



A BUNDLE OF
THYME
For Every Season

Online Women's Magazine | thymemag.com

May 2022



TIPS

The Dressing – Bags and Totes and Packs – by Marcy Lytle

I love a new summer purse to dress up an outfit, a cloth bag for taking to the market or carrying books, and even packs or coolers for picnics and road trips. I'm a sucker for new bags of any kind! Even when I was a kid, I purchased some sort of purse or pouch on our family vacations as my souvenir of choice. I remember one cylinder shaped purse with a picture of the Smoky Mountains on the front. Can you imagine?

This month of May, with summer approaching, trips pending, and all sorts of fun outings on the calendar, we're going to need bags and totes and packs of all shapes and sizes. So here are a few of my favorites:

New purse – We recently stopped by a farmer's market and one of the tents was full of hanging purses – handmade – that looked so cute for summer. I picked this crossbody and I love it. Venture out on a weekend and see if you can support a local artisan, too!

Local tote – Marshall's has had local tote bags with the name of our city on them a couple of times. I love this cloth Austin bag for carrying books and more. They even had zipper pouches to match. Isn't Marshalls and TJ Maxx a great place to find something so cool for the new season?

Crossbody leather – This bag is also from Marshalls, and it's leather. It has so many zippers and compartments, and I carry it on trips or when I have a lot to carry or on long walks. It fits greatly, is comfortable slung across the front, and holds so much! It's cute, too.

Backpack – I love this Coleman insulated backpack for toting lunches and waters. It's been perfect for trips to the hospital to sit with my dad, it's great for picnics or walks, and the straps are padded. It's comfortable. I love the colors, too!

A Book Bag – This pretty orange and green tote is from Barnes and Noble, and it's great for books! Magazines, hardbound books, puzzles, any sort of reading – I have a stash every time we go out all day, for those times when we pull over to rest and then I pull out something to read...

A hat – Okay, it's not a bag, but it goes with the look of carrying a cute summer bag! I found this one at Charming Charlie (you can still buy from them online!). I love the colors in it, and it's great for sunny days at games or in the park, or just to feel sassy and smiley.

I'd love to know where you've found a cute bag or tote, so share with all of our readers in the comments! Enjoy each new one you find, as you head out in the city or the country...

Seven for You – May Pies – by our Panel of Women

We asked our panel of women to share any pies that are their favorites, from savory to sweet. After all, May is a great month for getting the family together for Mom, having picnics outside with friends, or just enjoying a slice of something good on a weeknight or weekend – just because!

I love all of the pie recipes they shared, and I hope you do too!

This pie was my favorite growing up in the UK. Cornish Pasties have been around since the 13th century. Traditional hand-held Cornish Pasties are made with diced beef, sliced or diced potato, turnip (called swede in the UK), and onion. The recipe I'm sharing for these replaces the turnips with carrots.

These pies were a favorite of coal miners because they contained a full meal that could be eaten warm or cold. My grandad worked in the mines and loved them. We would then buy them from the "Chippy" on the corner and eat them walking around the shops.

History note:

Side-crimped pasties gave rise to the suggestion that the miner might have eaten the pasty holding the thick edge of the pastry, which was later discarded, thereby ensuring that dirty fingers (possibly including traces of arsenic) did not touch the food or mouth. I never found out if the arsenic part was true, but Grandad did say that holding the side crimp of the pastry kept the pie clean from dirty fingers.

In England today, you can find them made with spicy curry, peas, and other non-traditional veggies. - Cathy

<https://www.serious-eats.com/cornish-pasty-british-meat-hand-pie-recipe>

I love pie! Just thinking about it makes me happy. . But I don't make pie. When I get a hankering' for pie, I head over to Marble Falls, Texas to the Blue Bonnet Cafe. It's always coconut cream for me. I've never eaten anything else there! - Beth

<https://www.bluebonnetcafe.net/>

I am most fond of pecan pie. However, a few years ago I ran across Tootie Pies in Dripping Springs, Texas. I had their peach pie -- it was crazy good. It ships cold in a box ready to be cooked. I can't say enough about this pie. This particular one is often sold out. <https://www.tootiepieco.com/Enjoy!> – Edith

I love pie!! I don't make them that often but my favorites to make are pumpkin, apple and pecan. I don't think peach cobbler is a pie, but I also love that! Tim, my son, loves the pumpkin pie and asks for it on his birthday instead of a cake. There is no secret family recipe - just the one on the back of the Libby's pumpkin can. My pecan pie is my favorite - of course it has the most calories but when I am eating pie, I just don't think about it! I could probably eat just about any flavor of pie. One of my favorite places to get pie is in Marble Falls at the Bluebonnet Cafe. And it's a must to have it warmed up with a scoop of Blue Bell ice cream on top.

And what about chicken pot pie! This is a favorite one just because you can make it and bake it in the same skillet. It's really good the next day, too!

<https://www.copymethat.com/r/pTmwN643G/skinnytaste-moms-chicken-pot-pie-from-on/>

– Melissa

I have used this recipe for 30 years and it is still a favorite in our family! It's even good for those family vacations since all the ingredients can be taken with you and then the pie can be made wherever you are. Just don't forget your pie server!

Low fat Pie Recipe

1 ½ cups cold milk. I use 2%.
1 (1ounce) package sugar-free instant pudding mix.
1 prepared graham cracker crust.
½-1 (8 ounce) container fat free Cool Whip.

Add milk and pudding mix into a large mixing bowl. Beat with wire whisk for 2 minutes. Spoon into pie crust and place in refrigerator to set. Once set, top with the amount of Cool Whip you prefer. Be sure to add chocolate sprinkles, shaved lemon peelings, or whatever you prefer on top. Store in the refrigerator.

This recipe can be used with any pudding flavor and sprinkles or topping. It's easy to make and easy to make in your own preferences. My kids grew up with me using chocolate pudding and sprinkles with this recipe. They didn't even realize it was low fat. You can also use a larger amount of pudding, just be sure to use an amount of milk that will thicken to pie consistency. – Carole

Apple pie is a favorite in our house, any time of year, not just in the fall. It's really the only pie I like! This particular recipe is called Easier than Apple Pie because it's simple and so tasty:

Ingredients:

1 refrigerated pie crust
¾ c sugar
2 T cornstarch
1 T ground cinnamon
4 c peeled thinly sliced apples (4 medium)
1 egg white slightly beaten
1 t sugar for glaze

Directions:

Prepare crust as directed on package. Place on foil lined baking sheet. Press out any folds.

Mix the sugar, cornstarch and cinnamon, toss with the apple. Spoon into center of crust spreading to 2 inches from the edge. Fold 2 inches of crust over the apples, pleating crust as needed. Brush crust with egg white, then sprinkle with 1 t sugar.

Bake in preheated oven 425 degrees – 20 minutes or until apples are tender. Cool slightly before serving. – Marcy

I am of the persuasion that [Impossible Pumpkin Pie](#) is not just for Thanksgiving, but for every day. If I had some in my refrigerator right now, I would be enjoying a slice of its creamy spicy good-ness, accompanied with a cup of fresh coffee. I make Impossible Pumpkin pie in a 9 x 13 glass baking dish, so there is plenty to serve my family...and have leftovers for snacking. It's a very easy dessert to make. I modify the recipe by using the larger can of pumpkin available at the store (or 2 regular cans), and I probably double the amount of pumpkin pie spice and vanilla, and I add about ½ cup of brown sugar, since those are some of my favorite flavors on the planet. Bon a petit! – Angela

I am not a huge fan of squash, but I am always trying to incorporate more vegetables into my diet. My Mother-in-law introduced this delicious dish to me years ago. It is similar to quiche, but uses much less egg and more vegetables. Who knew there were so many varieties of squash?

Ingredients:

4 cups thinly sliced zucchini	2 eggs
1/2 cup butter	
8 oz. shredded mozzarella cheese	
1 cup onion-chopped	1/2 tsp.
salt	
1/2 cup fresh chopped parsley (or 2 tbls dried)	1/2 tsp.
black pepper	
1/4 tsp. garlic powder	8 oz.
can crescent rolls	
1/4 tsp basil	
2 tsp. mustard	
Dash of oregano leaves	

Heat oven to 375 degrees. Saute onion and zucchini in butter until tender. Stir in parsley and seasonings. In a large bowl blend eggs and cheese. Stir in vegetable mixture. Separate dough into 8 triangles and place in 10" pie pan. Press over bottom and up sides to form crust. Pour vegetable mixture into crust. Bake 18-20 minutes at 375 degrees. Let stand 10 minutes then cut. Serves 6.

- Gina

Three Moms – Those Parties! – by Marcy Lytle

We asked the cousins this month to weigh in on how to manage all the parties, once their kids start being invited to more and more. How do they afford the gifts? How do they manage the calendar? It definitely becomes more of an issue as the kids age, because parties become more frequent and gifts more expensive. And leaving them at the house of a stranger...is it safe?

So, what's a mom to do?

Mom of Three

Parties my kids are invited to are a lot easier than doing our own parties. But that's for another month. When the kids were little, it was like a family event and we were all invited. But now, each kid is invited to individual parties from classmates. If we're close to the whole family, all of our kids get invited.

The boys don't want to go to a girl's party anyway, if their sister gets invited – it's no problem! And the two older kids now don't want to go to their younger brother's parties.

However, how many parties to attend can get out of hand and crazy! There are so many parties happening now that Covid is behind us. My daughter was invited to five parties in one month. That's crazy!

1. We always look at our calendar first. Family days or other events come first.
2. We look at our budget. I don't want my kids to not celebrate just because we don't have the best of funds. If we don't have the funds, the kids can sometimes draw the birthday friend a picture. I usually give them a budget of \$10, or I've been to parties where not every kid brings a gift. I try hard to budget in at least a little bit for gifts.
3. We look at whether or not parents or included or what type of party it is. Nothing has come up as being uncomfortable...yet. Thankful for that! Most include parents, so one of us stays. Also, sleepovers are starting with my daughter, and I must know the family and the parents.

Thankfully, we have good friends and families in our community. As we approach middle school...I might have a whole different answer!

Mom of Four

When our kids were younger, we all went together and stayed at the party because parent supervision was first! Now that we have a middle schooler and the others are older, sometimes they go on their own!

We have to know the parents and family very well. We recently moved, so this is more difficult at the moment. We go with them first, to get to know the families.

If the other siblings want to go, we tell them they will have their parties and special times later.

One difficult party type is sleepovers and slumber parties at other homes. We try to have most of them at our house, which is very exhausting!

As far as gifts, with four kids we really just let the kids pick out candy, maybe draw something or craft something...and that's it. We might pick up a \$5 gift card to Sonic or Braun's, as well. This simplifies and lessens the burden of choosing something that breaks the budget.

Mom of Two

Birthdays – I can't wait to hear the other two responses! Our girls are so young that most of our parties have been cousins or just a few friends – so we give an actual gift.

However, invitations are becoming more frequent now.

First of all, if we have no plans we try to make it to the party. But if something is going on, we just can't make the party. Our schedule is busy, so sometimes we cannot make it. We will have to make more decisions soon, I know!

Second, regarding gifts for all the parties, maybe our girls can start putting their allowance, etc. towards gifts. I have to think about this! I also have my girls make handwritten cards. And another thing is that we save our gifts bags. This is a great way to save on wrapping cost.

Affordable toys are pretty easy to find at the moment at Walmart, for little kids. They like anything. I'm sure that will change before long....

In the Kitchen – May Gatherings – by Marcy Lytle

This month would be a great time to host a Mother's Day get together for a few moms, invite a few friends over to enjoy a visit, or just to have a family night with a fun spread. We recently had friends over and served the following fun recipes that filled the table. Enjoy!

Spinach Artichoke Dip

We made this as one of our appetizers for watching the Oscars and really liked it. And I ate it during the week, as well. It's from a cute cookbook I found at Five Below called *Fabulous Food Boards* by Anna Helm Baxter.

- 8 oz softened cream cheese
- ½ c sour cream
- 2 cloves grated garlic
- ¼ t fresh ground black pepper
- ½ c finely grated Parmesan
- ½ c finely shredded white cheddar
- 1 can (14 oz) drained artichoke hearts, chopped
- 6 oz frozen spinach, thawed with excess liquid squeezed out

Preheat oven to 350 and lightly grease a 1 quart baking dish.

Combine the cream cheese, sour cream, garlic and black pepper in a medium mixing bowl. Add the Parm and cheddar, and mix. Fold in the artichokes and spinach, transfer to baking dish, and bake thoroughly – about 20 minutes. Serve warm. (Keep leftovers in fridge for up to a week.)

Sundae Bar

Easy to put together, and this will be a hit with your next family gathering. Use a large tray for arranging, and little containers for all the toppings.

Ice Cream (small containers for a variety, or one big tub of vanilla)

Toppings: toffee bits, crumbled Oreos, strawberries, dark chocolate peanut butter cups, Snickers, cherries with stems, mini chocolate chips, sprinkles, and caramel and chocolate syrups.

Arrange your pints of ice cream in an ice filled metal pan to keep them cold. Set out all the toppings.

Include waffle bowls and tiny wooden spoons, if you like!

Flavored Popcorns

Grab some pretty pastel bags and a wooden box for displaying these bags of four flavors of popcorn. Then set out little cups or bowls and scoops for serving.

- 12 cups popped corn
- 6 t olive oil
- Popcorn seasoning ideas: (use 1 T per each 2 cups of popcorn)
- Nutritional yeast
- Ranch seasoning
- Cheddar cheese powder
- Everything but the Bagel
- Cinnamon Sugar

In a large mixing bowl, toss 2 cups of popcorn with a t of olive oil and the seasonings of choice. Enjoy.

Mediterranean Board

This was my favorite thing for our last table where we served friends. It tasted so good, was all store bought, so it was easy in a pinch to prepare.

- Tzatziki dip
- Hummus
- ¼ c olive oil
- 2 T mixed peppercorns
- Pinch paprika
- 1 cup chickpeas, drained
- 3 large radishes thinly sliced
- Tortilla chips
- Red bell pepper, cut into sticks
- Cucumber cut into sticks
- Carrot, cut into sticks
- Kalamata olives
- Green olives
- Tomatoes cut into wedges
- Shredded red cabbage
- Fresh herbs for garnish
- Lemon slices
- Pita bread

Combine olive oil with 1 t lightly crushed peppercorns in a shallow bowl. Drizzle some over the hummus and dust with paprika. Top with a few chickpeas. Set the hummus in the middle.

Drizzle more of that mixture over the tzatziki. Set this to the side.

Moving in a clockwise direction, surround the hummus with the veggies and olives, etc.

Sprinkle with fresh herbs.

Serve with lemon slices and pita bread.

Biscuits and Jam

If you're having family for Mother's Day brunch or breakfast, a biscuit tray might be just the thing. This one was for the two of us, but it can be made for a big bunch!

- Buttermilk biscuits
- Butter
- Jam
- Strawberries
- Nuts
- Cheese
- Bacon

Make the biscuits (I just used canned) and then just arrange all of the items on pretty trays. Provide plates, napkins and juices for drinks. You're done!

Tried and True – Learning from last Month – by Marcy Lytle

Each month, I share little things to big things that I've observed or learned or taken in over the previous month's living. It's made me stop and realize that I'm learning and still growing, so I hope you are as well!

It's okay and so fun mixing bedding – not buying a “set.” Target has so many cool textures and colors and prints! Just pick one and start mixing!

Five Below Store has this book table, and sometimes cool books are there waiting to be bought! Like *Fabulous Food Boards* by Anna Helm Baxter!

Generous Women – by Earl Hamner (the guy who wrote *The Waltons*) – is a great read for the month of May.

M&M's pretzels – have you tried them? He didn't like them, but I did – a lot. Instead of a peanut inside, it's a pretzel!

A Sunday afternoon sitting by a body of water relaxing and doing nothing on a pretty day does wonders for the soul.

Chick Fil A has a side salad, and when eaten with their waffle potato chips, it's a yummy meal!

Have you checked out Mixtiles? I sent in my photos from my phone, they made the set of tiles, and I love them!

If you don't have Dijon mustard for a recipe, just mix yellow with brown mustard and it tastes great (used in a pasta salad!)

The Dollar Tree now has a \$5 aisle with fun things! Have you seen it?

CODA – the film that won “best picture” at the Oscars – is worth seeing twice! You need to put this movie on your watch list.

Bags of flavored popcorn are great to have for snacks next time the family gathers...Ranch dressing, Everything but the Bagel, - just mix with a bit of olive oil and then toss with the popped corn. I've included the recipes on the In the Kitchen page!

Sitting in a fancy hotel lobby is fun, it's a great place to people watch, and it's relaxing on a Sunday evening after a busy weekend. Try it!

Keep a razor in your car because the best place to shave your legs is when sunlight is streaming in – seriously – you won't miss a hair!

My sister told me that adding ½ cup to 1 cup of baking soda to your load of towels when washing makes them smell and feel SO good. I tried it, and it works!

When you just have a couple chicken breasts, some leftover veggies and one lone baked potato, throw it all on a sheet pan, season, bake – and you've got yourself a meal!

SUGAR + Spice

Whole in One

I get excited when I find things that make life easier, even just a little bit.

One of my long-time favorite beauty company, [the Balm](#), recently had one of their 50% sales, which sent me browsing through their on-line store where I found [The Balmbina](#) palette.

This palette is a sort of best-of the Balm products. It includes matte and shimmer eyeshadows (yessss), 2 blushes, a bronzer, and a highlighter, all in one cute eco-friendly package!

Originally, I broke my current “NO MORE PALETTES!” rule by purchasing this palette, because I wanted the combo of blush-bronzer-highlighter...three products in one package. Nice. But the shadows are as lovely and flattering as the face products.

Now, for my simplified everyday makeup, I just reach for this palette. Easy-peazy! This palette will definitely fit on the bamboo vanity, in my hut on my Deserted Island. Speaking of...

DESERTED ISLAND product of the month:

This month's highlighted product is a hair product that I use every day: [Suavecita Pomade](#). Not that I would do my hair if I lived on a deserted island, but really, who wants frizzy fly-away hair? I would want my beachy waves to be smooth, held back with a pink hibiscus flower tucked behind my ear...

Just a tiny dab on my fingertips tames the frizzy and flyaway hairs, however I style my hair. It's a medium hold pomade that adds shine, and has a lovely light scent. I also love that the Suavecito brand is an up-and-coming small business, who I like to support.

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](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie, and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at www.AngelaDolbear.com



HOME

Practical Parenting – Party in a Pinch – by Marcy Lytle

We missed a couple of family birthday gatherings for the littles because they were sick. And then my dad was in the hospital, and life got chaotic. We finally found a small window on a Saturday afternoon to have a quick “dessert” picnic with outside games and fun in a park. We didn’t have time for a big blowout, and yet we wanted the time to be full of family fun. So throwing an impromptu party isn’t so bad. Here’s how:

For the decorations:

Bandannas, as I’ve said before in other articles, are great for colored napkins and table décor, and they’re so cheap! Keep a drawer full, and pull them out for times like these...

Target has these cute plastic buckets with a stopper, great for packing in ice as a base for your cold food. And it looks great as a centerpiece.

Try stacking some of your food to give some height on the table, and use trays you have at home for the base.

Just pick up a Dollar Tree tablecloth and banner for the table.

For the fun:

Visit the dollar store and just pick up all the random outdoor activities you can find, like water guns, balloon tennis (wooden spoons taped to paper plates and balloons), scavenger hunt by hiding toys or dinos or candy, jump ropes, bug hunts, etc. They even have a \$5 aisle now with other games like huge checkers or ladder ball.

For the food:

Ask the birthday kids and adults their favorite desserts, and then have a tray full of options. The 8 year old likes cheesecake, and adults do too, so a frozen array of different kinds worked! The 7 year old and his brother asked for chocolate donuts. That’s so easy, as well! And finally, ice cream was a favorite, so that package of little individual cups was the easiest.

Use a cake stand or large tray to display the donuts, by making a pyramid.

Place the slices of cheesecake on a board.

Set the ice creams in a bowl of ice, to keep them cold.

Provide any toppings you like, cute wooden spoons, and you’re done!

We didn’t have a lot of time to prepare or even have the party, but it all worked. The table was colorful and inviting, the games were family connections, and the family time was needed and a blessing!

I Don't Do Teenagers – Their Responsibility – by Marcy Lytle

Someone recently asked me if we made our kids pay for their insurance, once they got a car. And I honestly couldn't recall. I know some parents do require this of their teens, once they have a job and a steady income. Other parents cover this cost for them. Is either one the "right way" to give our teens responsibility and make it theirs? I'm not sure there is a "right way" when it comes to giving our teens responsibility, but there are some things to think about that will help us make the choice.

Home Chores

My own parents felt like, when we were teens and studying hard in schoolwork, our home chores were minimal. However, when I married I did not know how to do very many things, and right away ruined a load of clothes with bleach! Other parents have their teens ready to manage and entire household by the time they graduate. The first option can leave a kid inept, and the second can be a heavy load.

Chores are good, healthy to learn, and great for kids to manage – but grace needs to be extended when their lives are full. Just like we need grace from time to time, so do they.

Car Insurance and Gas

If our teens have a job they can manage and still be present with the family and get their school work done, then more power to them to pay for their insurance and gas. Of course, we want to teach them responsibility. And if they're old enough to drive a car, they're old enough to afford the upkeep. Yes! However, an occasional gift card for gas and a surprise payment from Mom and Dad are great rewards for jobs well done and responsibility well taken.

Car upkeep is expensive, and while teens need to become adults – they can do this slowly – rather than abruptly. If parents pay for gas and insurance, parents have leverage if cars aren't driven properly and used responsibly. That's something to think about, as well.

Cleaning Rooms

Oh, how many parents can give a "high five" to the times you've had knockdown drag-outs with your kids over that messy place they call their room? Sometimes, parents have one kid that enjoys tidying up and there's no problem. But almost every family has one or more kid that cannot keep his/her room clean, no matter how many sticky notes, reminders, threats and punishments are made for not keeping that floor tidy, the room smelling clean, the bed made, and closets neat.

If your kid works well with a calendar, help him make one with days to clean, to tidy, etc. If your teen needs help because he doesn't know where to start, offer a hand once a week and model how to organize and clean. If your teen's room resembles the dump, sit and have a talk and make a plan and set boundaries until changes are made.

For us, clean rooms were non-negotiables because rooms are part of a house, in which the entire family lives and breathes...together.

Homework

How much does a parent step in and help their teens with homework? I often sat with my kids late at night helping them finish math homework, or helping them outline a story, or gather materials for a project. I loved being involved because it allowed me to see what they were learning. And I was found coloring a map with my son, because I thought that quite a mundane homework assignment for a high schooler! But actually doing their homework for them teaches them nothing!

Some kids are just managers of time, papers and schedules...and others are not...just like adults. Use your own skills to help them with due dates, scheduling out how much to read per night in order to finish a book, and ways to keep their backpacks organized so they can find that assignment they know they completed.

I'm a big proponent of parents modeling behavior they want their kids to learn, even in the teen years. We may not think they're watching and still learning then, but they most definitely are. It will be exasperating and some of the skills we're so adept at, our kids won't ever get it. They're cut from the same cloth as we are, but often the way their patterns develop are different. And some things we give them responsibility for will never fully mature until they're long gone and have a home of their own.

Each teen is different, and we can only do our best. Talk to them, pray with them, lead and guide them, and learn to let go a little, pull back a little, and continue to walk beside them all of their lives. It's not easy...so give yourself some grace, too!

An Adage a Day - Just Fiddling Around – by Carole Gilbert

I have always loved string instruments of all kinds. I played the drums but always wished I had learned to play a violin or guitar. I did try to teach myself the guitar and learned a few chords, but my favorite string instrument is the violin or viola, also known as fiddles. My daughter took viola lessons in fifth grade. And I will say learning to play requires determination, patience, and hard work. And that's for the ones listening, also!

It's interesting to note that the term "fiddle" refers to all stringed instruments. And this term evolved, in a round and about way, from the Roman goddess of joy and victory, Vitula. This helps us know how the term, fiddle, refers to feeling that all is well and good, or fit. Thus, along came the term, "fit as a fiddle."

And becoming fit as a fiddle is like learning to play one, or any instrument for that matter. It takes time and hard work. And the older you get, the harder it becomes unless you are one of those women who have never had a problem with being in shape, like one of our sweet writers that I won't name but whose initials are KS. I have never been one of those women. When I was nine, I weighed 130 pounds, not much less than I do now. But I have worked at being fit. I haven't had the victory of it yet, but I have felt the joy of trying.

This phrase is over 400 years old, starting in the 1600's in the British English language. "Fit as a fiddle" doesn't only mean to be in shape but to be well maintained, to be fresh as a daisy, not run down, or out of sorts, much like a musician keeps his instrument. When it first began, it was thought to have been used to describe a string instrument that had been tuned and kept in good shape for the sole purpose of being ready to play beautifully for those listening. Hence, the instrument was fit as a fiddle.

Ironically, my shape is pretty much like a fiddle, maybe even a guitar, but I know my physical state is not all that's important. My spiritual shape needs to be more fit as a fiddle, maintained every day to the fullest for joy and victory. I can't find a Bible verse that puts being fit along with string instruments together, but I can find lots of Bible verses about these two topics separately. This tells me that being "fit as a fiddle" is important to God. And we definitely know how important our joy and victory, through Jesus, are to Him.

Have you ever heard the song, "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" by The Charlie Daniels Band?

In the song, Johnny beats Satan in a fiddle playing duel. He wins Satan's golden fiddle and doesn't lose his soul. I'm sure Johnny had to be somewhat fit as a fiddle to outplay Satan and his fired-up fingertips. So, I'm encouraged by this song. And every time I hear it or just think about it, I want to jump to my feet and move around or dance! I may not play like Johnny, and my shape may look like a fiddle but I'm full of joy and victory because my determination and my soul belong to God.

Tiny Living – Dogs and Deer – by Leyanne Enterline

CAUTION...Beware animal lovers, a not so good ending...

Living tiny with big dogs is a bit difficult at times. These high energy dogs must be let out and given opportunities to run quite a bit! One activity that the pups enjoy is unfortunately chasing deer. However, our pets are herding dogs and it's in their blood to "herd." Usually, they work together with each of them coming at a different angle to keep the group of deer together. The deer then often all jump over the fence and escape, and the dogs feel like they've declared their purpose in life by keeping us all safe from these intruders!

One normal night we let the pups out to have their fun, and things took a turn for the worse. There were two groups of deer on the property that night. One called axis to the left front, and the white tail in the middle. As the dogs started running to do their herding activity, I think they were confused at how many deer there actually were. All of a sudden, chaos took place! Deer started running from all directions, and one dog ducked as a deer leaped high into the air over him.

I was screaming, "Hide!"

I hid behind a cedar tree, the kids beside the car and tree. I felt like we were in a production of *The Lion King*, and Tucker, the one dog that was having a hay day running as fast as he could all over the place, was the lion, and the deer were the gazelles he was after.

Finally, the fiasco lessened and we couldn't find Tucker. All we could hear was the ear piercing scream of a dying animal. It was heartbreaking and terrifying. We didn't know exactly what had happened and which animal was harmed. We had to take the truck up to the front of the property and stay clear of whatever could be coming our way. As we yelled out for Tucker, we finally saw his tail waving in the bushes. These dogs have a funny skunk-like tail and it sort of pops back and forth. If they're happy to see us, it's more of a helicopter spin. This time it was different. It seemed as though he was okay, but definitely what he had experienced was not okay. We finally called him off the creature and realized Tucker was covered in blood. We quickly put him away and checked on what he had attacked.

In not so gruesome details, a beautiful young axis did not make it. We think it was too small to jump over our fence and catapulted backwards leaving an easy target for Tucker. From the looks of it, it looked like a normal dog just trying to grab hold of an animal that was an intruder on his space. I don't think it was actually going to be his meal, just more like,

"Look guys! I saved y'all!"

After checking Tucker thoroughly and washing him off, he was totally fine and ready to play as usual.

It was an extremely eventful night that I pray we never have to relive again. We have learned that allowing the pups to chase the deer is not the best idea and we will keep them apart as best we can. However, that hasn't stopped them from going after the ever so fast lizards, bunnies, and birds...

Remember love grows best in tiny spaces!

A Night to Remember – A Mom’s Blessing – by Marcy Lytle

What better month of the year to affirm your kiddos than May, the month that celebrates motherhood! Yes, we love to be doted on with cards and gifts and food, but what if we moms doted on our children with the kind of affirmation found in the Word? SO FUN!

Preparation: Have a praise song you all know picked out for listening, a fresh loaf of bread for sharing, a bow and arrow from the dollar store if you can find one (if not, just print out one) or a game of darts for playing, and olives/cheese/toothpicks for snacking.

Psalm 8:2 *Through the praise of **children** and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.*

Did you know that when you kids praise the Lord this shuts the mouths of all your enemies, like fear or whispers of lies in your ears? What are some of your biggest fears?

- Play a praise song and sing it together with the kids.

Psalm 37:5 *I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their **children** begging bread.*

The righteous are those that believe and love the Lord. He promises that he will provide all that we need. And that he will never leave us.

- Share the bread with each child and give thanks.

Psalm 90:16 *May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their **children**.*

Splendor means magnificent. Like a beautiful sunset! What is magnificent to you in God’s creation?

- If possible, go outside and observe His splendor together.

Psalm 115:14 *May the LORD cause you to flourish, both you and your **children**.*

To flourish is to grow happily and healthily, to thrive! It’s only through a relationship with the Lord that we can be like a tree planted by a river with beautiful leaves that wave in the wind.

- Affirm each child in an area where you see growth.

Psalm 127:4 *Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are **children** born in one’s youth.*

Wow, you’re like arrows. That means you’re sharp, pointed in the right direction, and aimed at a target. But Mom/Dad have to guide you and keep you pointed in that direction. We love you and are pleased when you obey, and grow. It’s then that you will be like an arrow, aimed for the target! What is the target? You’ll learn as you grow.

- Give each child a bow and arrow, or demonstrate how to use. Or just play darts!

Psalm 128:3 *Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your **children** will be like olive shoots around your table.*

An olive tree has growth around the base...it's like you kids growing out of the base of your family tree...connected and rooted in the Truth of the Word...growing up and producing fruit. We pray for you daily that you will grow in the knowledge of how much God loves you and others!

- Share olives and cheese, with toothpicks, for a snack.

Mom's prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for my children, the best gift in life. I ask that they know you as their Father, the giver of all good things, and that they grow in their relationship with you. May they feel and know your love and protection, and offer that same love to those around them. And may they be like arrows and olive shoots, growing and sending forth your love to the world. Give them each day your daily bread, and may they always observe the sunrise and the sunset, the splendor of who you are. Thank you for my children and I trust them into your good hands. - Amen

Chipped China – Snail Face – by Jennifer Lytle

I recently visited a restroom in the building where there was a basket (or two) on the counter with multitudinous items for visitors. Everything from gum to pantyhose or hairspray had been purchased in mini sizes and set out.

“How nice!” I thought.

If I found myself in need of bobby pins, there were some! Among the various pieces, I noticed a foil, holographic package. The package was attractive. After reading the label, two thoughts occurred to me.

“Am I on candid camera?”

“I’d like to try this for my face.”

After that second thought, I wondered about my simple-minded attraction to this odd commodity. The lotion was called Snail Technology and though the packaging was possibly mesmerizing, it showcased a weird messaging. Ingredients included snail mucus. Snail mucus? Really? Am I so desperate for a new face lotion?

Maybe you've never been tempted to put snail mucus on your face, but have you ever found yourself following the most recent trend? Do you remember ever wearing a pair of overalls backward? Perhaps you teased and feverishly sprayed hairspray in your hair only to cry and cringe later, trying to brush out the tangles purposely pushed into your follicles.

These examples might be funny, but there is currently a vicious onslaught against feminine beauty.

Certainly, this isn't the first round of perverting what is pure and innocent in regards to women. My husband and I can recognize symptoms of the struggle that is currently brewing just beneath the surface and spilling out for some young girls because we have a daughter.

It's a difficult time to be female. The attacks are multitudinous.

Christians are instructed to "be transformed" and cautioned against "conform[ing] any longer to the pattern of this world" in [Romans 12:2](#). The New Living translation admonishes, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world."

May the Lord help you and your daughters navigate this world with true beauty and grace.

Jesus, help me too!

Amen.



YOU

Inner Strength - Breathe... - by Michelle Wyatt

Some say “just breathe” when we need to feel better. Well, there is no such thing as “just breathe,” because the word “just” makes it sound like breathing is easy and unimportant. Effective breathing is anything but. What is effective breathing?

Effective breathing can transcend us from faking a smile to sincerely smiling. (Faking a smile takes less energy than frowning and research has shown it increases serotonin in the brain. So, faking a smile is a good place to start.) Personally, effective breathing keeps my stress in check and protects my kids from unfairly getting the brunt of what’s not about them.

There are strategies to effective breathing that I have learned from various sources such as mentors, counselors, books, and even coaches.

Box breathing: Inhale for a count of four and hold for 2, exhale for a count of 4 and hold for 2. Repeat 4 times

Diaphragm breathing: Consciously inhale through your diaphragm (you should see it go up)

Deep breath, turn your head to the right, then exhale strong and quick over your shoulder.

5 finger breathing: This is a great one for kids that I learned from their coach. You hold up one of your hands and breathe as you trace your fingers with your other hand. More specifically, you inhale when you trace up and exhale when you trace down. That’s what keeps the pace of your breathing.

Blowing into a pretend balloon: Make a fist leaving a small opening. Take a deep breath in, put your mouth up to the hole, and blow out hard all the while envisioning your worries leaving you and opening your heart and mind to the blessings around us.

Now, since breathing is an involuntary motion that keeps alive, we seldom (at least I know I don’t) ask ourselves, “How am I breathing?” I’ve discovered that the more I do these breathing techniques, the more aware I get of how my breathing is when I start to feel stressed. This awareness leads to a more proactive approach to emotion regulation through effective breathing than to a reactive approach.

The heart gets tired and drained. When I find myself exhaling loudly, without inhaling in, that is my biggest cue that my heart and soul are out of balance i.e. I have thoughts and feelings that need attention. I am often unable to process those thoughts and feelings immediately, so I use a breathing technique to get me through. For example, when I want quiet time, but the boys are hungry, I breathe on my way to the kitchen and while in the kitchen, to get through that time of day until maybe in the evening I can journal, pray out loud, cry, etc.

I encourage all of us to reflect on the following questions...What is your biggest cue? When do you most find this coming up? What breathing technique will you do today? Most importantly, remember...

The heart breathes deep to every moment that we follow Him.

Life in a Nutshell – No More Missing Out – by Jill Montz

I spend a lot of time alone in my car. Whether I am driving for work or waiting on my kid to get out of school or practice, I spend several hours a day on average behind the wheel. Several years ago, I decided to make the most of this opportunity, and I began to listen to audio books or podcasts any time I was alone in the car. While I still have not mastered a new language yet, I have learned many things in my SUV classroom.

Most of my selections fall into a few categories: Business, Health and Wellness, Personal Development, Spiritual Growth, and just a few Comedy and Fiction options thrown in for the days when my brain just needs a break.

One morning I had on a weight loss podcast, and the host was talking about how our minds are the first battleground for weight loss. Nothing new, there. I had heard that before. But then she interviewed a woman who had a family member fighting cancer, and the woman was saying how most days she just wants to drown her sorrows in wine and unhealthy food choices because she knows the struggles and difficulties this disease will bring.

The host went on to talk to the woman about “unnecessary suffering,” and how we as a society do a lot of “pre-mourning and pre-grieving” when we future cast doom and gloom situations in life. Our brains think they are protecting us by giving us all the worst case scenarios to prepare us for what MIGHT happen. But in reality, whether a person dies suddenly or the process is drawn out over time, we all “hurt equally when they are gone.”

This information made me have to pull my car over, dig around for a pen, and grab a drive-thru napkin to jot down some of these truth bombs. I was just shouting *yes, Yes, YES* in my car as traffic flew by at 75 mph. I wanted to plaster my napkin against my driver’s side window and get the attention of all those on the road that they needed to hear what was coming out of this woman’s mouth.

So often I have grieved for people, places, and things...WHILE I WAS STILL WITH THEM! So often I have missed out on the good stuff, while dreading the upcoming bad stuff. Guess what? The bad stuff still came, it still hurt, and it still brought me to my knees in agony. No amount of “pre-grieving” helped ease the pain when the time came to say goodbye, let go, walk away, give up, etc.

I know I do this with my daughter, Dotty. She is my one and only child and since the day I realized she would be my “first and last” of just about every major parenting event in my life I started “pre-mourning” the big milestones.

Her first day of school...was my last first day of school.

Her first softball practice...was my last first softball practice.

Her first school dance...was my last first school dance.

Her last day of elementary school...was my only last day of elementary school.

As she is wrapping up middle school...I too will never be the parent of a middle schooler again. As she gets ready for her high school days...I am facing four fast years and then high school is over for me as a parent.

I don’t get another shot at this parenting thing and the truth is I have been doing lots of it wrong by focusing on how sad it is, while it is flying by each day. I have joked with my staff for years

that I won't start crying the first day of Dotty's senior year...I will start the first day of her freshman year because I know I don't get to cry again over another child so I need to get all the tears in. It is sort of a joke...but sort of not.

With every milestone she reaches I can't help but clap with one hand as my other tries to hold her back (or at least hold onto her a little while longer). And the truth is clapping with one hand is not very loud or effective. I miss out on fully celebrating and enjoying the moments because I am also being sad about the future moments that aren't here yet.

I realize I can be happy and sad at the same time. I know those emotions are closely related. But I also know no matter how many hours I spend imagining how sad I will be the day I come home from dropping her off at college won't ease the pain on the actual day. On that day, I won't have stocked up enough tears to cry less. I won't have felt the hurt in my heart enough to feel lonely less. I won't have worried enough minutes to worry less. Those emotions will come and no prep ahead of time will slow down the waves that will wash over me.

Since I am writing this article in advance of its due date (because my daughter does live her best life and keeps me very busy in the spring), when this goes to print it will be the month of May. Dotty will be walking out of the halls of middle school and into the auditorium of high school for orientation. She will have participated in her last middle school sporting and extracurricular events. She will have taken her last middle school field trip. She will be making plans for the summer camps and time with friends and telling me all about her plans to get her learner's permit to drive SOON.

She will be excited about the events as they come and the events to come. And I pray I have learned to be excited, as well.

For it is written in Ecclesiastes 3:1 & 4:

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...a time to weep,
and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance...”

I don't want to miss the laughing and the dancing because I am too busy weeping and mourning for the things to come. So I plan to live, love, laugh, and dance my way through all the great moments God blesses me with when it comes to Dotty. Because I know the sad times will come and there will be plenty of time to be sad when they do.

But until then...I hope I dance!

I know Dotty will be thrilled. She loves my dance moves like only an almost 15-year-old girl can!

Health Habits – Cautionary Tales – by Marcy Lytle

Aging is a privilege and has so many perks. However, aging is definitely a challenge as the body gets older but it wants to do what it wants to do! I titled this article Cautionary Tales because I'm offering caution to those of you at any age, really, as you mature and grow older...and wiser. These are tales from living several decades on this earth, and I'm sure you have your own to add, as well!

Walking upstairs can be hard on the knees at times. I've found that placing my feet flat and pushing with my thighs, instead of feeling the climb with my knees, is so much better!

Dust collects over the years in places you'd never think to look! We recently remodeled and I think we had enough dust to create another Adam! *Check under and behind your beds*, above baseboards in closets, and other hidden places...and dust. It might be a healthy thing to do.

There's a verse in the Bible that says we are to *love His ways*. And I've found that despising God's ways (waiting to answer, saying no, etc.) is unhealthy in so many aspects. Learning to trust and love His ways, without understanding, now that's life-changing!

They tell us to bend our legs to lift, but I never heard to *bend straight-on* and not at an angle! I bent to lift a mattress to tuck a sheet, at an angle – and popped out my back! Lesson learned.

Get rid of the mandoline. Okay, maybe you're proficient at using that finger snapper, but I am not. And I tried buying one twice, several years apart, but never again. That slicer is a beast! (Never could figure out how to use the guard properly).

Quit wearing pointed toe heels when you start to feel the pain. I've found that pointed toe flats aren't nearly as bad, but the heels – they will do a number on your toes that might be painful AND irreversible. There are lots of cute sneakers and flats – learn to love them!

Vary your workouts. Youtube has great exercise (and dance) video options, sunny days call for walks in the neighborhood and parks, and listening to music is a great motivator to dance. Vary what you do, and do it daily.

Elderly people seem to suffer physically from dehydration and just refuse to drink water. So make it a habit NOW. It doesn't take long until you actually *prefer water over soft drinks* and other beverages. Lots of water, always. It cleanses and hydrates and just makes your body smile.

When you're tired, rest. It makes no one happy if you're running on low fuel and sputtering expletives and giving nasty looks, all because you're overworked and haven't stopped to take a break. You might need a friend to help you with this one...

I still see people doing it – looking at their phone while they're walking. *Don't do it*. Place it out of sight. That person can wait 60 seconds until you're safely across the street or parking lot, where you can stand still and text.

Those are just a few reminders of things I have to remind myself of, sometimes daily! It's wise to listen to our bodies, but also wise to listen to tales of others that have fallen and hurt themselves, and noted what caused them to fall.

Here's to a healthy month of new habits for all of us...ones that change our lives for the better.

Life Right Now - Fairy Tale Endings - by Jennifer Stephens

Once upon a time, in a land far, far from perfect lived a little girl with caramel-colored ringlets flowing down the back of her frilly ruffled dress. The kind of dress with a teeny bell sewn into the hem that jingled when she twirled. Her days were spent mothering baby dolls, listening to her favorite fairy tales, and baking snickerdoodles with her mom. Throughout her early years she was often asked what she wanted to be when she grew up. The answer was always the same. She had one dream. To be a mom.

As each year slipped into the next, the little girl grew up, always keeping that dream tucked inside her heart.

One day the young girl set off to find a prince. Like many young girls, she had to kiss a few frogs before finally finding the prince meant for her. A lot of those frogs took a flying leap when they learned of her dream (frogs can be such scaredy cats), but this time it seemed she'd finally met the right one.

The prince and the girl married and lived in a charming home in the middle part of a midwestern town. They were busy enjoying life together, but as each month fell into the next without an announcement from the lovely couple, the townspeople (who were always digging their noses into everybody else's business) began to worry. Relax, they insisted (Maybe she could relax if everyone would stop bugging her all the time!). It'll happen when you stop trying, they suggested. Just adopt, they offered (there is no "just" in adopting). With each bit of unsolicited advice, the evil disappointment dragon emerged, attempting to break the girl's spirit. But she prayed. She prayed as she planned baby showers for friends. She prayed as tears rushed down her cheeks. She prayed as the year's ticked by, one after another. The reality of her dream coming true began to feel impossible. She still longed to be a mom. Even as she waited, she trusted in God's plan for her.

The years turned into decades when suddenly a fairy godmother (who must have been an angel sent straight from Heaven) appeared. The girl, now a middle-aged woman, was teaching the children's Sunday school class at church and this visitor, who'd never been seen there before and would never be seen there again, asked the exact same question everyone asked when meeting her for the very first time. This mysterious lady asked if she had any children. Slightly annoyed about being asked this question yet again, this time she didn't plaster a fake smile on her face or give an overly enthusiastic response about having two furry dogs. This time she uttered a disgruntled NO.

Then, without even a bibbidi-bobbidi-boo, this angel pulled her aside and immediately prayed that if God's answer to this prayer is no, that He remove this desire from her heart. And He did. Eventually. She felt something shift inside and she knew that letting go of this dream would free her heart to take hold of something new.

The ferocious dragon of defeat occasionally reared his ugly head, breathing his fiery breath. She learned to guard her heart against the ruthless dragon (he tended to show up at otherwise joyous occasions, which was quite troublesome). While his attempts to attack her steadfast trust in God's plan were fierce, she held tight to His promises. Even though she would never create snickerdoodle memories with her own kids, she fully accepted God had something more in store for her.

It wasn't the fairy-tale ending she'd anticipated, but with God in their hearts she and her prince (and their pups) lived together happily ever after...

Moral of the story:

It's easy to trust God when everything is going our way, but He wants our trust even when it isn't. God knows better than we do. When it feels like He isn't answering our prayers, it isn't that He's ignoring us, it might be that the answer is simply 'no.' Not because we've done something wrong or didn't pray hard enough, but because He sees beyond what we can see. His 'no' is a merciful no, even when it hurts.

The other moral of the story:

Be compassionate as we celebrate mothers on Mother's Day this year. This can be a difficult day for some - those that have lost their mothers, have difficult relationships with their mothers, are longing to be mothers and those never meant to be mothers.

Under Pressure - The Children's Bread – by Debbie Haynes

There's a story in Matthew 15: 21-28 where Jesus had just been in Jerusalem trying to tell his followers and the religious people around him about their hypocritical ways. He spoke about how it's not what goes into a mouth that defiles a man, but rather what comes out of the mouth. The listeners just didn't get it!

Jesus then moves on to Greece, seeking out Jews lost in their sin – the ones he came to save first. And one humble Greek woman rushed to where Jesus was, because she was totally desperate. It seemed that her daughter was completely taken by some demonic power over which she had no control. This unnamed Greek woman had to cross some serious social barriers, stigmas and racial discrimination and place herself where she was clearly unwanted. We know this, because Jesus' followers were completely compassionless for this woman and displayed great disdain for her. They even told Jesus to get rid of her, because she was such a bother.

In spite of the obstacles, this mother pressed in, and because she fully recognized Jesus, her prayer and her actions completely contrasted the hypocrisy of those Jesus had just been speaking with. And her prayer was so different from the arrogant, agenda-driven prayers of the religious society.

- Her prayer was short
- Her prayer was not puffed up
- Her prayer was humble
- Her prayer was desperate
- Her prayer was respectful
- Her prayer was so worshipful she fell at Jesus' feet.
- Her prayer was full of understanding and faith

At first, Jesus answered her by telling her it wasn't proper for her to take the Children's Bread – that which was meant for the Jew, first. He was testing her faith by making this statement. Jews often referred to her kind as dogs, as that term was often used to identify by that culture unsavory things. But here, it was used to indicate someone outside of their "rights."

In Matthew 7:6 Jesus says...give not that (bread) which his holy bread to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, unless they trample them...

The Bread represented all the Messiah came to bring – salvation, healing, deliverance, etc. And children had rights in that day – family rights of the firstborn, legal rights to inheritance, divine rights from covenant with God and redemptive rights. And this woman, knowing her position in the culture, that she did not qualify to receive the children's rights, did know her rights as a dog – a Gentile! She knew that she could scrape crumbs of bread from the floor and that bread would be enough for her daughter's healing, because they were from the Son of God.

What faith!

Jesus was moved by this mother's faith and marveled at her, and commended her, and gave her exactly what she asked for. The mother's daughter was healed that very moment.

When we believe strongly for something and we don't get what we believe for, it's hard. There's a verse in James 4 that says God gives more grace to the humble...like this mother. Her faith was tested. A little non-Jew, Greek lady expressed complete trust in Jesus.

Jesus' bread is all-encompassing; not a partial healing, but it covers our whole being for our needs – all of them – in this life and for eternity. The Children's Bread is ours – not just crumbs – the whole loaf for whatever we need.

Matthew 7 says if we ask it will be given to us. If we knock, it will be opened. And if we seek, we will find. And then Jesus states that if we know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our Father give good gifts to those that ask?

Let's pray humbly, like this Grecian mom, as we offer faith that catches His attention. And let's recognize that Jesus' love, death and resurrection for us all gives us legal right to the Children's Bread...not just the crumbs.



MARRIAGE

In This Together – Taco Love – by Bekah Holland

As I'm pretty sure everyone on the planet has heard someone talk about Love Languages, I'm about to add another for you. In case you're one of the four people who've managed to avoid these, I'll break them down into the most relatable terms.

1. Words of Affirmation: Your tacos are delicious
2. Acts of Service: I made you tacos
3. Receiving Gifts: Here's a taco
4. Quality Time: Let's go out for tacos together
5. Physical Touch: Let me hold you like a taco

Now, I'll be honest. I was embarrassingly far into adulthood before I figured out what my love language really is. What makes me feel seen and cared for. *Be better, y'all*. Thus, what emerged is the taco scenario that we can all identify with. I always thought that my love language was of the, "Your tacos are delicious" variety. Also maybe, "Let's go out for tacos together." Really, I thought I was (as my mother assumed I would be) a bit high maintenance and encompassed all of the love languages, both taco and otherwise.

It turns out, however, that it was a bit more likely that I just didn't know myself at all. I was a relatively emotionally aware kid. And I assumed I was as a grown up person. But getting married, having kids, epically failing at life, hitting some peaks, a few more epic failings, and I realized that what I assumed was neatly summed up in the wise words of Nitya Prakash, "Adulthood is like looking both ways before crossing the street and then getting hit by an airplane." So while the pandemic has been horrendous in most other ways, it did provide me with a desperation so overwhelming, that I had no choice but to figure out how to better fill my cup....or at least plug the hole that it seemed to be leaking through.

After a few (many) complete and utter breakdowns, I realized that while I love gifts and love giving them, what I really needed was "I made you tacos" kind of love. Even more importantly, "I saw you were having a rough day, so I did the dishes, vacuumed, fed the kids and poured you an adult beverage so maybe you can breathe" love. It turns out, a lot of my inability to manage the chaos of my emotions and feeling of dread thinking about anything at all really stemmed from misunderstanding myself and what I needed.

I feel seen when my husband sees something that needs to be done and just does it. He's always been great and telling me how much he appreciates me and all I do. And I need that, too. But when we both realized what I was really missing it was a game changer! Is it always perfect? No. Some proof being the dishes strike I've been on in an attempt to outwait my teenager, the basket of laundry that's been sitting on the floor waiting to be folded because, well, laundry is straight from the depths of hell, and I will claim that until Jesus comes. But because my partner in this crazy life is actively working to see me, and find ways to make me feel safe, loved and appreciated, everything else is just not as big of a deal.

I'm more in love with my husband than any other time in our relationship. It's because we are both striving to see each other, fill each other's love tank, give each other the attention and even space when that's what we need. And some days the dishes don't get done (okay, lots of days). Some days, we (I) forget about the vegetables we (I) bought and died a slow and smelly death in the crisper. Some days, we get it all done and enjoy it for the seven minutes it lasts before the pre and not so pre-teens start running steadily through our house again.

We feel lighter, because we aren't always running on empty any more. And when we are, we know we aren't alone, that we're more together, and that there is still sunshine peeking through in the form of the little things that matter to us both.

And love.

Knowing that this love keeps growing, and changing and filling the empty spaces, makes the dirty dishes and astronomical grocery bills and teenage angst a little bit easier to trudge through.

So, lean in. Lean in to find out what version of the taco love language makes you feel the best, makes you smile like only tacos can, fills your soul as much as your belly.

"Love is a two way street constantly under construction."

Carroll Bryant

Date Night Fun – Beautiful Walks – by Marcy Lytle

This is the time of year to incorporate walks into date nights with him. Before the summer heat is on, after the chilly nights are gone, and while the month of May is here. Walking together can be one of the most intimate, thrilling, romantic activities to do with him. It doesn't have to be mundane or something to dread, but rather beautiful and calming and pleasant and all the things! Here are five different types of walks to encourage you to step out together and go:

Find a park – Search parks in your area that have trails. It doesn't have to be a super long trail, just a place where you can walk. Pack a lunch, and go. If there's a pond in the park and benches along the trail, that's even better. Stop and watch the ducks, skip rocks, look at people, and just observe. Parks are a great place to visit in the month of May where people abound and the sun shines. Talk about nothing, just breathe and hold hands, and enjoy the day and the food you've prepared.

Find a mall – an outdoor one, preferably. On this date, take a stroll through the entire mall (we like the outlets) and then on your second or third time around stop in a few stores. Maybe you'll get an Auntie Anne's pretzel, browse for a new shirt for him, or sandals for you. Be sure to drink lemonade with that pretzel! It might be fun to take in a movie on the way home...

Find a neighborhood – There's this subdivision near us that has a long walkway with pretty lights and landscaping that we enjoy walking, especially just before dark. Nearby that walkway is a small pond with a fountain and green grass besides. We have met another couple there a few times to walk and chat, to sit and snack. It's a great way to have a date night out to watch the stars as they appear, when the night goes dark.

Find a track – Is there a high school near you with a track on which you can walk? Step on the track and begin your walk, and talk about your own high school days. What did you like about high school, or dread? Who was your best friend? Your worst subject? It's easy to track your mileage when you're on a track, because four times around – and you've walked a mile. Sit in the stands, eat dark chocolate and nuts – sipping on cold tea from a thermos. Enjoy!

Find a lake – There are lots of lakes near us, and walking by the lake is a joy any time of the day. This time, take some reading material to enjoy after you walk, and some outdoor chairs. Pack a hat, too. Don't have one? Stop to buy one before you go! And even consider taking a kite to fly if there's an open field near the lake to run. Lake dates are the best.

Walking. It's good for the body, but it's also good for the two bodies, minds and souls, as well!

After 40 Years – The Farmers Market – by Marcy Lytle

It's one of our favorite weekend activities if we're in town and the weather's nice...going to the Farmer's Markets. We choose different ones, depending on what we've got planned for the rest of the day. And we enjoy the outing, both of us for different reasons.

I enjoy browsing the fresh vegetables for meals I might make next week.

He loves purchasing a cup of hot coffee to drink while he's walking around.

I like to see if any artisans have set up a booth with cute bags or jewelry.

He always gravitates toward the fresh honey booth, because he is always in need of more.

I love taking our cloth bags (if we remember) because that's just plain fun.

He likes packing the cooler to bring (if we remember) in case we buy refrigerated items.

I like walking outside in the sunshine among all the people and the goods.

He likes seeing how many tents there are, and talking to the vendors.

What I'm saying is...we enjoy this same activity but for totally different reasons.

There might be some activity we think of doing with our spouses but we think he won't like to tag along, or will be bored. And while that's true some of the time, it's not true all of the time.

I enjoy the Farmer's Market, but especially with Jon. I also love the colors of the fresh produce piled up in rows, and discovering some new vegetable I've never used before. Micro Greens were a new discovery for me a few years ago. He loves trying out all of the local flavors of roasted coffee makers in our area, and I love watching him taste them all.

And then...after the Farmer's Market...on lazy Saturdays or Sunday afternoons, we often walk more. One particular market is in a park, so there's a nice trail to take after we've shopped. And if we've purchased other goodies, like homemade soap or a cool new purse, then we enjoy putting everything away.

I know lots of married couples that go their separate ways when out, maybe she goes shopping and he goes golfing. And that's great! But it's also great and fun to find things we love to do together...differently...and yet the same.

I'm not a fan of growing old and apart, but rather of growing together and closer. Any activity where we can hold hands, smile, enjoy the sun on our backs, and find lots of fun new things is a winner in my book.

The other place you'll find the two of us holding hands is at the movies! But that story is for another time...

Here's to weekends of Farmer's Markets and sunshine this month of May...

For Better or Worse – Two Are One – by Kaelin Scott

Marriage isn't always noteworthy or extravagant,
but it is always significant.

Some seasons of marriage may feel mundane or boring. Nothing more than surviving each day together and meeting our family's needs. But I think that's kind of the beauty of it. No matter the season of life, whether the dry ones or the bountiful ones, marriage is a partnership. It takes on many forms, morphing to whatever is needed at the time. It's an ever-growing partnership, able to withstand storms and adapt to life's struggles.

Even in the times that feel like nothing more than routine, marriage is still something to marvel at. There's no other partnership like it. It's really amazing when you think about everything a husband and wife go through together. Facing obstacles, taking turns holding each other up, celebrating one another, raising a family...the list goes on and on.

Whatever it is that comes our way, it affects both of us. We can't just decide we want to partner up with someone else to tackle a problem, nor do we choose to go it alone. We're in it together, for better or worse, and that's not something to take lightly. It's a really big, awesome, amazing commitment. It truly changes your life having that one person to face it all alongside.

I don't really have a point to all this. Simply reflecting on how wonderfully beautiful marriage is. Even in the seemingly boring times, sharing life with someone is nothing short of astounding. Two people becoming one flesh is one of the most sacred things on this earth. Thinking about it makes me so grateful for my husband, the one God designed for me, and the fact that I get to share my life with him. How amazing.

“So they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

Matthew 19:6



ENCOURAGEMENT

Rooted in Love - MAKING EXCUSES – by Kaelin Scott

People are full of excuses, aren't they?

Politicians have all sorts of excuses for failing to deliver on their promises. Leaders can be full of excuses why they don't have to follow the rules. Friends make excuses why they don't show up to events. Families make excuses for each other's poor behavior. Parents make excuses for their children.

My kids' favorite excuse lately has been, "I forgot." And I'm not above this issue either, trust me. I'm full of my own lame excuses for lots of things, chief among them being, "I'm too tired," and "I don't have time."

But what do excuses do for us, other than hinder us from growing? Often, when we make an excuse, we ignore the real issue at hand. Sometimes we use an excuse to cover up the truth, or maybe to make the truth seem less harsh. But softening the truth doesn't equate to full honesty, does it?

I don't want to make excuses for myself. I want to be honest, even when it's hard. And I want to own up to my mistakes, rather than try to explain them away. Maturity and responsibility are gained through recognizing faults and working to correct them. It's definitely easier to come up with some reason why I messed up, and therefore make it okay. But the easy road usually isn't the best one, nor the healthiest.

My relationships with others and my inner peace would be much improved if I could stop making excuses and look at things truthfully. Sometimes, yes, I really don't have time to do something. Sometimes I really am exhausted. But other times, that's just an excuse to be lazy or procrastinate something that needs to be done. And you know... I realize that everyone forgets things sometimes. But when my child says it 13 times in one day, then the real issue isn't forgetfulness. We've talked about slowing down, thinking about what we're doing, and being mindful of our actions. Then it won't be as easy to forget.

I'm not assuming that you make excuses. Maybe you're the rare exception, and in that case, I commend you. If you are like me and have room to improve in this area, don't be discouraged. It's a natural tendency, I think, to deflect blame away from ourselves. I'm not saying we should fall on our sword every time we mess up. But I think honesty is highly undervalued these days, and dishonesty is disguised as subtle excuses.

The world could be so harmonious if people were straightforward and honest with each other. Imagine if nobody tried to hide the truth. Wouldn't that be so beautiful? Instead of spouting out lame excuses, what if we just gave a truthful answer, or even said nothing at all?

The Bible says that we should speak the truth in love. I think the truth part has been forgotten along the way, and the love part has been distorted. And, really, we can't have love without truth. Yet the truth is so offensive to people these days that it seems to be a foreign concept, and we're so quick to make excuses for everyone. The road to eternity isn't paved with excuses; it's paved with the truth. Being honest with someone could very well save their life. Instead of covering it up, we need to let the truth shine, starting with the small things. Owning up to our mistakes and being willing to try again.

Life's too short for excuses. Let's be intentional with our words and speak the truth in love. Even to ourselves.

“Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ.”

Ephesians 4:15

It was a sunny, cool, and windy Sunday morning. I decided to take an early walk to the nearby community garden to check on the raised bed my friend and I share. On the way, I had a little one-on-one time with God, listening to a psalm or two via ear buds that kept falling out of my ears.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!" For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night...For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. (Ps. 90:1-4,7-8)

I think about Moses, who wrote these insightful words more than 3000 years ago. Moses, alone in the desert, like I am at the gardens—Moses, who doesn't have the knowledge, the books, and the backdrop of history that I have, yet, he knew the important things: God is eternal, our physical lives will end, time is relative, we can't stand against God's anger, we can't hide. That all sounds kind of ominous to me. But then comes the part that gives me hope and reminds me God is good:

Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (vs. 12)

Moses, in the deep quiet of the desert, surrounded by a vast sky replete with stars, felt the compelling presence of God. He was very aware of God's "bigness" and his own "smallness." Maybe this is why he was so humble. I ask God to help me have the awareness of Moses, even in the midst of all the noise and star-blocking light of our present time, knowing my days are numbered, so that I can live each day to the full.

I'm guilty of wasting time too often, of doing my own thing before checking with God, of forgetting that each day is a gift and tomorrow may not come. My loving Father is faithful to discipline his children. He finds a way to remind me how few days I may have left, and I get serious. The importance of walking righteously before God is magnified and I'm acutely aware of the grace I've received through Christ-- and I'm so thankful. The work of God on Earth and my part in it, no matter how small, becomes more acutely important.

I think about what I need to do on my way home. Sundays are mostly reserved for rest, renewal, and fellowship, but I try not to hold anything too tightly and remain flexible. *Lord, help me to be attentive to your voice, to remember what you've called me to, and give me a heart of wisdom so that I please you in every way for all my numbered days.*

Moving Forward – God With Us – by Pam Charro

Matthew 1:23

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel
(which means God with us)

You may be familiar with the above scripture, and you may have heard it said that God is always with us. But what does that really mean?

If you have been a follower of Jesus for more than a few months, you probably know several things it *doesn't* mean. It doesn't necessarily mean you will always be happy or feel your very best physically. It doesn't mean your heart will never be broken or that you will succeed at everything you attempt to accomplish. It doesn't mean you will never lose your job or even your loved ones. Life is messy and often painful, even when God is with you.

So, if that's true, what's the point of God being with us?

The problem with that question is, it assumes that God's purpose in being with us is to make life here on earth easier and more comfortable for us. And, while the Holy Spirit often brings comfort and God gives many good gifts to his children, those aren't the only reasons God is with us.

God is with us so that we can know him and make him known, and that often means he becomes most visible when times seem darkest. If life were already perfect, he would not have the opportunity to show off the way he often does. And because we are his children, our hope in him shines out of us even when we don't undergo hardship perfectly. We have something others want and need, and, even as we struggle, they see it and are often drawn to it.

Another reason life is often so difficult even though God is with us is because God knows the beauty that is being carved in us, even as we suffer, and he knows that painful moment is making us ready for the next moment, which is making us ready for the moment after that, which will ultimately result in us becoming who he created us to be. And that version of ourselves is something we wouldn't want to miss out on, something that is beautiful beyond our current imagination; and it brings such glory to God. We become more like him as we are refined, and we shine more and more brightly in a world becoming otherwise increasingly dark.

For our light and momentary trials are creating an eternal glory
for us that far outweighs them all.

2 Corinthians 4:17

So if, like me, you have sometimes felt that God being with us hasn't really done us much good, take heart. So much more good is coming from it than any of us realizes.

He really is trustworthy and knows what he's doing.

He really is bringing hope to a lost world, and allowing us to help do it!

He really is with us. And it's the best news ever.

Simple Truths – Moms of All Ages – by Marcy Lytle

I've been a mom 35 years now, and I've observed new moms after me, older moms before me, and taken note of my own experiences as a mom. One thing I've realized is that moms of all ages need grace. Grace to be themselves, fail in motherhood, enjoy a candy bar, not cook if they're tired, say no just because it doesn't feel right, and dance in the kitchen on any given day. Yet it seems like we moms are the worst at offering ourselves grace.

New moms,

You're going to love that baby like you've never loved anything before...and want to exit the house and not see that baby when he's crying for hours just a few months later.

You're going to frown at the lines and the bulges you have now that weren't there before, but it's okay. They're markers and trophies of the amazing life you've brought forth.

You're going to wish he did things like you do, but he won't, and the baby will have her dress on backwards when he dresses her...but let it be. Give thanks that he's helping.

You're going to want to hang out with other new moms, and then run from the same moms, when they say what they're baby is doing that yours is not. Who cares? Why do you want your baby to be like any other?

You're going to look lovingly at that nursery when the baby is small, and shut the door when friends are over when that toddler is crawling. New paint will be old, fresh sheets will smell bad, and toys will be the new décor. Laugh out loud. It will do your mind and soul some good.

Moms of teens,

You're going to wonder how he grew up so fast and let go of your hand overnight. Just know that you're in his heart forever, and one day he'll write you a card saying so.

You're going to emerge with a cute outfit on (in your opinion) and she's going to comment that it's not, and it's going to hurt your feelings. Wear it anyway and smile. She's not your fashion designer.

You're going to stay up late waiting on him or her to make it home after you handed them the keys earlier, and you're going to worry with fear...but still your heart and pray...always. He's near.

You're going to walk past their rooms and gasp at the piles, the odor and the unmade beds, and you're going to demand a change. Just keep training and one day they'll get it or not...but your job will be over.

You're going to disagree with your spouse or some other adult in your teen's life about the letting go and the holding back, but stay true to your gut, ask Him, and He promises to guide you...and your children that are now teenagers.

Moms of grown children,

You're going to cry at their weddings, bawl at their empty rooms, and wonder if life will ever be full of joy again. It will. I promise. Cling to Him and him, to friends, and to life.

You're going to observe them make decisions you wouldn't make, and you'll keep your lips closed, because they're adults now...and your heart will ache. This too, will pass...

You're going to hear them thank you for the things they hated you for at some point in their adulthood...because they'll get it...one day.

You're going to love seeing their lights coming as they drive up in your driveway, but if they have kids – you'll love to see the lights going at the end of the night – and give thanks those kids are gone.

You're going to pray more than ever for your grown kids and their kids, but you'll grow by leaps and bounds at placing cares at His feet and walking free of worry and fear...because again, he's near.

All moms need grace. And if you're not yet a mom, concerned that you'll never be allowed the blessing of being a mom or you've lost greatly as a mom, I'm praying for you as I write. God has a special place in his hearts for moms in all stages. Read again the story of how Jesus spoke about his own mother being cared for, as he was near death. And how God heard the cries of so many mothers in the bible, like Moses' mom, and took that baby that was meant for death and used him to lead others out of slavery.

Grace. Take it this month no matter where you are on the timeline of motherhood. And when Mother's Day arrives, don't be sad if your expectations aren't met, if the kids don't show their love like you wish they would, or if you feel lonelier than ever because your own mom is gone. Go ahead and shed those tears, and let them run down your cheeks freely. Crying is healing. Smiling is too. So do both. Thank God for His watchful eye over those kids...and over you, as well, and over every minute of today.

QUICK UPDATE: *Before I begin this month's story, I want to share an update from last month's story. My friend "Jane," who is really award-winning filmmaker Lindsey Willson-Stuart (she gave me permission to use her name), and who also had a hysterectomy about the same time I did, and who was contending with ovarian cancer, but who is now CANCER FREE!! Praise God!! God heals! Amen and amen. Now, on to our story...*

Unearthly Thing - Childless on Mother's Day – by Angeal Dolbear

Flowers, candy, brunch...Mother's Day. My mother's birthday is close to Mother's Day, so I often shop for both of her gifts together. My mother-in-law's gift will have purchased and then delivered to her home in Houston (thank you, Amazon).

But Mother's Day is not a day for all women.

The U.S. Census Bureau cited on August 2021 that 15.2 million, nearly 1 in 6 (16.5%), adults age 55 and older are childless, and the levels of childlessness among older adults is expected to increase.

There are no gifts or celebration for me on this day. There is, however a twinge of grief in my heart.

I was never able to give birth to a child of my own.

My in-laws send me a sweet Mother's Day card, and I will get a text from my step-daughter, whom I love like my own flesh and blood.

I had a miscarriage when I was in my twenties, and I never got pregnant again. My husband and I never made a decisive effort to try to have children. I always thought if it happened, it happened. I think one child was enough for him, and I respected that.

Contending with an auto-immune disease for most of my adult life was not conducive to getting pregnant. Or being able to carry a child to full term.

My husband's child from a previous marriage got our full attention while she was growing up, and that was good for her. I believe that is what God wanted for us.

But, I have always felt like an outsider in the church among women who have children. Listening to war stories of childbirth at women's Bible studies has always made me feel outside the circle. Maybe even a little cursed.

There was always a little spark of hope in my heart when read stories in the Bible about Sarah, Hannah, and Elizabeth, who gave birth to children in otherwise barren circumstances. And in their advanced age. Of course that spark was snuffed out in November 2021 when I had a total hysterectomy.

But being a step-mother has been a great blessing. I got to do a lot of the mom things, like make Halloween costumes, help with homework, and give impromptu cooking lessons. But my step-daughter has a mother, and I knew early on it was not wise to try to take her place.

The lack of legacy is hard to swallow. I have no one to pass precious things down to. But then, they are just things. I try to remember to pass down to my adult stepchild the important things like praying, and keeping a close with God.

But God...

After I wrote and published [The Garden Key Tales](#), God brought many young women into my life who needed a "Mother" figure to help them. These novels follow the main character, Maddy, through her adventures with romance, courtship and marriage. The first book, *The Garden Key*, focuses on the topic of searching for a mate and dating God's way. My spiritual daughters clung to this story. We even held a [Bible study](#) I wrote on it.

I believe God saw that these young women needed a mentor/mother figure to help guide them. And I was extremely blessed to take on the role.

Whenever they would come to me for advice, I had to make sure I prayed, asking God to make my words His words, and not my own, because they listened to what I said! And I was there to pray with them through many tears of longing, and tears of repentance.

A couple of my spiritual daughters have gone on to marry very godly men, which is a great answer to prayer. It makes me feel over-the-moon blessed.

If ever self-pity starts to creep in on Mother's Day, I remember these young women, and how God answered my prayers for them. And how I still pray for them, and their children. A verse that brings me comfort:

"Sing, O barren one, you who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who did not travail with child! For the [spiritual] children of the desolate one will be more than the children of the married wife, says the Lord," [Isaiah 54:1](#) says. Such a promise!

God is good. He gave me a mother's heart for these women, and for any other young people that come into my life. Some I get to minister to with a close relationship, and some I pray for from a distance, and check in with periodically.

God is indeed good.

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, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction, with an aim toward spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, while hopefully inspiring readers to laugh and/or cry. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, Tennessee. 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 – All the Jewelry – by Marcy Lytle

It was super early and I was wide awake, so I decided to get up and be productive. My counter by my sink and my jewelry stand, and my drawer, were driving me crazy. Random necklaces were dangling from a stand filled with watches and bangles. Loose earrings were among other things like a DQ gift card and a couple of nickels by the sink. And it was all driving me crazy! So I tackled the project of organizing.

Organizing is something I enjoy doing, especially when my mind is full. Somehow, taking a mess and making it neat physically helps rearrange my thoughts as well! Crazy, but it works.

The first thing I did was take everything off the stand and out of the drawer. Clearing out the entire space enabled me to see what I wanted to keep and what I wanted to discard. Not a bad start, mentally either. Clearing my head of fears was first in order, at 4:45 a.m. on a Thursday morning.

The second thing I did was sort and pair up all of the earrings, discarding ones that were broken, missing a match, or tarnished or just never worn. These went in another pile, apart from the pretties that were staying. I have a lot of thoughts just like these pieces, ones from the past, ones that don't match up with the Truth, and more. These too were tossed aside – no good – to be dumped in the trash.

The third thing was to then pair up all the earrings I adored by match, color and size. I enjoyed this activity, as I found some earrings I'd forgotten I had, a ring that belonged to Mom, and memories attached to so many items that made me smile. It was good for me to pair up my thoughts too, to the good that occurred just yesterday, his favor and his blessings in my life, and thoughts I wanted to keep close to mind.

The fourth thing in this early morning of organizing was to then sort and place the earrings and bracelets and necklaces and watches back where they were easily visible and accessible and neat. I have this cool sectioned rectangle for doing just that, as well as a stand that holds bigger pieces. They both had gotten cluttered and dusty from neglect. So had my mind. It was totally cluttered from a hard day yesterday, getting behind in things at home, and just being tired and weary and exhausted. Dusting that away is going to be a process for months to come...

Finally, everything was in place. The old stuff was gone, fancy earrings were together, artisan-made ones were in their section, gold and silver were separated, and each piece was organized with like kind, color and size, and it felt SO GOOD. I now will be able to actually wear and enjoy some pieces that had become hidden in the drawer or topped with a bigger piece, or forgotten behind the mess. I have some thoughts organized in my mind as well, now. A friend reminded me of a blessing yesterday, and it's in the forefront of my thoughts this morning, allowing me to see through the muck and give thanks.

Who knew that an early morning rise from a restless night would result in a productive hour of sorting everything out? I didn't. And I'll probably need a nap later today.

But for now...the mess is no longer an eyesore on my counter, in my drawer, and by my sink...and my mind feels rearranged as well, all things settled and in place. All the jewelry in its prettiness and shininess waits to be worn now, and I'm excited to do so. And a new day awaits me too, where the sun is about to rise, and my thoughts are lifted high.

I'm so grateful for all the jewelry that called me out of a deep sleep to observe and discard...or to keep.

FRESH THYME - Catch a Glimpse – by Marcy Lytle

A couple of months ago, I wrote and shared a devo series on nights and days. I had been fascinated by how many times the Bible mentions nights coupled with days, not just the day's events. For example, Jesus fasted 40 days AND 40 nights. Why were the nights mentioned? It was a super interesting study, and I came away from it with the reassurance of His attentiveness to every detail of our lives. And to the steadfastness of his love that appears with the sunrise...to the sunset.

It's been a few weeks now since I ended that study and part of what I ingested while reading is staying with me big-time. And I'm so glad, because I've needed it while my dad has been slowly recovering (and regressing) in the hospital. Reading again about how faithful God is not only FROM sunrise to sunset, but in the reminders of his presence WITH the sun high in the sky.

There were many mornings that I drove in to the city to the hospital to sit with Dad and I saw the sun rise, over my shoulder, and it "followed" me all the way in. The warmth and the presence of His creation rising high in the sky out of the darkness of morning brought comfort to my soul, and I gave thanks.

There were several afternoons when I threw down my bags in the kitchen upon arriving home from the hospital visits, put on my walking shoes, and headed outside to stroll around the neighborhood so I could breathe. And there it was again, high in the sky...the sun. The warmth and the presence of this amazing ball of fire warmed my body and my soul, and I could hear him whisper, "I'm with you, always...."

There have been a few evenings where we both found time and space to head out together to walk before the sun set, because days are longer now...at least the daylight stays with us longer. As we walked on the trails near our house, I could see flickers of the sun through the trees as it lowered close to the horizon, before it disappeared. But it didn't really disappear...it only dropped...and the moon rose...to provide light in the night. This too, made me smile and breathe a little deeper, with the reminders of his love all around me.

I can't tell you how many times during this long ordeal with Dad that the presence of the sun, the faithfulness shown to the earth every 24 hours, brought peace to my unsteady soul.

Prior to this study, I feel pretty sure there were many drives, walks and sunset strolls where I missed the beauty of the glimpse of His presence. Either my head was hanging low, my thoughts crowded out any flickers of light, or my fears and worries obscured the faithfulness over my shoulder.

I'm thankful for the Word, for reminders of how he has set in motion sunrise to sunset, and this will never end. He has given us all a physical manifestation of his love and attention day and night, if we only catch a glimpse. And to do that, we have to look up, pause to feel the warmth, and stand astounded at the beauty.

Catch a glimpse today as you ride into work, take a lunch break on a bench, or step outside after dinner...and linger...and know.

FRESH THYME - Friends in Need – by Marcy Lytle

I've been in need mode for the past weeks, with my dad. He's 96, he's had pneumonia, he's been in the hospital, and it's been hard to say the least. I've had friends in need, as well. We all do. And sometimes we don't know what that friend needs, so we just stay silent and pray. But I noticed during this time the very things I needed the most...and I thought I'd share. I had several friends just reach out in different ways, and I felt loved, safe, and covered.

Here's what they did for me, the friend in need:

Texts – I'd get a "ding" and a friend was just saying "How are you?" Three tiny words that invited me to spill on my feelings at that given moment, and for them to respond with another reply stating they'd been praying for me. That meant the world.

Songs – My sister and another friend sent me a song to listen to. It was nice to have those to click and play on any given day when I needed to breathe. Music lifts the soul.

Presence – One of our friends offered to sit with Dad so our entire family could have a birthday dinner. They took their time to drive in to the hospital, sit with a sick man, so that we could get away. I couldn't thank them enough.

Comments – I posted updates on Dad on Facebook, and floods of friends commented with their love for dad and my family, offering prayers and encouragement. That's the GOOD in social media!

Thoughts – I had one friend that just texted in the morning to say I was loved and they were praying. No questions, nothing else, just a reminder. I felt blessed.

Ears – My own daughter listened to my concerns and my fears, and even my tears, because she wanted to. She wanted to share in my concern for my dad, her papa. Others listened as well one morning, when I called to just let it all out, without judgment or religious platitudes being quoted back to me. They just listened, and I was grateful.

Emails – Many friends just wrote and said they were praying, I was in their thoughts, and they hoped Dad was getting better. Simple words that made me smile.

Empathy – I loved it when others said they were so sorry, or they knew it was hard. And I knew they'd been through the same. There was no suggestion, not even encouragement, but just acknowledgement of my pain.

All of those things together fed my soul. Some days, I needed a verse, other days the song was wonderful, and still other days I wanted nothing but an "I get it. So sorry." It was like a full meal to my weary body, mind and soul. And I'm forever grateful.

Don't ever think your text, your love, a simple verse, etc. is insignificant. If you think of it, do it, for a friend in need. Listen without judgment, and pray always. Let her know you're praying. It's what lifts up weak arms, strengthens feeble knees, and eases worrisome minds. And it's like nothing else, when that ding or message or picture or call comes through.

FRESH THYME – Trios in the House – by Marcy Lytle

If you follow me on Instagram, you'll hear and see me share often the tip about decorating around the house in trios. Supposedly, setting out décor items in groups of three (or another odd number) is more pleasing and focusing to the eye than even numbered settings. I think it's true! I have several places in my home where items are grouped by three, so I thought I'd share a little inspiration for you to consider as you set up your home this spring/summer season:

By the bed – We recently purchased new nightstands for our newly remodeled bedroom. On the stand is a lamp, a plant and an item of interest – three things. The vase I found vintage shopping in Taylor, Texas and the greenery is just a branch from my yard! That twine is just fun to set out (and useful, too!) and our new lamps are from Walmart.

On a tray – I have a couple of trays I found in the patio section of a store – they're solid and so pretty – and they make a perfect base for a trio. A candle, fresh flowers, and something whimsical work on a tray. And it's easy to change out one thing for another, depending on your mood! Candles are always good options in a trio!

Atop a stand – If you have a stand you use for serving or a wooden Lazy Susan, you can use it for decorating as well. Use a piece of fruit as one of your trio pieces. A tiny vase from the dollar section at Target, and a huge three-wick candle from Kirklands are great options. They have such great smelling candles!

In a bowl – Do you have a large flat bowl, like a pasta bowl? Use it for décor. Fill it with oranges, then set a candle beside it. That's three items, if you count the bowl. A bowl of fruit is so picturesque and invites anyone near to grab a bite, too!

At the side of a bar – Target has cute little plant stands of different heights, so pick a couple, then set a tiny vase beside, for a trio of three. Insert real or fake plants, your choice. Be sure to vary the heights, as that brings a pleasing look, as well.

On the porch – Near your front door is a great place for a trio! Set a pretty plant in a basket, then consider a tray of succulents. There are so many choices, and some bloom so profusely and beautiful – and they require very little watering!

There are endless options of decorating with trios. On your shelves, above your bed, by the sink in the bathroom, etc. Try one of the ideas above or create your own, and consider just rearranging some of the items you already have spread out across your space.

Enjoy!