patches from catching on other items in the wash.

It was a success, it took a while to do, it was fun, and it was creative. What more could parents want with a family activity on a Friday night?

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

We don't talk much in this magazine about dark things...like porn. But maybe it's time we address this issue that drags our teens into a world of danger and darkness like nothing else. It even can become an addiction, just as devastating as drugs or alcohol. So how do we prevent this from starting and certainly nip it in the bud if it does? I'm no expert at all, but have researched a bit and offer encouragement:

It can start with movies and internet. We might monitor our teens coming and going, but often we let them loose when it comes to what they watch. And this can be the start of the addiction. There are movies with scenes that are unforgettable, depict the unthinkable, and ruin the beauty of what God intended love to be between a man and a woman. Beastly acts, abusive behavior, and rabid physical satisfaction starts this trend toward taking and demanding by any means possible, until the darkness of despair enters one of the most beautiful things couples share.

Place boundaries on where your teens go and what they see,
and what they watch on their phones.

It can lead to shame and guilt. Maybe your teens are sucked into watching these unthinkable acts in the movies they share with friends at their houses. Perhaps at night when they're alone and their hormones are raging, they begin to explore what's out there and think about participating in some way. However, your teens can also feel remorse or shame and guilt for their feelings and their desires, and their need to be liked by the crowd of friends or other teens with whom they hang.

Talk to your teens about their emotional and sexual feelings and lead them to the Word – about remaining pure – thinking pure thoughts – relying on the Holy Spirit to lead them – and then choosing to follow the truth.

Not talking to your teens could add to the shame...so talk.

Make sure your hidden addictions aren't part of the problem. Lots of parents also indulge in porn either privately or together, when they're behind closed doors. But, why? Why are we attracted as adults to alternative behavior in the bedroom? Maybe our own marriages need some counsel, or we need to read the Word ourselves about having our needs met only through Jesus, and how to love each other in ways that respect and honor.

Consider your own desires, and confess them to Him.

Ask God to help you lead your children by example.

Focus on the Family puts it this way - Exposure to a sexual culture causes boys and girls to become consumers of people. Wow. That's alarming. Teen brains are completely vulnerable and once certain things are seen, it's hard to un-see them. It can be that way with adults, as well. The brain becomes enslaved and the immediate desire for pornography becomes as basic as the need for food and water.

Kids aren't going to come to us. We need to go to them with love and training and warnings...leaving our door open always for talk and prayer and hugs and affirmation.

The Word is our best defense to things of evil, so stand on it, love it, pray it, and speak it...with and over your kids as long as they live.

In Each Room – A Spring Porch – by Marcy Lytle

There's no season that seems more rushed, one more people anticipate and prepare for, than spring...is there? And the porch is usually the first place I start, because I want it to be welcoming and pretty as we enter our home! There are some simple touches and additions one can add to the front porch to welcome spring which seriously arrives this month!

Double the rugs – Have you seen the layered rug effect by your front door? The bottom rug is a larger thin rug that spans across the whole doorway. The top rug is one for wiping feet, one that coordinates. It looks pretty and complete with the two!

Add green pots – Green is a color that screams “spring!” And yes, you'll have green plants, but what about a pretty shade of green pots to go with those spring flowers? Target has some nice ones, or visit a nursery, or even a thrift shop! Set a group of three and enjoy them as you arrive home each evening.

A new wreath – Some folks are great at making their own wreaths. I used to do that, but I've now opted for keeping one green wreath on the porch and changing out the picks or lights. This spring I found this pretty square wreath on Amazon and added lights from Target – solar rattan lights – and they come on each night after dark. So pretty!

Add lights – Besides lights on your wreath, a lantern or solar light sitting near a chair or on a table is so pretty in the spring as well. It soaks up the sun and then illuminates your porch at night so you can see to enter the front door! Lanterns are everywhere, and even the discount stores have some really nice ones!

Maybe a throw? – I have a throw or pillow on the chair and hope the squirrels leave them both alone. A throw is so inviting, and it begs you to come and sit for a while and read on this porch that you've decorated so cutely. Find a pretty spring one and toss it over your chair for those cool spring mornings while you relax.

A pop of color – Stand back and look at your porch. What's missing? Maybe it's a pop of one color. A metal bird in a pot might be just the thing. Or your wreath might need one pop of something yellow or pink – you pick the hue and the item. Visit your local craft stores for a pick, or peruse the internet for ideas for front porches and be inspired.

If your front porch is large, that's so cool. I wish ours was a bit bigger. And that might be more of a challenge to decorate so just focus on the front door area. Maybe you have a tiny porch with no room for a chair. No worries at all, you can place tall thin plants or a tiny table by the door if there's room. Think about it, plan it, and then do it! Make that spring porch come alive.

An Adage a Day - Home Sweet Home – by Carole Gilbert

I love March! Spring is in the air and it's time to be outside again. Another thing I love so much about March is it's our anniversary month. This will be our 39th anniversary! Wow! My husband, Jim, and I have had a wonderful marriage, so far. We've had our "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health." We're now in our empty nest years and having fun with the grands, but there's one story that's always been and always will be close to my heart. It's the story of our home of 24 years. It's the story of how God "checked every box." It still brings tears to my eyes and gets me all choked up.

But first, what does that phrase "checked every box" even mean and why is it important? You can read and hear this phrase used in sports, politics, restaurants, and other places. It means to be thorough, complete, to leave no stone unturned. I have yet to find its origin, but I checked every box in my search. I believe its importance is in the completeness it stands for. It shows 100% effort. It gives you the whole truth. And I know that's what God did for me and my family.

24 years ago, Jim and I started to look for a new house. We were limited in where to look because his elderly father was driving over several times a week for supper. We still had lots of options though, so we didn't mind limiting our search. The holidays started so we put our looking on hold. During that holiday season, Jim's daddy became ill and had to have emergency surgery. Sadly, he never woke up. After a few weeks, we restarted our house hunt, but now we had no limits on where to look. After just two weeks, our real estate agent called and said she had a house for us to see, as it had just come on the market. She also told us to give it a chance, which made us leery, but we decided to go see it anyway.

We had come up with five features we really wanted in a home and had been praying for any combination of these five, and we knew this house had three. It had four bedrooms, a swimming pool, and a little land for our kids to have animals and just experience life in the country. We were hopeful and excited. As we turned onto the street, we drove down a long paved dead-end road. This was number four on our list! A street where the kids could ride their bikes without much traffic. And as we drove up the small hill at the end of the road, we saw it! The lake behind our house! Number five! My husband had always wanted to live on a lake, but we never thought that box would get checked. And even though the house needed work, I knew this was it. God had given us all five of our wishes. He had checked every box!

But God didn't stop there. You see, not only did he answer my and Jim's prayers, He also answered a prayer I had when I was a child after losing my mother. I had prayed for a home like what I had when she was still with me. After a few years, I finally gave up on that prayer. But this home was just what I had prayed for. It had a few acres like I had as a child, and it was a safe, secure, God filled home again! We have the best Heavenly Father! He truly does check all the boxes!

Psalm 37:4, Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

A Night to Remember – Stuck Like Glue – by Marcy Lytle

Easter is this month, and no doubt you and the kiddos will either dye or hunt real or candy eggs, eat some delicious food with family, maybe buy some new clothes...and see images of Jesus on the cross and then the empty tomb. Easter is such a fun time with kiddos! And the message of Jesus' forgiveness of sin and conquering death is HUGE – a must for our kids!

But here's another take on that image of the cross. Jesus was stuck to it with nails, nails he could have called for angels to remove, but he hung there stuck like glue until his work on earth was finished. And our kids need to know that Jesus is stuck like glue to them, as well, when they believe!

Preparation: Kids need a pencil with an eraser, and white paper.

Proverbs 18 says there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.

A brother is pretty close – he lives right in the next room to you if you have one! Or maybe in the same room!

(Draw you and a brother inside a house)

Brothers show up to every dinner, they come watch you at your games, they throw balls with you in the yard and its' so fun until...

(Add a ball in your picture)

One day that brother gets mad, or you get mad, and there are mean words, maybe a fight, and you run to your room wishing you never had a brother at all!

(Put a big X over the brother in your picture).

See that X you just drew? Well a cross is kind of like an X.

(Draw a cross on the side of your picture)

Jesus hung on that cross, stuck with nails that pierced his feet and hands, and he stayed there to complete the work his Father sent him to do – take on all the sins of the world – and offer us eternal life.

(Draw a man on the cross)

When we ask Jesus to be our Savior, his forgiveness enables us to forgive our friends and family.

(Erase that X on your brother and think about the cross and Jesus' dying for you.)

When we forgive that brother, or he forgives us, the ball starts bouncing again and we play together with joy.

(Add another ball to your picture).

God's word that says there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother is talking about Jesus. He died but he rose again and he lives in our hearts and never leaves us or abandons us – ever! He never sends us away. He never closes the door or picks a fight.

(Draw another large cross between you and the brother)

This Easter, when we see the cross and the empty tomb, let's give thanks for the One who is stuck to us like glue – super glue – that is! He is always with us!

Tiny Living – Safe Place – by Leyanne Enterline

I love that my boys want to invite their friends over! Even though our home is very tiny, the fact that the kids aren't embarrassed to have their friends over in our tiny space is awesome to me, as their mom. *Perhaps they feel like they are camping...or glamping?* I'm not sure, but it is nice to have the kiddos come here.

The pros are:

I know where my kids are.

I know what they're all doing!

15 and 16-year-old boys have a lot of energy and play hard!

And that's also the con:

15 and 16 year old boys have a lot of energy and play hard!

I have never heard so much yelling in my life! Whether the kids are outside throwing a football, working out, or just making fishing lures, the boys turn everything into a competition and with a crazy song added in the mix, as well.

If they're inside our small space, there's no sleep happening! The boys are eating, stomping, yelling, and literally rocking the trailer. I have feared for my life at some points in time!

This trailer is not meant for so many teenagers, but they're having fun in a safe environment. And for that I'll be thankful!

I do look forward to the day with more space, but I know I'll look back and remember the fun memories of the complete chaos because...

Love grows best in tiny spaces!



YOU

Under Pressure – What an Event – by Debbie Haynes

Easter is this month, at the very end! And we often say, “Happy Easter,” but I love to say, “Happy Resurrection Day!” I’ll tell you why...

When Jesus was arrested, he was given a mock trial. The ruling system sorely failed by calling evil *good* and good *evil*. They even condemned the wrong man, an innocent and holy man, and let the criminal go free! The judges were corrupt and motivated by evil. When we hear or read about Jesus’ brutal treatment and death, we often recoil at the injustice of his crucifixion.

But...the celebration part of Easter isn’t just about death. Jesus said that the Son of Man had to die but would rise again in three days...so we can celebrate the resurrection! A once self-proclaimed atheist Josh McDowell authored 150 books on the facts of the resurrection and states there is not a better documented event than the resurrection of Jesus.

This event might be the singularly most important fact upon which all else we believe is built:

1. The seal was broken, as stated in Matthew 27. A stone had been set in place, a guard was stationed to watch, and there were likely ropes that would have to be breached!
2. The tomb was empty (read Luke 24). All that was found inside were Jesus’ burial cloths. A dead body was never found.
3. The stone was removed (Matthew 28). It weighed more than two tons, and the movement caused an earthquake!
4. Some of the guards abandoned their posts. This was an act punishable by death, but the guards maybe slept or fled to tell the news or just left!
5. The grave clothes were folded, with the head cloth laying aside the rest of the cloths. In Jewish custom, the master finished a meal and if he FOLDED the napkin, it meant he was coming back to his place...so this was a message to the two guys Peter and John that stepped inside the tomb!
6. Jesus appeared after the resurrection (I Corinthians 15) – seen by over 500 at a time and in many different places.

Another unbeliever, Charles Colson (named as one of the Watergate 7 that was imprisoned) came to faith precisely because of these above facts! He wrote 30 books about his faith and established the greatest prison ministry ever known.

He wrote,

“I know that the resurrection is a fact. And, Watergate proved it to me. How, you ask? Because, 12 men testified they’d seen Jesus raised from the dead and for 40 years never once changed or denied their story.

Though they were beaten, tortured, stoned, imprisoned and eventually killed, not one ever recanted. They wouldn’t have, they couldn’t have, endured all of that if it were not true.

But in Watergate, 12 of the most powerful men in the world couldn’t keep their stories straight for THREE WEEKS during the trial!

You cannot tell me that the 12 apostles kept their stories straight for 40 years and then died for it, and it not be true! It's just not possible."

The resurrection of Christ is truly astounding and miraculous, and without it, we would have no hope. Jesus was the first to be given new life, and we can take that miracle to the bank and experience it, too.

Happy Resurrection Day!

Inner Strength – Yeh! – by Michelle Lynn

Picture this...a church full of college students, young families, and community members all singing repeatedly *Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Alleluiah*. Then, when the song is done a boy, around 1 year old, shouts “YEEEEHHHHH!!” The whole church and everyone in it is filled with so much joy that you can almost hear people smile.

That boy cheered for God. God cheers for us. We are called to cheer each other on. Children, especially, need cheerleaders in their life – parents, teachers, counselors, church leaders, school counselors, friends, other parents, and cafeteria staff-cheerleaders can come in many forms. Children soak up what messages they are given both verbally and nonverbally, so it is important to be their cheerleader whenever possible. Whether they are conscious of it or not, children strive to be who God has called them to be, but they can’t do that alone. It’s not about waiting until they perform a certain way before saying, “Yeh!”

The following is a story that illustrates this:

The other night, Matthew and I played a game of Racko. It’s a card game where the goal is to get your set of 10 cards in numerical order. I wasn’t sure if Matthew would want to play it, since he doesn’t like anything associated with math. I was glad that he was interested in it. (As it turned out, playing Racko was a good warm-up for his math homework). Matthew picked up how to play very quickly after watching me do a round. As he was choosing new cards and discarding old ones, he was quickly reaching his goal. That gave me the first opportunity to cheer him on.

“Look at you, Matthew!”

“Yes,” he replied. “I only have, 1..2..3 more cards to get.”

He continues to trade out cards. Upon pausing again to check them over, he doesn’t notice one of the cards that is out of order. So, I said something to the effect of, “Wait...almost.” Those encouraging words prompted him to check again and I cheered him on when he caught it. “Good job!” I would say. When Matthew had them all in order, we both raised our arms and said “Yeh!”

Excitedly, he opened up his school computer and asked me to help him with his math IXL lessons. As he pulled up his assignment, he said phrases like, “I don’t have a clue,” “I have no idea.” To keep the motivational momentum going, I told him “Well, let’s look at it. I bet you do, but I’m here to help.” Sure enough, it just took me helping by reading the problem to him out loud and walking him through the process a couple times; then he took over, using the strategies I modeled for him, such as reading out loud and taking each part of the problem a step at a time. How he did each problem was a chance to cheer him on! At one point, I felt so much joy being his cheerleader. I could tell he enjoyed cheering on as well. It was at that point that I realized that the only way kids are going to know how to cheer themselves on is if we cheer them on loud and clear!

Now sadly, this experience wasn't all smiles. Matthew started rushing through a couple problems and didn't use his strategy of reading out loud. I could tell by his body language that he was disappointed. So, I cheered him on in a different way by reminding him, "That's why you think and read out loud." He kept going until he missed another one. He walked off to take a break, and then came back with glow-in-the dark slime – something he likes to play with. Matthew had reached his limit for that night and that was okay.

What came next was a result of the bond that was created that night. Matthew began pulling pieces of the slime apart and created a design on a sheet of origami paper. He wanted to tape it to this wall, but didn't know if it was going to stick. Upon testing it out, yeh! It stuck!

Cheering children on creates a bond that is priceless! It actually doesn't take as much inner strength as you might think. What takes inner strength is fighting the urge to make it all better for them.

If I can follow God's calling and cheer on my children, so can you!

Healthy Habits – Just Before Bed – by Marcy Lytle

There's a lot out there about bedtime, about not having a television in your room, about what you drink or think before retiring...even about what you put on your face and what pills to pop. So going to bed healthily must be a big thing. But I'm pretty sure that routine, and the health of it all, is really pretty personal. If we're not sleeping well, we're not living well, and maybe it will help to consider what we're doing just before laying our heads on our pillows:

- If you like to watch television, go for it. It helps me get sleepy, whereas some people would rather read. And I like to watch something lighthearted or comedic, so that I find myself laughing and smiling before my eyes shut.
- If you read, then pick what settles your mind. Maybe it's a magazine, or a good book on your Kindle. I like to read a chapter or verse from the bible, as it's always truth, it's always hopeful, and it definitely settles my mind.
- If you washed your face in the shower, then you need a good moisturizer. They say right out of the shower is when your skin absorbs the best...so pick the one you love and slather it on. I'm not sure it's the number of potions you place on your face, but rather that you moisturize well. And don't pick something stinky – that will keep you awake! I love the night cream by Nuskín.
- If you ate something late or spicy and you're feeling it at bedtime, then prop up your head with pillows. This helps, and it will also enable you to watch that show...if you're so inclined. Then remember not to eat that stuff unless you do it earlier in the day.
- If you feel anxious or heavy and your mind is whirling, I know some folks pop CBD gummies or other pills. That's great if those work for you. You might consider, though, asking a friend to pray with you, unloading your worries on Him, and speaking to your soul and asking – *Why so downcast, oh my soul? Put your trust in God.* Some nights it's easy to do this, and others you might need a friend...
- If you love music, listen to it. Often, just an instrumental selection is the best, without words. But if you choose words, then choose lovely ones of hope and of the goodness of God. A mind filled with truth is less likely awake, hearing lies in the middle of the night. Check out City Alight music!
- If you had an argument with someone or thought ill of a friend or got offended today, then ask forgiveness, pray for that friend, let it go. Don't let the sun go down while you're still angry and mad. And if it just can't be done, then ask God to help you sleep and wake up unoffended in the morning.
- If you exercised a lot today and your muscles are sore and aching, or your feet hurt, treat them. Peppermint lotion feels great on tired legs and feet! I love JR Peppermint. Use a nicely seasonal soap as you bathe and smell the aroma. Light a candle in the bathroom (be sure to blow it out) that smells amazing to create a space to relax.
- If your bed is uncomfortable night after night, do something about it. Buy that new pillow, make the bed prettier and more inviting, or save up for a new mattress. A bed needs to be just right, like Goldilocks said! Pretty sheets might just do the trick!
- If your night clothes haven't been updated in decades, now is the time. Nothing feels more fun going to bed than a new – whatever you sleep in! I have pajamas, long t-

shirts, two piece matching sets and lots of option. They don't have to be expensive...at all! Check out Walmart or Amazon for cute ideas!

Think about your bedtime routine, each step. See which ones need to be thought about and consider a change to make bedtime a pleasure. No rushing, no pressure or anxiety about tomorrow, and definitely no eyes wide open situations when the lights are out.

A Hopeful Heart - A Time for Everything – by Christina Oberon

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear down and a time to build; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to search and a time to give up; a time to keep and a time to throw away; a time to tear and a time to mend; a time to be silent and a time to speak; a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3 has held a special place in my heart for years, resonating with my appreciation for the ebb and flow of life. The predictable sequence of the seasons mirrors the unchanging ways of the Creator, underscoring the unwavering nature of His character. This scripture reminds us of the rhythms of life, some that we can control and others that we can't, like birth and death. We ultimately have to go with the rhythm of God's work and plans in our lives.

But what happens when we find ourselves out of rhythm in a season? This is something that has strongly been on my mind over the last year. Contemplating the past year, I've grappled with the lack of harmony and being out of sync with the season I find myself in.

Questions linger:

Am I resistant to the present moment or to changing what I know needs to be changed?

Am I not where I should be?

Do I persist or depart?

Within my job, my relationships, and the broader context of my life, these uncertainties echo. Yet, amid this thinking, I'm gradually embracing the acceptance of my current moment of acknowledging the power and significance of being right here, right now. That does not mean accepting circumstances, but rather navigating and recognizing needed change in the current ones.

My mind goes back to Ecclesiastes 3 and I feel especially drawn to, "a time to plant and a time to uproot" in the context of this current moment in my life. The truth is, certain things I have built and grown over the years, including belief systems, may no longer serve me. I see it as a reminder to be mindful of the seasons in our lives. There are moments for growth, nurturing, and planting seeds of hope or opportunity, as well as times for reflection, change, and letting go of what no longer serves us. It emphasizes the balance between stability and transformation, urging us to recognize and embrace the appropriate moment for each action. What may have been perfectly aligned years ago may have run its course today. I find myself in this space and struggling to let go of what I feel needs to be uprooted, regardless of how much I have invested in it - and a little anxious about planting new. What I do know is that I wouldn't be experiencing this pull in my spirit if it was not part of the alignment and harmony I seek and action I know is necessary to be taken.

So, I go back to the peace found in trusting
that there is a time for everything
and sometimes that time is now.

Life Right Now - All The Colors of My Life - By Jennifer Stephens

It can be straight or curly. Thick or thin. Long or short. Or maybe there's none at all. And most people (at least occasionally) have a love/hate relationship with it. What is it? Hair. From the moment we're born everyone's got an opinion about our hair – asking, “Is that a totally bald baby?” or “Is that a full head of hair?” It's often the first thing people notice about us. Do we have long scraggly rock star hair or do we wear a sensibly tame 'do fit for a news anchor? Our hair tells a story.

Some of us grow our hair long and some keep it cropped short. Or maybe we're the type to let it grow for miles then suddenly sprout a wild hair and decide to chop it all off! That used to be me. I'd walk into the salon with a heavy waist-length mane and leave with an above the shoulders bob. And tears. It always ended in tears. Until I learned to ignore the whim to cut it all off and settle for a slight trim instead! Regardless of the length, my hair was brown. Just brown. Boring (in my eyes) brown. Until one afternoon when I came home with a box of tubes, chemicals, and plastic gloves...and became Clairol #30 Dark Auburn Brown. *Ooh la la!*

Since then, I've traded the DIY box for a professional hairstylist and swiveled between my natural color and chunky blondish highlights, full blonde (I know, crazy!), ridiculously dark brunette, sporty blue streaks, Grinchy green (that was a color mixing mistake), and festive pink & purple pieces! Looking back, each era of my life can be described by the color of my hair at the time. Auburn me was young and adventurous. Blonde me was kinda lost (Obviously. It wasn't a good look.). The blue streaks came with the excitement of sitting in the stands watching the KC Royals win the World Series. And pink and purple me is the me who decided to be unrelentingly myself. The me who no longer cared about judgy sneers because I'd figured out that other people's negative opinions aren't important (And being a 50-something with bright colored hair comes with others' unsolicited assessments. Oh, well.). Coloring my hair for my own entertainment has always been so much fun!

Until it became necessary.

I noticed a new color was emerging. And I wasn't thrilled. G-R-A-Y. Not a lot. Just sprinkled in here and there (Well, and that one patch in the back that my hairdresser lovingly pointed out. But she promised that'll be our little secret.). At first, I plucked and pulled each piece of unwanted bling, not caring how many more might show up to mourn the missing strands. While I have friends and family that look amazing with their silver tresses, I'm not ready to embrace the gray! Not yet. So, every four to six weeks I visit the land of foil with my hairdresser.

Long ago, silver strands were met with respect. Seen as a sign of wisdom. Proverbs 16:31 says, “Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness.” Gray hair brings with it a sense of maturity. Mistakes made and lessons learned. A life well lived. But in today's world, these shiny strands are often met with misconceptions. Suddenly old and irrelevant. Unworthy. Invisible. That's NOT how God sees it. Gray hair serves as a reminder of His faithfulness. In Isaiah 46:4 we read, “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.”

One day I will forgo my monthly salon visits and welcome the salt and pepper seasoning, but for now I'm in my pink and purple era. I'm going to boldly cover that gray because I know that in all the colors of my life - brown, auburn, blonde, blue, pink, purple, green, and, yes, even gray - it's God who carries me. It's God who sustains me. It is God who will rescue me.



MARRIAGE

In This Together – Begetting Joy – by Bekah Holland

I don't know about anyone else, but I NEED a little reset. It's a couple of months into the new year AND it's almost spring cleaning time. Again. And the world around me is full of people who've signed up for gym memberships, still riding high on a few months or so of determination and goal setting, swearing to lose that extra 20 pounds that has latched on with the strength of a 3-year old holding onto Mom's leg at drop off...barnacle level attachment, or ridding their pantries of all non-organic, non-GMO, sugar and/or terrifying levels of sodium, while their teenagers cry at the injustice of losing their midnight snack of choice. Sounds like a little slice of, well, hell.

If you are a New Year's Resolution making, spring cleaning, two-month gym attending, go big or go home kind of person, I applaud you. I am in awe. Also, I've got a chocolate and wine stash in case you remember that fluffy is the new fit and that yes, there are lots of things that taste better than skinny (basically everything short of cauliflower) feels. I've got you covered, so go with God and maybe do a little cardio for the people (me) whose idea of exercise involves a walk to the fridge and eating directly out of a carton. I save water. I save time. I save space in my dishwasher for the bowls that have lived under my daughter's bed for at least two months.

But regardless of your level of start fresh mania, whether you plan to rid yourself of everything you've collected and ignored for the last year or you're going all in on Crossfit and wheatgrass shots, or you are more of a "please-feel-free-to-dump-all-of-your-unused-snacks-butter-and-ice-cream-at-my-house-because-I'm-an-awesome-friend-for-removing-temptation-you're-welcome kind of person," by the time the holidays come and go, the new year is in full swing, most of us are just done. So, very done.

As women, we tend to carry the weight of these big celebrations and all the expectations, overstimulated kids, the planning, the cooking, the clean-up and all of that special magic everyone loves. And as much as I want someone to help me, I'm honestly usually so far behind chasing the eventual end of my to-do lists that I couldn't tell you what day it is, much less know how to wrangle the chaos enough to speak in coherent sentences. My husband WANTS to help. But he doesn't want to do something that I would have done differently. My regular, everyday anxiety is able to handle divvying up tasks. However, my special occasion "fresh start" anxiety fries some internal circuit board in my head and trying to think of things that I need help with may very well be the straw that broke the camel's back.

I know this. My husband knows this. You'd think one of us would have taken some notes in the last 18+ years we've spent together and maybe planned our things-we-needed-to-do-all-year-but-didn't-to-do lists during a less "magical" time, like March. But now that it's March, I probably don't have any more time than I did three months ago, so we probably just need a more *adulty* person in charge. But apparently we are the grown-ups and have to figure it out on our own.

Now, despite the list of things we never get done, we still try to make sure to engage in some form of the magic in the little, seemingly inconsequential things that mean so much. Like when my husband makes time for me to watch all of the musicals I love and never get to watch, since my people do not like watching anything in which singing and dancing can and will break out at any time. This is actually one of those intentional things my husband does that makes me love him even more and feel cared for. He's also endured *Rent*, *White Christmas*, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, *Hamilton* like a thousand times and many more that I'm sure he's tried to block from his memory. He hates that stuff. My kids are also not fans.

"Why do they sing in the hallway and the bathroom? Why don't they talk like normal people? No one dances and sings mid conversation," they say, which they know isn't true because I'm their mom and I've been breaking out into random song and dance any and everywhere (though mostly contained to kitchens, bathrooms and cars) since long before they came along and I've almost perfected the embarrassment.

And it's a "gentle" reminder that for years, they regularly pointed rudely at people in the grocery store, loudly asking why that lady has a mole on her face like Nanny McFee, while I tried to hide behind the chip display. So yes, Mom will absolutely dance in the car, sing through the aisles of Target and blast 90's hip hop in the carpool line. Because I can. And because revenge is sweet.
#sorrynotsorry

And I make sure that during football season, my husband gets to scream loudly at the TV every weekend and has all of the soda and snacks to keep his energy high enough to continue the screaming at the refs who can't hear him. Because football is sacred. We also have pizza for dinner way more than any normal family because pizza is his love language and we do what we have to do for the people we love....even eat too much pizza regardless of lactose intolerance bodily functions that half of the people in our house torture me with.

Too much information? You're welcome and welcome to my life.

You know what? I've come to love all of these things. Minus the lactose fallout, of course. We may be a mess. We may never actually get our curtains washed or remember to dust the stupid fans. We'll likely always have dirt on the floors from the dogs that no amount of vacuuming will ever keep up with. We'll never ever be done with laundry or dishes and no matter how many times I watch Marie Kondo, I will never be a minimalist, because if I get rid of everything that doesn't bring me joy, there won't be anything left but the dogs to run the house. So I'm working on accepting the clutter, and the dirt and never ending to-do lists and try to remember that when I've lived a full life and I'm ready to leave this world, I won't be wishing I'd kept things cleaner or kept up with the laundry. Because I refuse to leave this world with regrets, like wishing that I'd spent more time with the people that I love. I don't want to look back over my life and wish I'd loved better and bigger.

So this spring, while everyone is washing curtains and washing their windows, I'm going to try to pay more attention to my kids' laughter, and the way my husband's eyes light up when he gets too excited to give a gift to wait until an actual special occasion and not just a random Tuesday. Because these are the things that bring me joy and, to borrow one of the repetitive lines in the Bible, joy begets joy begets joy and on and on. And I want to "beget" joy and hope and laughter for my husband and my kids and anyone else I come into contact with.

So that's our spring cleaning this year. We're spring cleaning our hearts instead of our homes. And just maybe, that's the kind of clean-up we've needed, and with enough work, it will be the kind of cleaning that lasts so that when we look back over our lives we can count the blessings that matter. Each other.

"I make no secret of the fact that I would much rather lie
on the couch than clean underneath it."

Shirley Conran

Date Night Fun – Art! – by Marcy Lytle

I'm not an art aficionado by any means. I wasn't brought up cultured and submersed in art. And even as an adult, I don't own any fine art that hangs in my house. However, I've learned to love art of different kinds, and art is often part of our time together on dates! Maybe you're a lover of art, know all the ins and outs, and have some work of true artists in your home...which is awesome. Or maybe you're like us and just love to wander about and observe and even create...from time to time.

1. Art museums – There a rather large one on the university campus where I live and it's a fun place to visit. In fact, one can picnic there on the grounds. There's a gift shop, and unique exhibits. And some outdoor views that are spectacular of our downtown! And the best part about art museums is that they change their main exhibits often. So find a museum and go!
2. Art walks – Chalk art is one of the festivals we have near us, and people make fantastic creations from chalk on the concrete. There's also a beautiful setting near water in our town where there's a walk through sculptures – large ones – ones that make you look up and feel so small! They too have picnic areas, and sometimes even food trucks nearby. Look in your area and find one! I bet there's one not far away...or a trail where you can look at the art of creation...
3. Art on the lawn – There's an old house in our downtown called the Neil Cochran House and every once in a while, they have art on the lawn. Local artists come and set up their creations of all kinds, and there's lemonade and ice cream for sale. It's a lovely way to spend an afternoon and support your local artists! Google your area and see if there are any shows near you.
4. Art in your hand – Maybe there's something you've wanted to create in your yard with landscaping or pots of flowers. Or perhaps you both enjoy sketching with pencil and paper. Have you ever colored in the adult coloring books with markers? That's not my thing, but I know some that love it. Another kind of art might be just redecorating a space at home...together!
5. Art in the Word – I've mentioned these Alabaster bibles before, but they're beautifully curated with art that goes with the word of God...from the Psalms...to the Gospels. We have one lying on our bedside table. But what if you took the same scripture and both painted what you saw as you read...and then shared it with each other? Enjoy some cookies and lemonade while you do!

March is the time when some places start to thaw and little sprigs of green start to emerge. It reminds us that there's life among the dead branches waiting to spring forth. Look for an art escape with each other and do this often. And this month is a good time to start!

After 40 Years – Overthinking – by Marcy Lytle

I recently watched a video by Wanda Sykes, a comedian, about overthinking. It made me laugh out loud, because I'm an overthinker! One of my goals for a long time has to be more like my husband, an "in the moment" kind of guy that experiences peace all the time. I'm not there yet, and I thought I'd share a normal example of what I mean.

Here's a view into my head on a walk with Jon on any given evening, as the sun is setting, as we walk hand in hand around the neighborhood, along the creek, or through a park trail. The italics are my thoughts to everything Jon says while we walk.

Jon: I hear the birds chirping every morning. Have you heard them?

Me: I don't even remember this morning. This day has been soooo full.

Jon: I wonder why those leaves haven't fallen off of those trees, when it's now well into winter.

Me: What am I going to make for our lunches tomorrow? Do I have anything?

Jon: Wow, it feels so good out tonight. The breeze is perfect.

Me: I hope no one sees me, I can't believe I'm wearing this to walk, and my hair is a mess.

Jon: That dog is so cute (as he stops to pet another person's dog that looks at him with love...)

Me: Come on, we're going to end up walking in the dark. The sun is setting so fast.

Jon: I think that used to be a baseball practice field down there.

Me: Gosh, I forgot about that load in the washer. I need to get it out when we get back.

Jon: (As we arrive at home...) That tree I trimmed looks so good. I love to manicure things in the yard.

Me: (looking at my watch...) Well, at least we got 30 minutes in.

Can you relate to this at all? And that's just the cliff notes! I have walked an entire route holding Jon's hand, and even trying to stir up deep conversation...only to miss the leaves blowing, the people passing, and even the sun setting...in favor of overthinking!

And I've even been frustrated before that he won't enter into deep conversation (i.e. about life, mysteries, questions, etc. – the things that make my head hurt).

But...I've noticed that walking isn't the time for that. It's the time for observing His goodness around me and ending up at the end of the walk feeling refreshed...not like I've just walked with bricks on my back.

I'm still learning. And often, I realize it a third of the way through our walks and enjoy the last two-third. So I'm still growing. And I'm still learning. And I'm breathing a lot lighter and sighing

at the beauty of the amazing sun as it slips so quickly behind the horizon...instead of sighing that the walk is over and I can mark that task off my list.

And I'm squeezing his hand a little bit tighter, and giving thanks...

(I did stop and take this fantastic photo that made me smile...)

For Better or Worse - Cooking 101 – by Kaelin Scott

If my husband didn't have a career in ranching, he would probably be a food critic. He has really high standards when it comes to food, and he tends to critique every meal he eats. Whenever we go on a vacation, he bases his rating of the whole trip on the quality of the food. To put it simply, he's a guy who appreciates a good meal.

That being said, food must not have been the way to his heart, because when we first got married I couldn't cook. Poor guy! It wasn't that I was a bad cook. I just literally didn't know how to cook hardly anything. I guess it wasn't something I'd ever really been taught, and I hadn't had much experience since I was only 20 years old. Not only that, but we didn't have much money since we got married in college. So those first few years consisted of a lot of Ramen noodles, grilled cheese, frozen food, and Hamburger Helper. Bless my husband's heart, he put up with my nonexistent cooking skills and didn't kick me to the curb.

Over the years, especially since becoming a stay-at-home-mom, I've been able to teach myself how to cook. Since it's something I have to do anyway, I decided I might as well do my best. Now I have quite a stack of recipes we enjoy, and I'm constantly finding new ones to add to the list. I've built my skills one day at a time, and I'm actually a pretty good cook now (humbly speaking, of course.)

Every step of the way, my husband has been graciously supportive. Even if it isn't the best meal or when I try a new recipe that ends up being a flop, he always makes sure to thank me for dinner. He's not afraid to tell me what he doesn't like, but he's also extremely encouraging whenever he does like something I make. He compliments me and makes sure I know he appreciates my hard work.

Being able to grow this skill for my husband and family is something I'm grateful for. Looking back on those early days, I can't help but laugh and wonder how we even survived. Growth doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen if we try. Sometimes we mess up, sometimes we get it wrong, but eventually we can look back and see how far we've come.

Cooking great meals for my family is a great feeling, but nothing beats knowing it makes my husband happy. Hearing him praise a good meal is worth every bit of effort that's gone into it over the years. And it's why I'm going to keep improving my skills as much as I possibly can. That's because it's not really about the food. It's about showing love to my husband in a way that means a lot to him.



ENCOURAGEMENT

Rooted in Love – His Children – by Kaelin Scott

I think it's pretty normal for moms to worry about their kids. Being a mother isn't easy, and it can be stressful at times. It's easy to get overwhelmed by everything that comes along with motherhood, and I definitely know this firsthand.

Anytime something remotely wrong happens with my kids, I immediately jump to the worst-case scenario in my mind. I tend to blow things out of proportion in my head, and then I freak out unnecessarily.

Sometimes, even if I know something's not a big deal, I still struggle to think rationally and keep my emotions under control. I feel silly about it, but I have a feeling I'm not the only one who does this. It kind of comes with the territory of being a mom, right? We want to protect our little cubs from everything, and sometimes we turn into scary mama bears.

But I was convicted of something recently, and maybe you can relate. I'm not fully trusting God when I obsessively worry over my children. That's the obvious part, but here's what I realized that was actually pretty mind-blowing: My children are actually God's children.

Let me repeat that. My children are actually God's children.

What does that mean? It means that as much as I love my kids, He loves them even more. He protects them and cares for them and provides everything they need. He is a good Father to my children, so I don't have to worry about them. I can rest assured, knowing they are safe in His hands.

It's tempting to try to take control of every situation, but I'm not God. I don't have all the answers, as much as I wish I did. But He knows every hair on my children's heads. He sees every tear they cry (and each of my tears too). He knows them inside and out. And He already has their futures written in His book. Yes, they are my babies, but only because He was gracious enough to entrust them to me.

So instead of obsessively worrying or clinging so tightly to the reins that my knuckles turn white, I can relinquish control and trust God to take care of my family. I can do my best and trust Him to step in where I fall short. He loves me and He loves my children. They are not just my children to Him. They are *His* precious children, just as much as I am. He has my family in the palm of His hand, and that's the safest place we could be.

Simple Truths – Pebble Art Family – by Marcy Lytle

I saw something on a vacation years ago that piqued my interest and I planned to go right home and copy it...only it was years before I actually did it! It was called pebble art, and I'd seen little framed works of pebbles being used as art to depict all sorts of scenes, but the ones of family caught my attention.

Fast forward to years later, I decided it was the time to gather my pebbles. We visited a small town on one of our weekend road trips and there was a river stream behind a restaurant where there were lots of small rocks and pebbles. We got a bag and started gathering. I had saved a couple pictures of those pebble art creations on my phone, so I knew I wanted the rocks to be small, flat and mostly smooth - and of all different shades from pale white to brownish hues. We gathered quite a few and headed home.

That sack sat in my garage for over a year before one very cold weekend earlier this year, I decided it was time. I did have to look up the inspiration again on line to refresh my memory, and I found a pebble art family that I wanted to copy, using my own kids and their kids...to make a complete picture.

Next, I visited Michaels and asked the art employee in the back what kind of frame and glue I should use for this adventure! She showed me the frames (shadow boxes) and suggested E6000 for the glue. So I purchased both (be sure to get the clear or white – I accidentally bought black!).

I went through my bag of rocks and realized I needed several more small pebbles; and we have a pebbled area for our back patio, so that's where I found the rest of what I needed to create our family album in a box!

I studied the picture of the one I'd found online and began placing my rocks before ever gluing anything down. I also found some brown twine I had at home to use for the balloon string, and I was mostly excited about a heart-shaped pebble to place somewhere when the picture was complete!

Once I had all of the rocks and twine centered and in place on the frame backing, I began gluing very carefully (especially since I had black glue!) I made sure the people were centered top to bottom and left to right. It really didn't take very long.

Finally, the entire creation was left to dry and secure overnight. The next day I placed the backing back in the shadow box and closed it up, and found a place to hang our family pebble art. The little heart-shaped pebble was perfect for center top, and the twine wasn't just for the balloons – but it worked for legs on one of the kids and hair on my daughter-in-law's head.

Having the inspiration from online helped immensely, as it was so much easier to copy something than to create it. At least for me, it was!

I am not an artist, by any stretch. But copying? That I can do. If it's not too hard or doesn't take too long...as I'm not so patient. I'm so pleased with our family pebble art. It really turned out to be pretty simple once I had the stones and the glue!

If you've got a project in mind, maybe this spring is the time to start it and complete it...so I hope you do! Or I hope you're inspired to make your own pebble art family to hang in your home, too!

Moving Forward - Free From Fear – by Pam Charro

Like my mother, I'm a planner. I'm the person you can count on to request the days off well in advance, plan the route, and make all of the hotel reservations. I don't like flying by the seat of my pants or leaving things to chance, because I've had to pay in past situations when I didn't plan. I usually like to move forward with a pretty good idea of what to expect.

But, as I'm sure you know, life doesn't always turn out like that. I can't even count the number of surprises I've lived through in just the past few years. And, while I'm glad life hasn't been stagnant and I've appreciated the opportunities to grow, there are some things I don't ever want to go through again.

It really isn't just the situations themselves that I'm so dreading repeating; it's the person I believed myself to be in those times. I don't want to feel like a shameful, utter failure again. I don't want to feel trapped or helpless ever again. I don't want to lose myself or my hope. And I only recently have realized, in certain areas of my life, how terrified I now am to move forward.

Not long ago, I was pouring all of these things out to God. The monsoon of tears surprised me. I didn't sense anything but him sitting with me, but even though I wasn't aware of him responding, I felt lighter from leaving my pain with him. I hadn't been aware of the burden I had been carrying. It wasn't until later in the day that an incredible thought occurred to me: What if I could be victorious in my next situation, no matter what happens? What if none of my shortcomings, disappointments in others, or inability to control my circumstances could ever force me to repeat my past? What if power is available to me that will make me proud of who I am, even if all of my worst fears come true?

What an exhilarating thought!

And the more I think on Romans 8:28-29, the more convinced I am that God showed me my freedom from fear of the future. Because nothing that lies ahead of me will ever be able to make me less than what God is making me into - a much-loved, overcoming daughter of the King of Life. Yes, there will be trouble in this imperfect world, but I will never again be enslaved by shame and hopelessness because love and hope live inside of me, and they are being renewed in me every single day. And there isn't a single situation that can do anything to stop it.

God whispered my freedom from fear into my ear that day. It is nothing more (or less) than a mindset, a decision, a choice to believe what I say I already believe. I intend to walk into my future grasping that belief, tightly. No matter what.

Unearthly Thing - Talking with Tama – by Angela Dolbear

Ten questions for award-winning author Tama Fortner

I count myself blessed to be in the same writer's group as Tama Fortner. Tama is a talented and knowledgeable writer, and I learn so much from her.

Her latest release, [*Everyday Joys Devotional: 40 Days of Reflecting on the Intersection of Ordinary and Divine*](#), is one of my favorite devotionals (Day 5 melted my sometimes stoney heart...it's really hard to read through tears).

Tama's bio reveals she is an ECPA award-winning and bestselling author with more than sixty titles to her credit. She has collaborated with some of the biggest names in Christian publishing to create inspirational books for all ages. But her greatest accomplishments happen in a happy little home on the outskirts of Nashville, Tennessee, where she lives with her family and a feisty little pup who is convinced he's people too.

I asked Tama a list of ten questions, which she graciously expounded upon. I hope you delight in her responses as much as I did!

1. When did you first realize you wanted to be a writer?

When I was about eight years old, I read *Little Women* for the first time and discovered Jo March, and a whole new world of possibilities was opened for me. I had always loved reading books, but until that moment, I don't think I realized that there were people who actually *wrote* them—and that perhaps I could be one of them! I even went so far as to set up my own little cardboard writing desk in my childhood bedroom closet, imagining that I was just like Jo tucked away in her attic writing retreat.

2. What are your favorite books to read?

That is a bit like asking me to choose a favorite child! I love reading all sorts of books, depending upon my mood. I enjoy devotionals and nonfiction, but I read so much for that for my work that I usually find myself turning to fiction for my "fun reading." Historicals, romantic suspense, and rom-coms will always be found on my library shelves. And, of course, children's books have a special place in my heart too.

3. What is your favorite part of being a writer?

My favorite part of being a writer is working with the words. There's something almost magical about the way words and phrases can click together to share thoughts, weave stories, and invite readers into another world. A day spent tinkering with words is a happy day!

4. What's the most surprising thing you learned while writing your books?

Perhaps this sounds a bit silly, but even after all the books I've written, it still is the most wonderful little shock and surprise to realize that people actually want to *read* these words I write. I'm not sure I'll ever get over that—and perhaps it's best for me and my writing if I don't.

5. How did you first get published? How did you get your book deal?

My career in publishing began as an editor, first for a small publisher and then for the children's division of Thomas Nelson. When I decided to go freelance to stay home with my family, Nelson was the first to give me a shot at ghostwriting and collaborating with other authors on their books. Eventually, those connections led to my first children's picture book, *God Is Always Good*. Fast forward a decade or so, toss in a few dozen ghostwriting projects, add one agent, and—*presto!*—I began getting other publishing contracts for my own books. (Okay, obviously, there's no *presto!* to this publishing business. Just lots of hard work and stick-to-it-iveness.)

6. What is the best time of day for you to write?

I tend to do better if I can clear away a bit of mental clutter before I write. So after my morning quiet time, I'll usually spend an hour or so taking care of emails and such. Then the rest of the day is prime time for writing!

7. How do you know what to write?

My inspirations come from any number of places. It might be a simple phrase or rhyme that pops into my head, or a character. Often, I'm struck by something I read in God's Word, a connection that I haven't noticed before. I also spend a lot of time watching and listening to the world and the people around me. (Some might call it eavesdropping; I prefer the term "research.")

8. What is the most difficult part of writing a book?

There are days when the words just flow. It's as if God is whispering in my ear exactly what to write. But then there are other days, when a looming deadline tells me I have to write, but the words are *not* clicking together. In those times, I have to force myself to write "ugly." By that, I mean I have to just put words on the page—almost stream of conscious writing. It's hard, and it's usually terrible. Interestingly enough, though, I've found that this forced writing usually breaks through whatever wall my brain has thrown up and gets me back into a good writing frame of mind.

9. How important are book reviews?

Books reviews are *essential!* Not only are they helpful to other readers, but they also play a huge role in the algorithms of online booksellers. (And I'm convinced those algorithms secretly rule the world!) Publishers pay attention to reviews, as well. Good reviews—and a good number of them—tell publishers that readers like an author and that can lead to future book contracts.

But getting those reviews is tough. I hate asking because I know that they take time. So dear reader, just know that even a simple star rating (I'm partial to 5 stars myself!) or an "I loved it!" are as treasured by authors and algorithms as those lengthy reviews.

10. What important advice would you give a first-time author?

Write. Edit. Keep learning.

Write because you love it and you can't imagine not putting words on a page. Edit your work ruthlessly and ask other writers to do the same. And never stop learning. After sixty-plus books, I still take classes and read books on writing. Because when you choose to write, you embark on a lifelong journey of words that can take you to the most wondrous places . . . even if they're only in your imagination.

To learn more about Tama, visit www.TamaFortner.com.

Blessings to you!

Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her novels are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com). 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](https://www.soundcloud.com). 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 - A Cup of Sugar – by Marcy Lytle

I don't know about you, but I haven't borrowed a "cup of sugar" from a neighbor in decades. First of all, I don't bake much. Secondly, one neighbor I rarely see because he parks in the garage and never hangs outside. The other neighbor is a single guy that I'm not sure ever cooks...so I just make sure I load up on what I need at the store so that I don't have to ask anyone for anything at all.

After all, we live in a time when we can order our groceries on line, add to our list as we remember extra items, pick them up and stock our pantries. On the rare occasion that we do forget something, we often remember before we start baking because we have checklists we look over to see that we're missing something...so we don't even start the baking process. Or...we can run to the corner store ourselves, because we don't want to bother the neighbor or worse yet – owe them back.

I was thinking about this cup of sugar thing just this morning and realized that I treat faith the same way. When things are going well and my spiritual pantry is full, I bake away and enjoy the scents from my own kitchen, in no need of anyone else. And on those days when I do realize I'm a bit short on faith, I scramble and scrimp trying to fill my baking jars without success, because the sugar well is dry.

Okay, if that's too many metaphors for you, let me explain:

We live in a self-sufficient world, self-made success stories, and self-realized images of who we are, and this makes us these folks that see lack as a failure, a misstep, or a big goof on our part. So when we find ourselves weak in faith, we don't dare ask or "borrow" from someone else's full supply.

For example, when I'm low on faith, I often go to God and pine, wonder what's wrong with me, beat myself up for not trusting God, and all the things. And to ask or admit that I'm low and I need someone else to help me fill back up is hard. And there are lots of reasons that it's hard:

Sometimes, others make assessments of why we're low on faith and tell us so. It hurts.

Sometimes, others make flippant and religious remarks to encourage, but they annoy.

Sometimes, others offer solutions for situations they don't understand, and it angers us.

However, think back to when those neighbors really did ask for cups of sugar. It probably went like this:

"Can I borrow a cup of sugar? I didn't realize I was out."

"Sure, can! Here ya go!"

"I'll pay you back when I get to the store."

"Oh no, take it and use it. It's yours."

That's it. Transfer made. Bread baked. Bellies full. Neighbors smiling.

So, if we've been hurt when we asked for someone to fill our sugar bowl of faith, then let's find friends that will, gladly. They're out there. And let's be the friend that offers a cup of faith, no questions asked, no tallies kept.

There's no shame in having an empty jar and finding ourselves in need of a little of what our neighbor has. That's the beauty of friendship in Him. A cup of sugar for all who ask.

FRESH THYME – It's What We Do – by Marcy Lytle

This is for all you grandmothers out there, grandmothers to be, or grandmothers in love. This article is to encourage you, make you feel special, and inspire you to keep doing what you do so well.

We buy clothes – I can't tell you how much I enjoy buying the kiddos new clothes. Taking them shopping with me or surprising them with something makes my heart warm. I know my kids enjoy the help, since clothes are expensive and the parents don't have the time to bargain hunt. I do! And I make sure the kids can tell me if it's not what they want, and I don't mind returning it! Clothing our families and the desire and joy in doing so never ends...it's what we do!

We pray – Oh. My. Goodness. The world has changed, our kids are doing things differently than we did, and they're facing other obstacles we've never even heard of. So, we pray for wisdom, we pray for jobs, we pray for health, we pray for their relationships, we pray for the kiddos at school and in daycare, what they eat and who they befriend. We've been there and done that, and we now have this storehouse of faith that comes from seeing God's faithfulness in our own lives. Praying in faith...it's what we do!

We observe – Watching the kids at their games and performances – well we are happy to add all of them to our calendar! Even if we live far away, we love seeing the videos and hearing the kids tell of what they did and if they won or lost. We observe and pay attention to details so we can encourage and encourage again. We take the time to sit and watch and observe all they do...it's what we do.

We laugh – Have you ever sat with a toddler and watched him play? Of course you have, if you have little ones in your families. They make you laugh more than anything else you do in your life. Their smirks, their quirkiness, their play, their stumbles, their pudgy hands and feet, their sneakiness (that you don't have to deal with – their parents do) and all of the ways they interact with the world – makes for lots of belly laughs. And laughter does a heart good like medicine, the Good Book says. So laugh away...it's what we do!

We play – When the kids come to stay or we go there, we play, we don't do chores. The time for kids doing chores was when their parents were in our house, but now it's the time to play. Out in the yard, kicking a ball, or sitting around the table playing a board game – it's all so fun. Creating with water and dough, reading books that make sounds and have flaps, or just playing hide and seek in the house or the yard is the best. Playing keeps us young, our minds active, and if we get up and down from the floor – we ache –but we grow stronger. Playing is just plain good fun – it's what we do!

If you're a grandmother, I know you relate to all of the above. And there are times we need to be reminded of what it is we do. It's easy to lose our purpose, feel unimportant or unnoticed. But when we realize our roles of the one who shops, the one that prays, the one with eyes that see, the one that laughs out loud with joy, and the one that will say yes to play...that's a tall order and one we gladly accept as our role and our privilege.

Don't let the aging process speak lies of unworthiness in your ears.

We are important as friends, moms, aunts, grandmothers and more, as we consider these blessings called kids.

In fact, I just met a lady the other day whose husband has Parkinson's Disease. She was out trimming her bushes as I walked by and stopped to chat. She ended with this...

"Most of our days are spent at medical appointments or with the grandbabies. That's not a bad life."

That wowed me. It made me want to be more grateful. And I found myself thankful for this new friend.

FRESH THYME – The Awards – by Marcy Lytle

Do you watch all the awards shows like the Golden Globes, the Grammys and the Oscars? I have very few friends that are avid watchers like we are, and I know the shows can include political comments and rude dancing and all the things. However, I'm an advocate of watching them and loving them and I'll tell you why. It's not to convince you to watch, because that's your choice – of course! It's just to tell you why I watch in case you've shunned them but secretly really wanted to watch them:

I love fashion and I love to see what the people wear as they show up on the red carpet. I'm not looking for ideas by any means, because let's get real. Are we really going anywhere to wear these looks? NO. But...something I inherited from my mom is attention to detail in dresses, the things that make our outfits unique, and I just love the creativity involved in all of the super crazy and beautiful ensembles the nominees and presenters wear!

And the cool thing is that it's an escape from my "normal" closet into the dressiest night, and it's just so fun!

I love to stay connected to the next generation, because I have kids and grandkids! I like to know what appeals to them, what music they like, and what lyrics are saying. So the Grammys is a fun watch for those reasons. This particular year was really quite enjoyable. They included some of the older singers, like Billy Joel and Joni Mitchell, and that was heartwarming. The MC didn't veer into political jokes or jabs or filth, which I appreciated. And some of the lyrics were so stirring and beautiful.

And the cool thing is we can record these shows and watch them later; and fast forward if we do see something objectionable!

I love movies, I love the stories, I love to see how movies are filmed, the artistic licenses that are showing up these days in the movies. And I definitely have my favorites. So I love to see who is nominated and who wins. Going to the theater is my choice of relaxation on a weeknight especially, because days are long and I'm busy. If I watch at home, I'll still clean or do something while I watch. At the theater, I have to sit still and get comfy (which often ends up in a five minute snooze!)

And the cool thing is that weeknight movie watching is cheaper than weekends! Cinemark has senior night on Mondays and half price movies on Tuesdays, and often classics mid-week!

As a mom and grandmother, I can vanish into old age and be unaware and really not care what interests my family. But I love to see what the culture is putting out there. No, we don't watch every single thing, we don't approve of every storyline, and we certainly don't find entertainment in oversexed grinds and moves. But these days, we can choose what we want to watch, champion those artists that are putting out good stuff, and recommend the best ones for our families, and enter into conversations with the kids.

I find that my kids don't watch the awards shows or the movies all that much, because they're raising little ones. But they do live in a world immersed with music and fashion and stories –

they're surrounded by the talk and the chatter and the ads and the things. They listen to music, all kinds. They read the news and are lured in, just like I am.

The Awards Shows are a good way to just sample what's happening and become aware, and even possibly pick up a few new ideas, films, or lines that we actually love as well. These artists are people, not just celebrities, and I find myself reading their bios and even praying for them often. I want the next generation to have good stuff to view and listen to, and am so thankful for Christian artists that stay true to good lyrics and messages about Him. But the others need Christ too, and they need a friend and a follower, as well.

FRESH THYME – They're Not Strangers – by Marcy Lytle

I read often about the woes of social media and how we hide behind screens and that all of these strangers that like or visit our pages are not real people, and that's not real community.

I get it. That can totally be the case. But let me tell you about my friends that I've met on social media and how they are anything BUT strangers.

I have a few friends that share prayer requests with me, and I with them, and these women are prayer warriors. I love that!

One friend and I have so much in common from being movie lovers, to our love for music, and more. I think we'd be besties if we lived next door to each other!

I've actually gotten to meet a few friends in our travels, ladies I met on the internet, and they were delightful – forever friends now.

Another friend was visiting my city and invited me for coffee. I went and we hit it off, and we both love fashion, and we encourage each other often.

Another friend on my Instagram page likes and encourages me just about every day – she must be gifted that way – and I'm so thankful!

Sure, if social media keeps us from interacting with people around us, that's a problem. But I see it as expanding my community. And let's face it. As we age, that community can grow small pretty quickly! Kids are grown and have their own lives, churches are changing, and people are not as outgoing as they sometimes were, and all sorts of things!

I absolutely love meeting women I connect with across the miles and can't wait to meet another one in person as we travel around.

However we find friends, I say it's awesome. Finding another woman that loves our silliness, shares their family life, and wants to chat on a given moment's notice – well that's pure gold in my book.

It's not good to generalize about what other folks do. I love social media, and I have friends that don't. And that's great. But there's no shame in either of us liking what we like and enjoying the friends we have...anywhere and anytime.

It's called chatting on line...isn't the photo for this story the best?