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TIPS

The Dressing – Fall is for Jackets – by Marcy Lytle

I haven't really been that fond of jackets, at least all of them. In fact, I don't own a jean jacket, because I find them uncomfortable. However, this year I've found a few jackets I like and they're perfect for the beginning of fall. I can have a couple hanging by the front door and grab one to go with any outfit, should the cool winds start to blow. They're also great to take to the theater, where it's always chilly. And they really dress up an otherwise casual look!

I have seven jackets this fall that I'm wearing, and I mostly shopped my closet with what I had to make outfits to go underneath them. A couple jackets were old ones I've had, and a few were new ones I just bought!

The long black jacket – This one is from Old Navy and really well-made and comfortable, and quite cozy. I love the length of the sleeves and the jacket itself. I love a retro button up underneath (from Marshall) in shades of green or even lavender. And a pop of red, too!

A wild print – I've had this jacket for years, and while it's a challenge to find something go underneath, it's so fun when I do! This muted gray tee is from Aeropostale and looks great underneath the bold gold.

Caramel houndstooth – I just found this one on the rack at a discount store, another long jacket in a great color for fall. Graphic tees are my favorite underneath this one. Shades of dark gray in the background, or fun words in fall hues, work great.

Short brown corduroy – This jacket was hanging in a vintage store and I grabbed it, because it was ten bucks! I really love the collar and the fitted look! Another retro button up with lavender and brown, with a red pin, is a fun look with this one...or just a leaf pin. Pins are a fun find at a vintage shop!

A simple gray jacket – This too is a staple in my closet, because gray is like a neutral – it goes with everything! It too looks great with all the graphic tees in your drawers, as well as over a white tee – which supposedly is a fall trend for 2022.

Navy dress-length jacket – Another oldie, but goodie. It really dresses up an outfit, worn over a fall dress with booties. The dress is from Latitude Staunton. It's a great fall piece for cool nights, over any outfit at all really!

Sleeveless gray shacket – Also worn over a dress, this is such a fun surprise piece I found somewhere...I can't recall! It's like a jean jacket, only no sleeves. It's a fun item over long sleeves when it gets cooler, and now over short sleeves.

Revisit your own closet to see what jackets you have and how you can wear them as an updated look, and then maybe purchase one or two, and wear them all month – with pins, scarves, over graphic tees, or white tanks...whatever you please!

Seven for You – Holiday Savings

It's not holiday season YET...but it's so close...and tensions rise as money flies! We asked our panel of women contributors to weigh in on their ways to save money when purchasing gifts at Christmas. It's helpful to hear from each other and see if there are new habits we can pick up, as well! Gifts are costly, but we love to give...so how do we do so, without the stress? Hope you find some help in our hints...

I try to do all my Christmas shopping on Amazon on Black Friday. There are usually really good sales, and it saves me from having to go to the post office, since I have to ship most of my gifts to various regions of the U.S. It's helpful to set-up a "Gifts" Shopping List on Amazon, so anytime I see something I think someone might like, I save it to that shopping list. So handy! – Angela

I start shopping early, especially buying stocking gifts way before Christmas, so that extra expense is taken care of.

I wrap gifts with newspaper (which we subscribe to daily) and decorate with pretty ribbon – no wrapping paper expense! If you don't take the paper, you can wrap in all sorts of things – even bandannas are only a buck – much cheaper than paper and/or bags!

I have a budget for each person...it helps as I select the gifts...to stay in line. I record what I buy and how much it cost, to keep me in line. – Marcy

I set an overall budget. Sometimes I hand-make practical gifts and then give gift cards for the grown kids. I like this best. I've already had requests this Christmas for larger bowl cozies, which will be fun.

As for the younger kids, they all love pjs, and they like handmade ones, too.

Then I add a game or book. I try not to give money to the younger kids, but they really do like gift cards as well!

I totally stay away from clothes now, even though I enjoy buying for the kids. Their likes and sizes are a challenge that negates the pleasure. – Debbie

Years ago my grown kids decided they didn't want me to be bothered with buying them gifts. They only wanted the cash. But that's not as fun, so I still fill their stockings and have fun doing that. I watch the Walmart clearance aisle and if one talks of some little something they want, I get all of them the same. The girls get for girls and the guys get for guys. For example, one year I got all the guys folding camping stools because one wanted it. It was a fun gift. They all loved it and the stools were very inexpensive at Walmart.

I also every year include toothbrushes and lotion or bath gel from Bed, Bath, and Beyond. And they always have coupons and sales going on. https://www.bathandbodyworks.com/p/white-citrus-shower-gel-021980239.html?ef_id=CjwKCAjwsMGYBhAEEiwAGUXJaWx6u163Z1aRXynurNpLwzBGwldiDvuZOmKQVNVU8LaH54Xoda69MRoCKFMQAvD_BwE:G:s&&cm_mmc=googlepmax_-paid-

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I usually get too much to fit in their stockings so part of my fun is finding bags or creative containers for everything. One Christmas I bought Buccée's portable cooler bags to use. That one was a big hit!

Knowing that I'm buying fun items for stockings only allows me to shop all year for bargains. Last year I bought a fun little item and after hiding it, I forgot all about it. I got one for everybody but I can't tell you what it is. They're all getting it this year! – Carole

I have been thinking about how to answer this question. First, I always set a budget for each person (family). I try my best to stick to it. If I start buying items early (like the summer) I have to keep a notebook with each person's name and write down what I bought and how much I spent so I won't go over my budget. I don't really count stocking stuffers for the kids as part of my budget since I get most of those at the dollar store or the dollar spot at Target.

I love bargains and specials. I shop the clearance aisles early and often and I even got a few things on Prime Day. Walmart has wonderful clearance isles! I have already gotten some Lego sets at 50% off which is incredible for Legos. I will say if a person has asked for something they really want if I can't find it on sale, I will go ahead and just buy. With the way things have been this past year I worry it will sell out and I won't be able to get it. I think things are getting better though!

I also use coupons and if shopping online I always try and sign up for the discount by giving them my email or text. I can always opt out of the text once I receive the discount. Target has a great way of giving coupons and a percentage back of what I buy just by typing my phone number in at the register. Christmas is my favorite time of the year - I think it's because we get to give gifts. I have to remind myself that Christmas was our greatest gift from God that He sent His Son to be born! – Melissa

Christmas and the holidays is stressful in so many areas, but budgeting and spending can be fun if we let it be. Even gifts like words of encouragement, written out in a card, mean so much! If you have time to bake, then bake away and give just that warm plate of cookies or a few bars wrapped up in a pretty box. Most of all, lay aside comparison on what you give compared to what they give. Pray about what to give, what to spend, then enjoy doing it. And if there are no funds for spending, then put on your creative hat and don't spend funds. People say they like gifts from the heart or handmade ones the most, and I think it's true! Enjoy the holidays without breaking your budget for once, this year, and sigh at the joy He gives to us all...freely!

Three Moms – Book Faves – by The Cousins

It's that time of year again when we start thinking ahead to Christmas and what to get the kids. What better gift than a gift of a book! And it helps to know what other moms/kids found delightful, so that we can then make choices for our kids. Below, the moms share book ideas for kids from ages 3 to 12. Hope it helps you shop and find just the right ones for your kiddos!

Mom of Two

My girls love books and usually always read before bed or in the morning on the weekends. They love to grab a book and try to read by themselves.

The Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd Jones – it's a great illustration of the main points and stories in the bible that's so relatable to kids. The girls love it. Each story is wrapped in Jesus' love for us. How cool is that?

Love You, Forever by Robert Moch – The girls can recite this book! I even made up a song that goes with the love you forever section of the book. As parents, this brings tears to our eyes because it has such a good meaning behind it!

The Adventures of the Sea Kids – a Christian book series by Leyane Manchini – a friend introduced us to these. There is also a DVD series to watch. Each book has an underlying meaning of some sort of good, moral story of how you should act and all of the sea creatures are seen praying in the book. Also, every page has a hidden bible or Jesus fish, so as the kids read they find those on each page.

The Usborne Books – these have to be bought through a consultant who sells them – one of my good friends sells them. These are interactive books with lift the flaps, themes of learning about the body, about science or the outdoors. There is an alphabet book or even ones with erasable markers. I love that it's not just words, but the kids are involved in action. There's even a flashlight series where you find hidden pictures – the girls love.

We love to sit down, relax and let the worries of the day fade away while we read...

Mom of Three

I will be honest, my kids are not the biggest fan of reading (unfortunately, they take after their parents). We are not really readers. That being said, we have in place 15 minutes of reading time every day after school and have really worked on helping them find books they enjoy.

Augie, who is 7, has really enjoyed the *Magic Treehouse* books lately. These books follow two kids who go on missions and adventures via a magical treehouse. They are similar to the Narnia series, but a bit easier to read as they are more for young readers. If you know Augie, he loves adventure, creativity and anything that gets his imagination stirred up.

Ayla, she is 9, has finally found a series she enjoys called *Dork Diaries*. The books are written in diary format so it includes drawings, photos, snippets, and different ways of writing that depict the daily life of a 15 year old girl. Ayla likes the drama and stories of the girl's life and how the book is written.

Our oldest, Gideon (who will be 11 in November), is really only into one thing - football - so we have had to find books centered on that. His favorite author is Tim Green, a former NFL football player, who now writes fiction books based around football & other sports stories. Gideon focuses on all the football ones, his favorite being *Left Out*. He likes this book because the story is about a kid who plays linebacker (like Gideon plays for his team), and is also deaf (which intrigues Gideon after all of his ear issues, growing up). Even though Gideon can hear, he has had his ears tested quite a bit over the years and so Gideon finds a thread of relation to the story. He is excited to read more of these books.

Mom of Four

Our four kids are old enough to share with us this month about their own of their favorite books and why, so they responded this month with what they like. From ages 12 down to 7, here are their faves:

Harry Potter is definitely a favorite series of the oldest, and *Goblet of Fire* is her fave...because every chapter ends with a cliffhanger – so she sometimes catches herself reading late into the night! It's also an action packed story until the very end. She likes the way the author J.K. Rowling keeps you on the “edge of your feet” with a “good-scared feeling” no matter how many times you read the book.

Elijah is 11 and his favorite books are the *Who Was* series and he cannot choose a favorite because they are all good! He likes the covers of the books because they have big heads on them, and he likes the facts inside the book because they are interesting. There are also great pictures inside.

Anna's favorite book is *Bean & Ivy* because of the pictures and how it's so easy to understand what's going on in the story. It's a chapter book, and Anny says it's funny, too.

The youngest is Hope, age 7, and she likes the *Grumpy Unicorn* because he's a mad character but he's really funny. He makes her giggle and laugh, and he's the opposite of what one might think a unicorn might act like.

In the Kitchen – Bars, Boards and Bowls – by Marcy Lytle

This season, where we have family gather, friends stop by, or just cozy nights at home in front of the TV, it's nice to have simple meals, yet fun and elegant, no matter how many are eating. Even if it's just for one! Whether we spread out the food across the bar or counter, make pretty bowls, or pull out wooden or plastic trays or boards...food prep and eating it can be such a delight! Enjoy one of these ideas this season:

Breakfast for One – I love getting up before sunrise and enjoying my breakfast laid out on a small cutting board. My daughter-in-law gave me a set of three, and I love them as a plate!

- Bagel (I like Everything but the Bagel)
- Fresh strawberries or fruit of your choice
- Peanut butter

Toast the bagel, then cut it into four sticks, and place in a small cup. Slice the fruit, then put a dollop of peanut butter in a tiny dish. Arrange on a board and enjoy.

Veggie Bowls – I have a couple of sunflower bowls I picked up at Marshalls, the shallow kind. They're perfect for veggies with rice, or alone, or any kind of bowl...really.

- Potatoes
- Carrots
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Onions
- Franks or sausage
- Bacon
- Grated cheese (optional)

Slice all veggies to be about the same thickness and size, so they'll cook quickly and evenly. Toss in your seasonings for flavor. In a skillet fry bacon, and leave the grease (a couple tablespoons) for the veggies. Cook the potatoes, carrots and franks first, as they take longer to get tender. Add in the other veggies and cook, until all are tender. You can add a pat of butter if you wish.

Serve it up hot, crumble the bacon and sprinkle the cheese, and you've got yourself a hearty meal.

Chips and Dips Platters – I found these awesome chips/dip plates at Lakeside Collections and I got two, so that we could have our own when enjoying chips with any sorts of dips. We used these just today for the first time, and they were awesome!

Guacamole – avocado, lime juice, diced red onion, green salsa, cilantro, diced cucumber, and Mexican seasonings

Bean corn salsa – Grill some frozen corn in a pan, add in diced green peppers, drained black beans, salsa and anything else you have left in your fridge! Dot with grated cheese and let it melt.

Place the two dips in the area for dips. Then add chips in the large area: lime tortilla chips, veggie chips and Elotes corn chips (from Trader Joe's).

What a fun and tasty lunch!

Snacks on a Board – I found this board on clearance 75% off, after my sister called to tell me about the sale! It's so pretty, so one night we just wanted snacks for dinner. They looked amazing on the new board, and made me enjoy my food so much!

On the board:

- Veggie chips
- Black olives
- Carrots
- Dip (of your choice)
- Slice cukes
- Cashews
- Dark chocolate

Really, presentation, can really make a meal!

Grilled Cheese, Please – I have a long cutting board that's small, but it's perfect for slicing a sandwich to serve!

- French bread
- Heavy skillet and another for grilling
- Cheddar cheese
- Gouda cheese
- Long pickle slices

Cut the French bread in half and create a sandwich the size you want. Layer the cheese (go light on the Gouda if you don't want that strong taste) and add lots of those long pickle slices. Lay the sandwich in melted butter in a skillet, then top it with a heavy cast iron, to press it and cook it. Flip and do the same on the other side. Or...You can grill them both open faced and then put your sandwich together. YUM.

Rice Bar for the Family – We had the kids over and a rice bar was so easy to put together, everyone could build their own bowl, and kids and adults alike found items they liked!

- Huge bowl of rice
- Black beans
- Roasted veggies
- Olives (black and green)

- Lime slices
- Tomatoes
- Avocado slices
- Grilled corn
- Chopped spinach leaves
- Sauces (chimichurri or tahini, whatever you like)

Provide bowls for each guest, and let them build their meal, one at a time. The bar is pretty, they can choose their ingredients, and the food is scrumptious. You can purchase shallow bowls at the discount stores, they don't have to all match either. That's the fun of it!

Last Month's Learnin'- by Marcy Lytle

If you don't have a window above your sink, trying placing a mirror. We saw one in an Airbnb and it looked fabulous!

When's the last time you purchased unshelled peanuts? They taste so good...I had forgotten...and they're great to grab for a snack.

Did you know that collard greens and French fries taste good together, as a meal?

And have you tried dipping popcorn into bbq sauce? It's tasty! I tried it at a theater recently.

Have you heard of the Moravians? If you haven't, google them, and read about their star and their history. So interesting!

Wilbur's Chocolates have these "buds" they sell that are divine. We are ordering some for Christmas. Check them out.

When's the last time you purchased a meal at a food truck or somewhere fresh, found a shade tree, and sat under it – on the grass – and ate? It's time you do it...

Not everyone calls them speed "bumps." Some places call them speed "tables."

There are some cities in the U.S. that leave flags out all the time, not just at patriotic holidays. It's pretty cool!

OMG – I had forgotten how good a tuna melt tasted. We stopped in an ordered one, and it was delish. Use good tuna, add cheese and tomato, then grill like you would a grilled cheese. Eat with pickles!

Next time you serve taco salad in one of those crispy tortilla bowls, turn it on its side and let the salad spill out onto the plate. Looks so pretty, and tastes just as good!

Did you know that at Hershey's Chocolate World the street lights are shaped like Hershey's kisses? Read about Mr. Hershey and find out what his middle name was...it's a good and interesting story!

There's such a tree as the weeping cedar. I did not know that...

You can make a charcuterie plate out of almost any snacks you have in your kitchen...use what you have and make it look pretty. Place popcorn in wine glasses!

A long time ago...women crimped the bottom of their skirts with a crimping iron to make ruffles!

The Wedding Dress Sewing Circle – I thoroughly enjoyed this historical fiction book – a great read!

Big Lots is the BEST place for finding outdoor tablecloths for your picnic tables – I just got a nice plaid fabric one for fall for \$10.99!

A rice bowl bar – it's so easy to put together – just make your rice and provide in a huge bowl. Then line up your toppings like black beans, bacon, tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, cheese, sauces (chimichurri or tahini). That's it. Let folks build their own! (See more on in In the Kitchen).

I don't know if every grocery store floral department has these, but fresh flowers now come in plastic cups with water, and these fit in your cup holder in the car! No more awkward spills or "where to put the flowers" anymore!

Just watched a limited series called "Deep Breathing" and heard an actor say the Hebrew word for forgiveness also means dance. I looked it up and found this: **Forgiveness is a dance**, and God is our partner. In other words we transform the distance we feel because of sin into a circle dance of acceptance with Him. Now, isn't that beautiful?

SUGAR + Spice - Spooky Palettes – by Angela Dolbear

In honor of October, I pulled out a couple of fun Halloween inspired palettes from my vast and ever-growing eye shadow palette collection. Both are from ColourPop, one of my favorite cosmetics brands--quality products at affordable prices!

- The Nightmare Before Christmas palette – It's an NBC product—I had to get it! This palette has a great color story with a good mix of matte and shimmer colors which all blend together well. I have had fun playing with this palette.
- Disney's "Hocus Pocus" palette – I'm not a super fan of this film, but I picked up this palette because the color story is full of rich autumn hues of olives and magentas, my favorite colors.

Both palettes are discontinued, sadly, but there are online shops where they can be purchased, like Glambot, Poshmark, or Mercari.

“Hack Job” Tip

If you have purchased a used eye shadow palette, you can sanitize it by first, scraping off its very top layer by quickly rubbing the surface with a tissue. After skimming the top off, spritz the palette with a little bit of rubbing alcohol in a small spray bottle and then let it dry. Voila! It's new again!

The beauty of blessings to you!

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



HOME

Practical Parenting – Picky Eaters – by Marcy Lytle

I had one child that ate everything offered at the table, and another that sneered and only wanted chicken and fries...until he was about 20! And an occasional brownie earthquake from Dairy Queen. And when my kids were little, there was really no talk of allergies, gluten free, or any real focus on a super healthy diet, at least among my circle of friends. I'm sure the trend toward healthier eating was there, but I never really stressed over it. I kept offering fruit and veggies, in some way or another, but didn't push it.

I honestly look on parents today and listen to conversations and overhear kids talking, and I wonder how in the world parents navigate picky eaters. Some influencers that are chefs say if you give kids healthy foods as toddlers, they'll learn to eat what's given them. I'm not sure I believe that works all the time. Neither does it work to treat all of our kids the same, as each one has a different taste palette! I remember making my son sit at the table for maybe an hour until he agreed to take those "five bites!" (Why was it always five?)

Guess what? My kids are now grown and they eat good food. They eat lots of kinds of food. They finally learned to do it on their own. I did the best I could, I tried not to make them totally separate meals, but I did try to make sure something on the table was appealing. I didn't have a "formula" for turning out carrot stick and hummus eating teens (that wasn't even a thing, either)!

Today, there are SO MANY issues with diet and allergies that feeding kids well appears to be overwhelming. Food has become more processed and full of harmful ingredients, so parents are reading labels and really trying to serve the good! Kudos to you all!

But here are a few hints to lighten your load, for the kids that don't require a special diet:

- It's still okay to send a sandwich on bread with your kids, instead of wrapped in lettuce. Just buy fresh bread at the market, or make your own (teach the kids and let them make it!)
- Cookies are delicious and a treat, maybe not from a box, but bake them together at home with oats and enjoy! Never giving them a cookie is just not an option!
- Drive-through food won't hurt a kid once in a while. Maybe not every night, but in a pinch, it's fun and okay. Always saying no just makes a kid want it more, doesn't it?
- Find out what dips your kids love, let them make them, then include them with their veggies in their lunches!
- So maybe they don't like everything you're making for dinner. Pull out what they DO like, and ask them to taste what they don't. Maybe they only like the spaghetti but not the sauce, so give them the noodles, and ask them to taste the sauce...over and over...just a bite here and there.
- Color is always good. Take them to the store and let them pick fruit and veggies of color that they WILL eat, and teach them ways to eat both! Sometimes, just the way it's presented on the plate makes a kid smile!
- Sodas are NOT good, for sure. But at the movies, with popcorn, once a month or so is fun! Just make sure you go early and not too late, before bedtime. And skip the extra butter!

Personally, life is hard enough without scolding and withholding every single food item that gets a bad rap. Bad habits are more the key, rather than never getting to taste ice cream. And not eating to gain comfort is another biggie. Teaching them habits to follow and modeling them is always best. So if you're going to have that block of dark chocolate from your desk drawer, then include a Hershey's kiss in their seat when you get in the car for the ride to school.

Eating should be fun, healthy, and oh so yummy – all wrapped up in color and smiles.

I Don't Do Teenagers – Don't Take it Personally – by Marcy Lytle

I remember when my son suddenly got too old to hold my hand when we were walking into a store. It hurt my heart, but how silly would it be for me to take that personally, right? He was growing up and it made perfect sense that he'd not want to be seen in public holding his mom's hand! I also recall shopping with my daughter when she told me if I purchased a particular coat, she would not be seen with me. Now, that made me chuckle, and I for sure bought the coat!

However, there are things our teens do that are hard to not take personally. What does that phrase mean, anyway, when we say, "Don't take it personally?" It means to not be upset or offended when someone does something. But here's a way of describing it that I really like:

Don't think of this as a failure that represents your value and worth as a person.

Really often, moms hear teenage daughters say, "I hate you!" and feel like a complete failure as a mom, if the daughter isn't her best friend. Teenage daughters are growing and experiencing conflicting emotions of trying to be an adult and yet staying small as a child. And when those two things collide, all sorts of hurt spurts out of their mouths! Obviously, we need to check to make sure we've not hurt our daughters with our words or actions, but if we've done our best and she's just mouthing hateful verbs our way, we need tell ourselves, "Don't take it personally," and walk away.

Other times, parents observe teenage sons rolling their eyes constantly at everything we say, and behind that eye roll is a "You're so stupid" look. We can tell our kids the same advice their friends give them, and yet we get an eye roll, and the friend might get a response of, "That's cool. Thanks!" Teen boys are asserting independence and trying to appear tough, and listening to parents isn't part of that thought process. So again, we can repeat, "Don't take it personally," and walk away.

And then...there are times when we cannot help but take it personally, when our kids are downright mean. Maybe they start slinging adjectives our way like "old, fat, dumb" and it hurts to the bone. Perhaps we've planned a special family outing and they sulk and don't want to go or be with any of the family, and it sends us to our rooms in tears because we feel complete rejected by these humans we birthed.

Some teens may outgrow this phase of rudeness, others may go back and forth between hugs and slander, and still others may leave the home and reject us totally...in every way possible.

How in the world can we not take THAT personally?

Here are some reasons for why teens attack us personally, just to name a few:

- Brain development
- Need for control
- Struggling to feel accepted
- Seeking attention
- Overbearing parents

- Hormones

And sometimes their behavior isn't "normal" but needs attention:

- If they're aggressive
- If the rudeness is constant
- If neglect is present
- If there's substance abuse

Whether the reasons are temporal or more deep seated, we as parents need to realize that it's part of normal growth, even if perhaps we never went through the phase, ourselves. And EVEN IF we realize perhaps that we HAVE been part of the problem – maybe we're working too much or we've been rude with our own words – we can take action without feeling like a failure.

If we've searched our hearts, asked our teens and listened, and there's nothing we know of that's causing their outbursts, we can shake our hands and raise them high, and ask God to deal. He will...in his way...and we can let go of the thoughts and fears that we've failed. If we've searched our hearts and realized our own hurts we've placed on our kids, we can repent, ask forgiveness and seek help. And we can STILL lay aside feelings of failure, because there's ALWAYS hope in HIM.

So, you see, we don't have to take it personally for any reason at all, because just like our teens are human...so are we. We can do our very best and she'll still stomp her feet in anger. We can make a mistake and he may react so rudely. But the worth and value of parent/teen never changes in the middle of the years when tensions build and burst.

Validate your teen. Validate yourself. Realize the worth of your children. Realize your own worth.

And don't let the hurting words and gestures land on your shoulders and weigh you down. Do your best, and let God take care of the rest. Sounds too simplistic, but it's the best simple advice around.

An Adage a Day- Cat's In the Bag – by Carole Gilbert

When I was a little girl, I had the cutest little Barbie doll dress my momma made for me. We were very poor, so she made all my Barbie's clothes. This little dress was lacy and had elastic at the waist. Along with my Barbies, I also had several little kittens.

A Barbie doll is much smaller than a kitten, especially at the waist. But in my childish mind's eye, they looked like the same size. I knew better than to try the dress on a kitten, but the dress and my kittens looked so cute separately, they just had to be put together.

One day, as I played, I put the dress on one of the little kittens and the elastic waist tightened at her stomach, way too much! The kitten started to frantically go around and around, in a circular motion, hissing and screaming a kitten's cry trying to gnaw at the dress. Momma came rushing in from the other room after hearing all the commotion.

"Carole, what's going on?" she exclaimed as she saw the poor little kitten in its frenzy!

She saw the little dress on the kitten and exclaimed again, "What have you done?! It's way too tight!"

My poor sweet momma knew what she had to do. Through the kitten scratching and pawing and trying to bite, my momma grabbed her up and yanked the dress off! The kitten was okay, but she never came close to me again.

The moral of the story is to never "let the cat out of the bag" by never putting the cat in the bag, or in this case a dress. What I was doing (unknown to my momma and that I wasn't supposed to do) became known in a big way when Momma heard the excruciating cries of the little kitten.

This idiom, "let the cat out of the bag" means to disclose a secret unintentionally. It started from a deceitful practice in the 1500's. A vendor at market sold a pig to a customer and then, unknown to the customer, the vendor placed a cat in the bag instead of the pig. Cats weren't worth as much as a pig back then. And this is how the phrase "Cat in the bag" became "Let the cat out of the bag." What is meant as a secret is then made known.

I didn't mean for Momma to know what I had done but with the loud frantic meows from the kitten, my secret was out! I really didn't think I had done anything wrong until the kitten went berserk. Then I knew I was going to be in trouble if Momma found out.

Have you ever let the cat out of the bag? Have you ever PUT a cat in the bag? Or is it that the cat got your tongue?

I was very blessed growing up! Even after all the scratches and bites from the little kitten, my momma hugged me. She told me to never do that again and she also told me that it was okay. That time, and after every time I got into trouble, she told me she loved me. Through my sobs

and tears that day I knew that Momma loved me unconditionally. I knew nothing would ever change her love for me.

Aren't we so glad that God loves us unconditionally even when we sin or when our "curiosity killed the cat," or in the case of me and the kitten, almost? Do we stop and realize how unconditional His love is for us? I hope we do. His Word tells us how much He loves us. And that's something we can all let the cat out of the bag about!

Romans 8:38-39 says,

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Arinne Borstad. photo

Tiny Living – A Touchy Subject – by Leyanne Enterline

Let's talk about the bano (*bathroom, that is.*) Not that it should be that interesting, but for some reason in a trailer a lot goes on in there! It is the tiniest space in our place but it is the pass-through to our room, so it gets the most action! Usually one person is trying to get out while another is coming through to the bedroom and some weird dance moves go on in there, while each person is trying to navigate in their own direction. Lots of yelling and bumping and rolling of the eyes happens. If one person is in the bathroom too long, also some hollering takes place!

Bathroom space is a touchy subject and each one thinks the other is taking way too much time! We have started to set a timer for the boys because we are on propane and we don't want to run out. It's such a pain to switch over and, of course, running low happens late at night and no one wants to go outside to swap the tanks! Plus, with four people to access one toilet and shower, we've got to keep things rolling!

Another space issue is the actual shower. I cannot wash my hair and shave my legs in the same night as I get claustrophobic and can't be in that tiny space too long! And again, the propane issue! I don't want to run out of hot water from being in there too long. Unfortunately, I had to learn that the hard way. The space is tiny! We do have two small built-in shelves that came with the shower so that helps some with the products we have in there. But we all only get one item each of shower gel, shampoo and conditioner. That's it! No more room! We can't hang those cute little baskets in there either, because the shower head will fall off the wall from the weight. And we can't use sticky things to hold a basket/shelf. Due to the humidity, items don't stick to the wall very well. So, we are limited on the products!

There is a sink obviously, but with almost zero counter space. I have just enough room to keep the soap and a tiny, slender container on the counter that holds toothbrushes and toothpaste. That's about it! Luckily, we have a cabinet underneath the sink to keep all the other products like extra shampoos and soap, brushes and some of *my* things! And there is mirror that opens with a medicine cabinet where Brian can keep some of his personal items.

We are very limited on the space so we must stay somewhat organized! There are two more small cabinets in the bathroom that help store Band-aids and items that go with wound care, and Brian and I each have a small section for some our personals, but it is all so tight! I have to purge quite often to make sure we stay in order and can find things.

It is not the easiest, all fitting into one tiny area, but we make it work even in the ole' bano! And it's not an outhouse...and for that I'm grateful.

Remember love grows best in tiny spaces!

A Night to Remember – Candy Corn Sweetness – by Marcy Lytle

Did you know candy corn has existed for over 100 years, and it was first called chicken feed with the saying, “Something worth crowing for!” And in the first half of the 20th century it was known as “penny candy” because kids could buy it in bulk for very little money. Then around the 1950s when candy was more and more associated with Halloween, candy corn advertised like crazy.

And guess what else? People either love candy corn or they hate it, much like people love or hate cilantro. Folks enjoy it by the handful or avoid it altogether. I really like it, but only the Brach’s brand! And the three colors in the candy made it a huge hit, because it was eye-catching!

Another interesting note about candy corn is how people eat it. Some just pop it in their mouths and chew, while others eat it layer by layer. According to a survey done, it’s about half and half. So how do you eat it? And there are some chefs out there that fry it or add it to the top of a pizza!

So why in the world are we learning all these interesting things about candy corn in our family devo?

Preparation: *You’ll need a bag of candy corn, pretzels, nuts, chocolate pieces, yogurt or plain raisins, and any other things you’d like in your fall trail mix, all set out in the middle of the table or floor, where you gather. Give each one his/her own sack or bowl to fill.*

There’s a verse in Psalm 139 that says we are fearfully and wonderfully made. I’m sure the inventor of candy corn took time to especially create his perfect treat, as well!

Let’s read it, verse 14:

*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

Think about how much time and creativity it took to make these little orange, white and yellow pyramids that we enjoy this time of year... But wait? Do we all enjoy them?

Who likes the candy corn, and who doesn’t? Tell why!

We’re also not going to be liked by everyone we meet. Some kids just won’t get our uniqueness, others may even bully us, and still others just won’t connect with us. But that’s okay, because it doesn’t take away from our value and what a treasure we are to HIM!

Deuteronomy 14:2 says we are a treasured possession to God!

Let’s start our trail mix. In your bowl pick your first favorite ingredient out of the mix before you. Some may choose candy corn, others pretzels, or still others chocolate! And some may avoid the nuts because of allergies.

Some say the colors in candy corn represent harvest time, another reason we eat it at Halloween. Orange pumpkins are around, and yellow corn, and white mums or pansies this time of year.

Genesis 8:22 says

As long as the earth endures, seedtime and **harvest**, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night will never cease.

This makes us know that seasons were created by God and bring us hope for change and newness and life.

Add another ingredient to your mix. How many of the family have already picked candy corn?

One can still get a lot of this fun treat, candy corn, for not much dollars. It's pretty accessible to most of us. And it's still eye-catching and pretty in a bowl!

The Bible tells us in Romans 6 that there's this FREE gift from God called eternal life! In other words, the sweetness of living forever is offered to us when we believe. We don't even have to spend pennies for it – it's free!

Finish your bowl or sack and enjoy your trail mix. What's your favorite part? How do you eat the candy corn, one layer at a time? How do you enjoy your pretzels, all at once or in little bites?

We're all different, but thankfully we are loved by God no matter our shape, color, size or how we're received by others. He receives us all with arms wide open and hands that give, always.

Enjoy this season of harvest, this time to get spooky, and all the sweets coming to fill your bags!

Chipped China - BTS Stress Less – by Jennifer Lytle

Back to school has a way of pulling the family in ten different directions. While many parents joke about their fervor for a return to quieter days, I have experienced the return to school days as a bit of a mirage. They promise one thing while, at times, delivering emptiness.

I remember moving into our neighborhood with one preschool-aged child and one barely school-aged child. When I learned about the sports schedule a nearby momma held for her two children, I cringed in judgment. No less than three years later, I was managing my own overpacked after school sports schedule and arguing about it with my husband. When the great slowdown (my term for the pandemic) turned outside life off, I experienced a beautiful peace and fulfilling reconnection with both myself and my family. Recently, I have considered ways to maintain that experience. These are a few ideas to alleviate stress and build in staples for the family.

Family dinners

It may sound like a broken record, but mealtime is a nucleus for families. It may be the only time your entire family sees one another at once. If you can only make a simple egg sandwich dinner, get everyone around the table for mealtime at minimum once a day. Even family snack time counts! For some families, breakfast time might be the only time both parents can be present. Whether you're in the home or sitting at a local cafe, prioritize family meal time.

Communicate with your spouse ahead of time your desire to be together for one meal and carve it out as frequently as possible. If it helps to make this time more manageable, [use paper plates](#).

Family Work Time

Already working in family mealtime? Find jobs your child/ren can partake in to aid in mealtime. Family chore time is a beautiful illustration of working together in community and can increase appreciation for what may otherwise be behind the scenes labor in addition to supporting communication. Can you hear it now?

“I need to sweep under the table. Do tell me when you have wiped it down?”
“Have you finished eating? I would like to clear the dishes from the table.”

If after-meal time is a bit too harried to create chore routines around, consider other opportunities such as:

- cleaning out the car
- yard work
- helping an elderly family member with grocery shopping or house cleaning
- decluttering sections of the home
- serving at a local food pantry

Fewer Extracurricular Activities

Children and adults alike require [unstructured time](#) to tap into their natural creativity and curiosity. While professional basketball lessons and choir practice may have future benefits, consider postponing these exciting opportunities to the summer, or during the break weeks, or later when your child is older. Traditional school days are typically filled with constant structure, expectations, and performance evaluations. Busy weeks call for a reprieve. How are you building rest into the weekly schedule?

Family Friends

When contemplating time away from the home, are there ways to village build as a family? These opportunities may provide the space to create relationships sought through extracurricular activities. Family friends with similar ages and stages of life are Godsend. Still, consider relationships with other generations whom the entire family can gather around. Family friends allow for village building without taking from family time.

Family dinners, family work, fewer extracurricular activities, and family friends are a few ideas to consider in order to decrease the stress of back to school schedules. As a parent and caregiver, you are the expert in the needs of your children and conductor for family life. When you manage the schedule, what do you prioritize? Drop a comment below!

Jennifer Lytle is the founder of Joyful Journeys Counseling. She works with couples, parents, and children. Check out Joyful Journeys Counseling blog, services, or sign up for the newsletter at joyfuljourneycounseling.com.



YOU

Inner Strength – The Struggle of No – by Michelle Wyatt

No is a powerful words for kids. What's more powerful are the words that come next. Why is that? The following are scenarios that illustrate why.

Scenario 1

Matthew loves to do card tricks. Cards scatter everywhere! Unfortunately, he doesn't pick them up once he's done playing with them. When I ask him to pick them up, he says, "No I'm not going to pick them up." Instead of getting upset, I asked him, "Why are you saying no?" He says, "It's a lot." I remind him he's responsible for picking the cards up, but instead of picking up the whole stack at once, I give him the choice of picking which section to pick up first. Once he cleans up that section, I praise him for it and remind him that he is expected to pick up the next section he chooses. He's not happy about it, but he does pick them up.

In this situation, I was honoring his ability to communicate with me honestly and effectively, so that he is comfortable elaborating in the future without me having to ask why.

Scenario 2

I was in the car with the boys. Brendan told Matthew, "Look, it's over there." Matthew responded with "No." Brendan responded back with, "Yes, it is." Thus, this back and forth was only going to get worse if I didn't say something. So I asked Matthew, "What do you mean, no?" To which he replied, "I can't see it over there." Talk about an enlightening moment.

I've found that if I wait a few seconds after he says no, he will continue to communicate. If I react right away, I'm not giving him that chance. I celebrated his ability to speak up for himself. It reminds me to do the same.

Lessons I've learned through these experiences...

Making assumptions and jumping to conclusions that the word no from children to adults is a sign of disrespect can lead to miscommunication. It's imperative to encourage children to elaborate what they are thinking and guide them if they struggle.

I pray that the boys and I continue to communicate what we think and feel with sincerity and have patience to hear and understand each other. I pray too for all of you going through similar struggles.

If I can do it, so can you!

Life in a Nutshell – Down Memory Lane – by Jill Montz

After my divorce I bought a house in Wichita Falls. Dotty and I lived there for seven years until we moved to be closer to her school in Iowa Park. I remember when we were packing up my Wichita Falls house, I had a couple of boxes in the garage that had never been opened since they were packed up seven years prior. My plans were just to toss them in a dumpster without even looking inside.

My mom was not on board with this idea. She wanted to open each box and make sure it wasn't filled with anything worth keeping. My point was if I hadn't needed it or even really known what existed inside those boxes for seven years, I highly doubted I would ever need it or miss any of it going forward.

But you know what daughters do who have their moms help them move in Texas...in July?

The daughters open boxes just so their moms can sleep at night.

One box was full of gift bags from Dotty's baby shower. One was full of empty old frames and broken trinkets I had bought to furnish my apartments before I got married. Clearly, all treasures worth saving. To the dumpster they went...but Mom could now sleep...so all was well.

I am not a saver of things. I don't attach sentimental meaning to many objects. And I love to clean out a house, garage, closet, drawer, and on a fairly regular occasion...my purse. Now things might still be cluttered, but I can assure you I have trashed some things.

Over the years I have given or thrown away carloads and sidewalks full of STUFF! Somehow my love to clean does not quite yet rival my love of shopping (especially the "add to cart" online version kind!) But nevertheless, I still enjoy an afternoon or a weekend waist deep in piles of things about to find new homes.

However, one night I discovered what I do treasure and hold onto most...my memories...especially of Dotty. Dot and I found ourselves looking through old videos and pictures on my Facebook account and that trip down memory lane got my cheeks wet from some tears, caused more than a few howls of laughter, and did my heart so much good.

I loved listening to Dotty's little girl voice talk to the camera as she put on her nightly shows in the living room. I giggled at her outfit choices when her sense of fashion had a flair for the dramatic and unmatched variety. I bit my bottom lip and forced a tight smile as I saw pictures of Dotty with dear friends who are no longer with us.

Dotty, in pure teenage form, was horrified at some of her antics and wardrobe choices. She often asked, "Mom, why did you dress me like that?" To which I replied, "You dressed yourself and I was picking my battles that day." Dotty also couldn't believe how silly some of the videos of her were and how bad her dance moves were "back then" (clearly thanks to TikTok she is much improved now.) But all I saw was my sweet baby girl who didn't stay little near long enough.

After an hour or so, Dotty had lost interest in my videos and was looking at her own on her phone. Then after a bit she decided to get up and see if she remembered an old dance from her Defining Moments Dance School days (Ms. Chelsea will be thrilled to know she did in fact

still know most of the moves!) Internally I laughed every time Dotty would request, "Okay Mom...watch this."

Some things never change.

That night I lay in bed and looked through a few of the videos and pictures on my phone. Most had not made it to Facebook, but all still brought me joy. Then I Googled how to make sure my phone was backed up properly to "the cloud"...whatever that is (if you recall from last month's article...I am not very tech savvy.) I may not hold onto many things in life, but I pray I hold onto my memories as long as possible.

Healthy Habits – Don't Forfeit Peace – by Marcy Lytle

My dad loved the hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," and there's a line in it that says "Oh, what peace we often forfeit," which I have always thought about. Forfeiting something is giving it up to the other team, as a win for them. Not showing up, or just giving up. And while peace is often hard to come by when life's waves are drowning us, there are some days it's more available than we realize. So come with me this month, as we hold on to peace in healthy ways...

Pray about everything – There are days when I complain most of the day about actions or inactions of others. It's exhausting. But when I remember to just take those complaints and frustrations to Him, it transfers the burden, and I walk lighter.

Sit down – Put up your feet, read a book, take a nap, do nothing, even if it's just 15 minutes. There's no medal or award being handed out for standing on our feet all day to slave and serve. And yet we live as if there is...

Organize one thing – Maybe your life feels out of control. Take one drawer, one part of your closet, or any area of your home or car or work space and organize it. Start small. Smile at the accomplishment. Sigh...in peace.

Give thanks – I must have written these two words a hundred times over the course of writing in this magazine. It's because I must continually remind myself how much peace this daily activity offers, when we choose to do it. Just as we feel compelled to walk so many steps to help our heart...so should we feel compelled to give thanks for so many things.

Step away – If there's drama, leave it. If there's gossip, walk in the opposite direction. Where there's friction, bow out. We often stay in something too long until we feel dirty, stepped on, abused, and torn up. That's forfeiting peace.

Drive in silence – With kids, this is hard. But if you can, take a drive in silence or a walk without talking on the phone. Observe the sky, the leaves blowing, feel the wind against your skin, see the sun and feel its warmth and tune in...and listen to Him as He loves you and whispers His care over you.

Pursue it – Peace isn't always waiting our doorsteps knocking to enter our rooms. We sometimes have to chase after it, run for it, and go after it. Now that doesn't sound like the rest mentioned above. I think it just means make it a goal to seek the peace in each day, or it will be covered up and invisible, like that lost sock beneath a pile of clothes. We sometimes have to put away all of the pile, before the lost thing is revealed. Go after peace, as much as you go after gut health, a strong heart, and good skin.

Find a bench – On a path, near a creek, outside a store, wherever you see one...take it and sit down and observe. Look at the foliage, listen to the sounds, observe what people are wearing, breathe and wait...but sit and soak in peace.

Peace. Don't forfeit it, because it's good living to experience it daily.

Life Right Now - The (Not-So) Scary Tale of an Introvert at Church – by Jennifer Stephens

They are everywhere. We don't always notice them, but they're there. At the store. In the workplace. Even at church on Sunday morning. There might even be one in your home! They don't *look* different than other folks. But they ARE different. What are they? Introverts.

Introverts are one of the most misunderstood groups of people around. I know because I am one.

We're not aloof, stuck up, or necessarily shy. We just prefer to get away from the noise every now and then. Especially when life gets too *peopley*. What exactly is an introvert? While there's no one-size-fits-all definition, introverts tend to be quiet, reserved, and prefer socializing with one or two close friends. On the other hand, extroverts are often the loud, outgoing, life-of-the-party personalities. Like an animal adapting to its habitat, we introverts have learned to adjust in order to maintain our sanity in this ebullient world we live in. We've become really good at blending into our surroundings – avoiding scrutiny, because thrusting an ounce of unwanted attention onto an introvert is a HUGE no-no. We change who we are so often to fit into an extroverted world, sometimes we don't even realize that's what we're doing. But what if we suddenly decided to embrace who we are and just BE our authentic introverted selves? What is a quiet, reserved person who loves Jesus to do when it comes to expressing her faith?

For an introvert, the church experience can sometimes be a little...scary. The church seems to send an unintentional message that equates being faithful to God to being LOUD about God. Somewhere along the way, we've gotten the message that the ideal Christian is an extrovert – one that can openly share their faith with strangers, greet everyone with over-the-top-in-your-face enthusiasm, and immediately shout an ear-piercing, "Yes!" when asked to lead in this way or that. These qualities are needed (obviously, or God wouldn't have created people that encompass them), but it's important to note that He created introverts with our own unique qualities too!

Psalm 139:14

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made..."

We can probably all agree that serving, connecting, and sharing are some of the main ingredients in a church-goer's diet. To an extrovert, boldly approaching a stranger or passionately sharing testimony to the masses are pursuits to run toward. Introverts will agree that everything from "turn to the person next to you and shake hands" to "share your testimony from the stage" are the things that send us scurrying away (or at least taking a well-timed restroom break). So, how can we, as introverts, survive at church? Or rather, how can the church support us - the introverts?

Step 1: Allow the introvert to serve quietly. Behind the scenes, if you will. Serving food at a fellowship meal, putting together treat bags for the children's ministry, and decorating before a big event are a few possibilities. Interestingly, introverts can make excellent door greeters – there's not that pressure for a long awkward conversation. It's especially helpful when there's some type of flyer to give someone as they enter. A quick hello with a purpose is a painless way for introverts to welcome others inside (this is especially important when welcoming a fellow introvert into Sunday services, as a loud, overly exuberant greeting can be...unnerving).

Step 2: Encourage the introvert to connect with others in a non-threatening way. Recently our women's ministry started daily devotionals using Max Lucado books. They needed volunteers to write about the daily reading and respond/encourage others – and it was all done online. This was a perfect way for an introvert like me to engage with others. I signed up without hesitation! By connecting online, I was able to share and support others in a way I wouldn't have been able to do in person.

Step 3: Give introverts time to reflect and gather our thoughts. I've been in Bible studies before where the leader thought I was disengaged or daydreaming because I didn't offer immediate commentary. Nothing could be further from the truth. When an introvert doesn't jump into the conversation right away it's often because we're deep in thought. Pushed to speak too soon and we'll stumble into a steaming pile of jumbled word soup, but when given time to observe and freedom to pause, we can - and will - contribute a thoughtful response.

Step 4: Don't force the introvert to share over the loudspeaker. We just might drown in a puddle of our own sweat if asked to share our testimony in front of the crowd at Sunday services. But we *might* share it in a pre-recorded video. We'll definitely share with the individuals we've built a relationship with over the years.

Step 5: Appreciate the introverts' unique qualities and stop (I'm begging here – STAWWP!) trying to make us into extroverts. There isn't anything wrong with us. And we don't love Jesus any less because we love quietly. We are introspective, empathetic and will thrive when allowed to do things in our own introverted way.

Remember, introverts may approach things differently than our extroverted friends, but that's how God made us. Of course we should listen to those God-sized nudges that challenge us to stretch and grow our faith in a fresh way, but we need our extroverted pals to understand that God knew our subtle approach would be a valued asset to the community as we serve, connect, and share our faith with others. Especially when reaching out to other introverts, who may run away from the blazing flames of a roaring, fiery extrovert - but will draw near to the smoldering, glowing light of an introverted, Jesus following friend.

1 Peter 4:11 "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace..."

Under Pressure – A Simple Challenge – by Debbie Haynes

There's a verse in Proverbs 4:7 that says wisdom is the main thing – get it – with all your getting – get understanding.

“Understanding of what?” you might ask.

We need to understand God's word, his character, and his love for us!

We all can agree that there are times we need forgiveness, when we're thankful that we've been forgiven, or times when we need to pour out our hearts to God and recognize the need to draw closer to Him. And I often say that it's not about us and our gifts and talents, but rather it's about connecting with Him and accepting His great love for us.

There's a great hymn called “Cleanse Me” based on this scripture, and the story of the hymn is quite unique and interesting. J. Edwin Orr is the writer, and he was born in 1912 in Belfast, Ireland. His education included doctorates from universities in four countries! Dr. Orr also served as chaplain in the U.S. Air Force from 1943-1946. But in all of his extensive travels to 150 countries, preaching and accomplishing so much, this author is probably remembered best for this simple, challenging hymn.

Dr. Orr recalls writing “Cleanse Me” in 1936 after a great move of God in New Zealand. He says that after leaving New Zealand, four Maori girls approached him and sang a beautiful song of farewell. And Dr. Orr stated there were many outstanding miracles performed while there. Just getting to New Zealand was quite a story in itself! He recounts how many thousands came to faith, and how many attendees could not stop worshiping so meetings sometimes lasted all night. Can you imagine? But when he had to leave, these four girls sang in their native language a beautiful song that touched him. As a musician himself, he filed away the tune and then shortly after, penned “Cleanse Me.”

That song has been used as a call to repentance ever since, as each verse tells a story of the journey from sinner to saint, that walk from needing forgiveness, giving thanks for it, and finally grasping His great love for us! It's truly a picture of the journey each of us walks with Him.

Below are the lyrics. As you read them, pray for understanding and wisdom to stand still and be searched, cleansed, filled and surrendered to His great love as you too, humbly plead.

Cleanse Me

*Search me, O God,
And know my heart today;
Try me, O Savior,
Know my thoughts, I pray.
See if there be
Some wicked way in me;
Cleanse me from every sin
And set me free.*

*I praise Thee, Lord,
For cleansing me from sin;
Fulfill Thy Word,
And make me pure within.
Fill me with fire
Where once I burned with shame;
Grant my desire
To magnify Thy Name.*

*Lord, take my life,
And make it wholly Thine;
Fill my poor heart
With Thy great love divine.
Take all my will,
My passion, self and pride;
I now surrender, Lord
In me abide.*

*O Holy Ghost,
Revival comes from Thee;
Send a revival,
Start the work in me.
Thy Word declares
Thou wilt supply our need;
For blessings now,
O Lord, I humbly plead.*



MARRIAGE

In This Together – Surrounded - by Bekah Holland

Sometimes, no matter what you do, how great things are and how hard you work, things still go to “hell in a handbasket.” Things are moving along swimmingly, everyone is happy and healthy. The dogs haven’t eaten anyone’s shoes in a while. You almost have life under control. And then BAM! The bottom drops out and you’re wondering what end is up.

I’m going to operate under the assumption that I’m not the only person this happens to and continue on with my story. I’ve lived some periods of my life that were in a constant state of disaster. Like just quit and move to a hut on a deserted beach in Mexico kind of bad. And I’ve lived periods where things were sunshiny and relatively drama free. And honestly, there are things that are good about both.

Now, you may be thinking I have completely lost the small shred of decency and sanity I’ve been holding on by. Which is a fair assumption, and probably a foregone conclusion of a future version of me, but I digress. So obviously when life is good, things kind of float along without many waves to knock you back in the water. No idea why I’m running with the water metaphor, but we’re just going to see where the current takes us (see what I did there?)

Where was I? Oh yeah, life, *easy peasy, yada yada*. We know the ease that comes with those days. But what can you possibly appreciate during a dumpster fire that once resembled a good life? Well, get comfy and I’m going to lay it out for you. I’ve come to realize, that in some ways, life being in a constant state of chaos and pain, is easier to maneuver. Mostly because, when you’re already in a mess, you’re a little more prepared for the other shoe to eventually drop. You’re well versed in the pain and struggle and, as heavy and hard as that is, you almost get used to it. You know it’s hard. You know (okay, pretend to know) how to trudge through until you can find your way back to the surface. And when more difficult things come, it’s just one more thing, and you can figure out just one more thing. But when things have been easy, good, peaceful, we (I) have a tendency to ignore signs that things might not be headed in the right direction. And in case you were wondering, that is a terrible plan of action. Because eventually, those signs turn into red lights and red flags and then before you know it, you’re driving full speed toward a construction sign blinking “road closed” without enough pavement to stop and faulty brakes. And those days are really, really hard. Especially in marriage. Because for most women, we grew up with fairy tales of being rescued, and then movies and books that gloss over those silly little hiccups like job losses, death, mental illness, and somehow, everything works out okay in the end.

And while lots of times, everything does in fact work out okay in the end, when there isn’t an end in sight, it can take us all on quite the rollercoaster ride. Unlike basically every Hallmark movie plot, we don’t always know how to take the next step or see into an unsure future. Marriage is hard all on its own, y’all. Heaping on circumstances determined to break us just feels insurmountable at times. But we tend to forget the important part of making it through this wild life. We are not alone. We have our partners, which is great. However, sometimes, we just need more.

We need friendships that hold us up when we can’t stand on our own. Friendships in which, when everything hits the proverbial fan, show up without being asked (most often with wine and comfort food in tow). These people are the ones who know better than to ask what they can do to help. They just help. They show up in messy buns and 20 year old t-shirts and dive in. It could be washing dishes, taking out the trash, making meals or taking our kids so we can cry on

the floor with a jar of Nutella without anyone asking for a snack. These relationships....they are just as important as our marriage. Because guess what? We can't do it all. Shocking, I know. And we can't even get everything we need from our partner.

I believe that God made us for communion and community. And that means filling our village with people who all show up and just do what needs to be done. Sometimes that's coming in jammies, prepared with a slew of junk food for a sob fest of movies we save for when we just can't do real life anymore. And just like the church was designed to be, they all have different strengths that soothe different parts of our spirit when it's broken.

I have been blessed with the most amazing of tribes. My people run the gauntlet of gifts, from allowing me a safe space to scream and rage, to people of action who just appear like magic, cleaning and picking up without my completely realizing they were even there, to people who listen and are able to encourage me in ways that no one else can, as well as those who provide comic relief to allow me to escape reality for just a little while. They come in every shape, size, color, background, location and viewpoint, and each one is as essential to my life as breathing. I've known some for a lifetime, and others much less. Each one speaks a language that is life giving and healing, in her own unique way. And without them, I don't know that I would be the wife, mom, daughter, friend, human than I'm working to become.

My husband understands, loves and supports these women, because he knows how much they bring to my life. To our life. He isn't jealous of the value they bring, because he's witnessed who I can be when I'm surrounded with people who know just how to love in a way that lights my path forward and will even give me a not so gentle push in the right direction when I'm too stubborn to listen. I remember hearing, especially in church, that your partner in life should be your best friend. And I believe that's true. However, I have other best friends who are just as much a part of my life as he is. In some ways, they can give me things he can't. And that's great. That isn't a failure on anyone's part. I can't be his everything, either. But with family, both the ones we are born into as well as the ones we choose, we can become so much more together. We can give and receive, pour out and be filled up.

This little village of mine is the key to my peace. It's the key to my husband's peace, and my kids' peace, which allows them to be that key for others. So please, no matter how dark your days happen to be, don't forget that God didn't create us to be little wind-up toys to go it alone until our battery runs out. He provides His peace that is far above what we can even begin to grasp. And He also provides others to walk in front of us, behind us and beside us, no matter the situation. It's because, together, we are so, so much more.

"Friendships between women, as any woman will tell you, are built of a thousand small kindnesses....swapped back and forth and over again." Michelle Obama

Date Night Fun – Music for Two – by Marcy Lytle

We have a turntable and lots of old records we've been collecting, and once in a while we put them on and take a listen. It's funny how albums and turntables are popular once again. But it makes sense, because music is life, isn't it? It can even be part of the life of our marriages...as we plan October date nights together!

Here are some albums you might enjoy, as you listen and mark your calendars to set aside time to listen and love...

Greatest Love Songs by Frank Sinatra – If you're an old soul and like his music, Sinatra is the choice for you. Dress up in black and white attire, eat by candlelight, and play this music in the background...and then dance.

Elvis Presley *Love Songs* – If you haven't seen the new Elvis movie yet, see it, or watch it again. Or watch one of his old movies, then put on the songs from this album. Make a peanut butter and banana sandwich, add a side of dark chocolate, and swing your hips from side to side to work off what you just ate!

Don't Cry Now by Linda Ronstadt – Do you like her voice, or have you even heard of her? There's a movie about her life too, if you can find it – *The Sound of My Voice*. It's good! Perhaps listen to the album while parked atop a lookout in your city, then go home and watch the movie. Enjoy peanuts and a coke.

Love Song – Love Song – that's the name of the group and the album. They were probably the first contemporary Christian artists to become well known, and their songs are awesome. Chuck Girard and the lyrics he put to song are heart-changing. Listen together. Stop at Goodwill and grab a 70's shirt, and go out for appetizers.

Celine Dion – *Let's Talk about Love* – The Titanic song is on this one! Surely, you know a lot of the words, so sing along as you listen! Rent a boat, or go on a sunset cruise. Hold each other close, and enjoy the love you've been given. Then make a list of 10 things you love about each other and say them aloud.

After 40 Years – Home Alone – by Marcy Lytle

We have LOTS, and I mean LOTS, of nights at home by ourselves, lots of weekend excursions just the two of us, and lots of time together watching a show or dining – just the two of us! When we had kids at home, as with all parents, the time alone was valued and precious and rare, because children were under feet ALL THE TIME. But when the kids are gone, they're busy, they have their lives, other friends don't call as often...and if we have some big life changes (like changing churches), well the time alone together is sometimes too much!

I prefer to be alone with my husband than to be with anyone else, and we have the best of times together, but sometimes we do enjoy the company of another couple. Then other times, we prefer to be alone and like it just fine.

Tonight, on a Friday evening, we are home alone and he's not feeling so good, so I'm sitting on the sofa next to him while he rests. The house is eerily silent, whereas last night was full and loud because the kids were here! Young parents long for silence, and we older parents are sometimes deafened by it.

For those who are homebodies, perhaps being home night after night is no big deal. But I'm definitely not a homebody. I like to be gone. I don't mind maybe a night or two staying in by the fire and watching a show, but mostly I want to be on the go. And I don't want to be "stuck" at home trying to think of what to watch on Netflix or any other non-activity that only requires sitting on the sofa. That's SO not me!

So here we sit tonight, home alone, he's resting and I'm writing this story. The only sound is the whir of the AC unit still running, because it's only early September. We had a fun charcuterie board while we watched a thriller, and it was enjoyable. The house is clean, and I like that, because it means the weekend is free to play. I don't want to do a craft, put together a puzzle or even read. I really start to panic when there's too much of at-home play...when I'd rather be gone.

So what is the point of this ramble about nights at home alone? I have to rethink and retrain my brain to refrain from griping and whining when there's nothing to do and no one to see. And it's not easy for me, but here are a few things that help:

- I keep a plan always in front of me – for an outing tomorrow, a day trip next weekend, a vacation soon, a visit or call to another couple for dinner, or an event this weekend. Looking forward makes me smile.
- I lay aside the guilt I feel for sitting on the sofa and watching a show – because I often feel guilty if I'm not productive. There's nothing wrong with chilling out and being escorted away into the story on the screen when a night at home is on the calendar.
- I do NOT in any way do chores or housework at night (a privilege that comes from having kids out of the house.) Nighttime is for anything BUT housework. If I'm at home, I might read a magazine or a book, or we might play a board game (if I can sit still long enough!).

- I think and pause and reflect and give thanks, things I'm prone to skip right over because I'm constantly on the go. We each sometimes scroll on our phones or listen to music on YouTube to pass the time, and it's okay some nights to do this! He plays a game and I look at cool videos, like teenage kids.
- I ask him and he always says yes, and we get in the car with no particular place to go...but we go...if the silence is too strong. We might get a tiny blizzard and watch the sun set out the front window of the car, or we might walk the aisles of Target and purchase a treat – but it's okay to go, too!

Sometimes, the shorter days means we're all at home a bit more at night and some of us love it, and some of us hate it. I'm among the haters. Thankfully, I have a patient husband that knows this and is ready if I need to go, here to play if we have to stay, and rubs my feet if the sofa is our spot.

Do you like to stay home most nights, or are you like me and love to go? I think it's best to learn to be content with either/or...whatever the season may bring.

For Better or Worse - Two Become One – by Kaelin Scott

When we marry someone, chances are we don't come from identical backgrounds. Usually, the person we choose to spend our lives with is pretty different than we are, or at least not exactly the same. How boring would it be if we married a carbon copy of ourselves? Becoming one flesh is partly melding our two backgrounds together into a completely new system.

A beautiful blended creation.

Sometimes, it can be hard to reconcile different lifestyles into something cohesive and fluid. Depending on how different our backgrounds are, it can be quite a challenge. It takes a lot of sifting to see what works for our marriage unit, and a lot of it is trial and error. That's the beauty of marriage, though. There isn't one perfect answer, and it isn't one size fits all.

We can make it what we want it to be.

Raising kids is another challenge when combining different upbringings from each spouse. We have to take the parenting styles we're accustomed to and somehow form them into something we feel will work well for our own family. This takes compromise and a willingness to learn together. But once again, it's such a beautiful thing. We can take what we liked about our childhood and continue those traditions with our own children. Conversely, we can recognize things that didn't work or maybe weren't healthy, and we can choose not to pass them on.

Coming together in marriage isn't supposed to be two lives fitting into one space.

It's the creation of one new life together, a beautifully blended masterpiece. Maybe our spouses were raised in a pretty similar way to the way we were raised, or maybe we're basically from different planets. The amazing and challenging and totally beautiful thing is putting those pieces together to create one big picture.

And whatever that picture looks like is totally up to us!



ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement - Time In A Day – by Kaelin Scott

People often ask me how I have enough time in a day. The answer is that I truly don't know. Actually, a better answer is that I *don't* have enough time in a day. That's why I have a running to-do list with things that have been on it for months. That's just how it is sometimes.

Between homeschooling my kiddos, working part-time from home, writing, and all the other housework and cleaning that goes along with being a mom...well, it can really leave me feeling stretched thin. But I've learned to be grateful for the time I have in a day instead of wishing I had more. Being a good steward of my time means celebrating the things I get done, not fretting over the things I still need to do. God has given me a certain amount of time in each day, and how I fill it can either be pleasing to Him or not. It's my choice how to use that time.

Another thing I've learned is this that being busy doesn't equate fulfillment. Sometimes it's necessary to have a full day and work hard. But it can be equally important to sit down and soak in the day. Some days we just need to enjoy God's creation and the blessings all around us. Work is good, but so is rest. Even God rested after all His hard work, right?

Sometimes it feels like I'll never catch up with everything I need and want to do, and I honestly probably won't. Because there's always more work to be done, mouths to be fed, clothes to wash, and little ones to entertain. Every time something gets crossed off the list, three more get added on. But that's the beauty of life. Each day gives us the opportunity to choose how we spend our time. Maybe some days aren't fun, but they're needed to take care of business. Maybe some days aren't productive, but they're refreshing for our souls.

Most of my articles seem to come back to this lesson, but balance is key. I'm in a season of life where most of my time revolves around my kids, but I still have to find time to care for my wellbeing, too. Reading my Bible, going for a run, reading a book on the porch...these are all simple ways to ensure I get the rest and spiritual nourishment I need in the midst of my busy life.

If you feel like there's too much to do and not enough time in a day, I can absolutely relate. But I don't think we're truly meant to get everything done in a day. Life happens one step at a time. Some steps are big, some are small, and some feel like going backwards, but we can find joy in each season. We can rejoice in knowing we spent our time well, whatever that may look like. For me today, that means doing school lessons, going for a walk with my kids, making food and folding laundry (and writing this story!) Tomorrow, it will be a trek into town to run errands and perhaps a stop at the park.

Managing our time doesn't have to be complicated or stressful. It simply means doing what we can with grateful hearts and good attitudes. The rest will happen in time, so we don't need to worry ourselves to death. Instead of wishing we had more time in a day, let's choose to be thankful for the twenty-four hours we're given and use them the best we can.

Firmly Planted - The Adventurous Path, Part 2 – by Dina Cavazos

An adventure is an exciting or unusual experience, as opposed to the hum-drum of ordinary life. I'm not really the adventurous sort, but I love living vicariously by watching mountain climbing and survival movies. That's enough earthly adventure for me.

Heavenly adventures are something else. Heavenly adventures get the "plodding horse" moving. Heavenly adventures make the old horse perk up and step higher. They inspire, bring purpose, and make the ordinary extraordinary. That's because they are God-directed. Life often does plod along and nothing much seems to be happening; but once in awhile an adventure comes along that reminds me I'm not just living an earthly life. I'm living a heavenly life, right now.

Whispers in my inner ear about the prayer garden in my backyard, and writing, have stirred my soul for some time. The prayer garden is now real, but I've never been sure of its purpose. A childhood dream of writing was buried under the debris of a problematic life, until, in 2014, on a whim, I sent a story to THYME magazine. As God would have it, there was a vacancy and I've been writing a monthly story ever since. But I still didn't consider myself "a writer." When a dear friend sent me a poem he had written, my buried love of poetry was resurrected, and I began writing poetry again. We shared and discussed our poems and stories, and his encouragement suggested that maybe writing was something I should pursue.

It's hard to pinpoint the beginning of this adventure story. Was it twelve years ago when I began the prayer garden? Eight years ago when I began writing for THYME magazine? Or was it more recent: when I was encouraged by my friend Jack, or decided to go on the [Soulwell Journey](#)? You can decide after reading the rest of the story.

The last two years, the question of purpose became heavier on my heart. Why the prayer garden? Did God really give me a desire and ability to write? These two things called my name; but sometimes I'm a little slow to hear, and doubt what I'm hearing. Then small, yet extraordinary, things happened.

First, I began reading a book called [Emotionally Healthy Christianity](#) by Peter Scazzero. Soon after, an acquaintance posted about a retreat called "The Soulwell Journey". Since all was not well with my soul, it got my attention. I looked at the website and it was *exactly* what I was looking for! I still remember the moment: sitting in my yellow velvet Goodwill chair, the website on my computer in front of me, I turned toward the bookcase. [Courage and Calling](#) by Gordon T. Smith. There it was, summing up what my heart was crying for, waiting for just the right time to be read. Was this a signpost on my Path?

I applied to go on this Journey and was accepted. The first email arrived with the first weekend's reading list. What a surprise to find [Emotionally Healthy Christianity](#) on the list. There was no doubt that God was in this.

The Journey was comprised of three powerful, love-filled, healing weekends. Through the Enneagram work we did (I'm a 9 with a 1 wing), I learned to appreciate my strengths and

identify some things that were holding me back. By the end of the Journey, God confirmed that I was hearing rightly: the prayer garden and writing are gifts I would be amiss not to use. I came away committed to move forward, somehow, perhaps join a writer's group.

About one month later, my friend Jeannie and I took a day trip to Belton, Texas. In line to pay for our treasures at an antique shop, Jeannie pointed to a flyer taped to the front of the counter. "Is that something you'd be interested in?" I had totally missed it, but I'm glad she didn't!

The Writerly House Fellowship--Email for more information

The response to my inquiry confirmed it was God moving again. Jeannie's invitation, the trip, the antique store...all these little pieces came together to point me to this wonderful group of fellow writers who now encourage, inspire, and motivate me.

The adventurous path isn't always so clear, but this particular season of my life God has graciously and definitely pointed the way. The story is still unfolding. I have an idea for a book that incorporates my prayer garden with God-stories. Now it's up to me to write it.

Moving Forward – Rejected – by Pam Charro

Everyone eventually feels rejected at some point in life, no matter who they are. If we are honest, we can accept that it hurts. Even Jesus was familiar with rejection, and he was perfect. So, while we know it makes sense that we will experience rejection, processing the pain can take time and effort. I'm currently feeling rejected by many people at once and it's not fun. But it is causing me to really examine myself so that I can understand why. I always believed everything was my fault when I was a kid, and, while I now know that isn't always true, I don't want to miss an opportunity to grow. Here is what I am learning about rejection so far:

-- Sometimes I won't really get an explanation for why I feel rejected and all I will be able to do is give tons of grace to the situation, make sure I have loved well, and let the person choose to reject me. That is what God does, and I want to be like him, even when it hurts.

-- As Jesus said, "If they hated me, they will hate you." If I am truly living a righteous life, it will cause discomfort to many around me who are not. It is a valid consideration that my godliness is keeping certain people at a distance. And that's okay.

-- Sometimes I am attempting to befriend someone who is unable to trust my motives. Maybe they don't see what they have to offer, or they haven't healed from trusting others. That is outside of my control, and if that person feels safer passing up my friendship, I need to accept it.

-- At times, even when both parties are loving and authentic, personalities and preferences do not align, and friendship just doesn't happen. This is not wrong, simply a fact of life, and no one has failed as long as there is no animosity.

-- Finally, I must be open to the possibility that I may have failed in some way, either by a mistake or an ulterior motive in the relationship. It can be difficult to have that degree of honesty with myself, but it is the only path to understanding the truth and growing.

Whatever the reason when I feel rejected, the one who created me and has invested the most in me loves me beyond my comprehension and will never leave or forsake me. I am learning to bring my sad, wounded heart to him when others don't seem to value what I have to offer, and to find my joy and hope in his acceptance of me, even as I become more and more impressed with the person he is making me into. In all of this, there is victory and freedom, even in something that initially only seems painful. I can withstand rejection from people when I remember that these trials are temporary, but God's healing, accepting love is always here for me, and it will last forever.

Simple Truth – A Full Life – by Marcy Lytle

It's a known fact that so many girls want to be thin. It doesn't help that the models and actresses our little girls watch and aspire to be are super thin and tiny and all the things, so the word "thin" becomes synonymous with the good life. But I'm here to remind us that "thin" isn't so good in so many areas. Let me tell you, and then maybe if you're one who longs to be thin, you'll let it go and be happy with who you are!

As we age, our lips become thin, not full – like they were when we were young. Thin lips are not pretty, so we're told.

Thinning hair is a thing after kids, after menopause, and after decades of life. And thinning hair isn't full and luscious like we see on the young ones...so we pine and we whine and search for products that thicken.

Fine, thin lines that appear at the corners of our eyes and mouths are to be erased, so we're told, as well. Fillers and cosmetics are sold by the thousands so that the thinness is gone.

You see, ladies, being thin is not so appealing after all, is it? Thin lips, thin hair, thin lines are to be avoided like the plague! Let's keep going...

A lot of places start to thin out, and our middle is not one of them. However, ear lobes are thin and droopy.

Fingers and toes start to thin out, and knobby bones and knuckles appear instead of smooth and silky hands and feet. (I personally thought my mom's thin hands were beautiful.)

Drooping eyelids are a thing, and they cause our once almond shaped eyes to become thin slits through which we look, as we powder our lids a certain way to hide the droop.

You see, ladies, the thinning process DOES take place over time, that process we long for when we're young, but emerges in older age in places where we don't want it!

What if...we taught and demonstrated to those younger behind us that being thin should never be a goal of any kind at any stage in life, but rather living a full life should be our desire?

Some are born wafer thin, they can eat all they want, and never gain a pound. Other girls can just look at a brownie and gain 10 pounds. Life is full of both kinds of girls. And yet there's this wall of shame behind which the bigger girls live, while they wish for the life the thinner girls have.

Thinning will happen, but it won't be like we wanted it, and it will show up sooner than we ever imagined it.

A full life is now my desire, with all the thinning of my hair, the lines on my face and the pursed lips on my face. I was discussing with a friend how older women often have a thin frown with tight lips because they've become bitter instead of better. But then there are a few older women, which are unfortunately hard to find, that are full on laughter, joy, and peace because

they gave up the pursuit to be thin, accepted the thinness they never wanted, and relished the fact that they have always been beautifully and wonderfully made.

Botox at age 30. Girls that envy the skinny. And moms that are still searching for beauty on the outside. That's the society in which we live, and I can't help but wonder why...when He came to give us all life, and that to the fullest...thin lips and all.

Unearthly Thing - Confessions of a Christian Halloween Fan – by Angela Dolbear

I love Halloween. The decorating, the cooler weather, the dressing up, the parties, and of course, the candy! Oh yeah--and carving pumpkins, and then roasting the pumpkin seeds after cleaning them out of the pumpkin guts. It all makes me smile inside.

That's teenage me in the picture, dressed as Pippi Longstocking for Halloween, at my job at the Chino Music Plus store, circa 1988. Ha! I had really long hair, and classic pewter braces on my teeth.

Halloween also means fall is in the air. The heat of summer must give way to cooler temps. Ahhh...sweater weather! My favorite.

BUT (there's always a big "but"), church sermons and blogs tell me I shouldn't like Halloween. That Halloween is a time for evil.

So, I have guilt and condemnation over the joy that Halloween brings me.

I have done some research and read sermons and blog posts over the years. Nothing has provided conclusive Biblical proof that I must carve out the enjoyment of Halloween from my life.

I don't see any evil in the seasonal aisles in Michaels and other craft stores. Candy and black cats are two of my favorite things, both of which I have near me in my office as I write. (Well, only one black cat, my Maddy, my sweet writing muse, a gift from God who I suspect may be some sort of angel considering all I have seen and felt, but that's a story for another time).

I have seen real evil. It is not seasonal. I have encountered demon possessed people. And it wasn't on Halloween. In fact, all my encounters with the demonic happened in church. On worship teams.

Think about it...if you were a demon, where could you be the most effective in destroying believers in Christ? Inside the church, especially in the leadership. Infiltrating God's ranks. Disrupting the worship of God. (SIDE NOTE: If this topic piques your interest, I highly recommend reading "[The Screwtape Letters](#)", by C.S. Lewis, and "[A Tormentor's Tale](#)" by Angela Dolbear. It's good to know the tactics of your enemy).

Little pumpkins and jangly skeletons are fun and festive. I witnessed a church deacon's wife screaming at people, and then crying and mumbling, and then screaming again. All the while her face seemed distorted, almost pixelated. For real. No joking. It was not fun or festive.

But it wasn't scary either. I know where that behavior came from (you could almost smell sulfur in the air). It wasn't scary because I have nothing to fear as a child of the Most High God. I admit, the incident stuck with me, and is something I will never forget. But I was not scared.

Maybe scary Halloween masks and haunted houses are not good for some people. Having just read all of I Corinthians in the Bible, I try to be mindful of things that might drag other people down. If that is you, it's okay. Stay away from Halloween if it bothers you.

But we should also be mindful of setting something up to be feared that should not be feared. Something that has no power over us.

And we should be wary of setting up our opinions as fact, in the name of righteousness. Especially, if the chief goal is to shame others, which is a Biblically noted goal of the devil. And he doesn't need our help in tearing down believers in Christ.

So, I will celebrate Halloween by excitedly purchasing "Day of the Dead" decorations when they become available at the Dollar Tree because I love the colors and textures (I love Mexican culture, a by-product of growing up in Southern California). And I will keep loving Jack Skellington, the Pumpkin King, mostly because God spoke to me through the film, "A Nightmare Before Christmas." That's a story I wrote about in THYME some months ago.

And I will fear nothing, except the lack of wisdom to see God as the Almighty God over everything. He is my Heavenly Father who has unfailing love for you and for me. So, there is nothing to fear.

And I will take the opportunity while celebrating fun Halloween events with others to not point out the perceived woes and dangers of Halloween, but I will freely talk about my Heavenly Father who loves me and cares for me. No matter what the time of year is.

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. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN--listen to their music on [Sound Cloud](#). Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME – Even at Our Best – by Marcy Lytle

“Do your best!” we say, as they enter the school building.

“Just do the best you can,” son, as he goes for the new job interview.

“Do the best with what you have...” my dad said, often, when preaching or talking to others.

And yet...we all know that even at our best, sometimes we have a sorry day, we don't get the job, and we fail at trying anything with what we have.

I was thinking about this the other day and I realized that even at our very best, we still need help.

Even when we get the best score on a test with no mistakes, we need help to not boast, to keep up the good grades, and to never belittle someone else that performed poorly.

Even when we land that job, receive accolades and raises, and all things seem to come up roses, we need help maintaining that level – because others are vying for the job we got. Others are placing excessive duties on our shoulders, and we're tired and need a break from all the greatness!

Even when we do the best with what we have and maybe we plant the perfect seeds and the rains fall, and the sun shines, and we yield a harvest of the prettiest vegetables we've ever grown, we need the continuation of good weather, no pests, and SO MUCH MORE.

So even at our best, we are dependent on HIM.

We need God to be free of the pressures, the opinions and the burdens that this world brings with all of the success we might achieve.

We need God to experience peace at night, when all is well with our families and jobs, but fear whispers “what if you lose it all” as we try to go to sleep.

We need God's forgiveness when pride does seep in and we take a fall, or when we realize we've stepped on the toes of others, and we've caused hurt....deep hurt.

We need God to give us identity apart from all of those “best” things in life, because they will attach themselves to us like glue and close our fists, and cause us heaviness. So we need to know who we are, apart from “even at our best.”

We need God to satisfy our deepest longings and desires, because the best that we experience now won't be the best we want tomorrow, and the next year, and the next... Only He can satisfy.

I'm so glad that when we're down and out and things go wrong, we have a Savior. But I'm equally as thankful that we have that same Savior when things are looking up, so that when they shift, we don't shift with them.

Even at our best, we need Jesus, and he's always there...

FRESH TIME – Five for Fall – by Marcy Lytle

As I was decorating my house, I realized that in the past I've placed this "burden" of sorts on myself to decorate wisely so that what I place and use can last a lifetime. While there's wisdom in being frugal in spending, there's also some freedom that some of us need to experience about the reality and beauty of seasons! They come, and then they go! None of the four seasons last forever. They show up when they're supposed to (well, somewhat), they give way to the next season, and they all show off their own colors and breezes and scents!

Here it is fall again, and I'm guessing most of you have already started decorating. Or maybe you don't decorate for seasons. But I just can't pass up a pumpkin spice candle or a new pillow cover with leaves on it, or a table setting with orange plaid...and more! And in a few weeks of time I'll be replacing it all with evergreen and cedar scents, pillows that say "Merry Christmas" and table settings that are festive and sparkly.

And guess what? It's okay and normal and healthy and good to enjoy each season and its different feeling and ambience that it brings, without guilt!

If you're one of the ones that hears that whispering imp on your shoulder all the time, the one that tries to zap all of the fun of life right out of you, don't listen to it this fall. In fact, turn and knock it right off your shoulders and consider some easy, affordable ways to change out five things in your house each season.

Tea towels – These are inexpensive at places like Marshalls and Ross, so grab seasonal ones and hang one on the stove, or near the sink, and admire it. Or buy a pack, and do this each season! Yes, use them, get them dirty, and then buy new ones next season.

Candles – Okay, these can be expensive. But don't buy the ones that cost \$30 and up. Again, hit the shelves of the discount stores and smell them and get a few, and burn them. Burn them often, and use them up each season, and then buy new ones for the next! One for the kitchen, living area, and your room (in a jar, for safety!)

Pillows – Opt for a couple of pillows and then purchase the covers to switch out for seasons. This saves space and dollars – and they're so affordable on Amazon. Place on the front porch or back porch chair/bench, one or two on your sofa, and toss one on your bed! Why not?

Gourds – Visit the dollar store, or buy a pack of them at Hobby Lobby, and then set gourds near some of your décor that you already have out. Remember to place in groups of three, so set a gourd or two by a lamp, or atop a stack of books, or on a shelf by a photo. They'll look great! Buy fake ones or real ones.

Cups – Find ones in fall colors at the dollar stores, place on a shelf, use one for a vase for short flowers or greenery, set one on the counter in the kitchen and USE it for hot tea or coffee or cocoa, whatever you sip! Use one as part of a trio on a wooden board, perhaps with a pumpkin and a vase of stems you've cut from your yard, or herbs.

Set aside one shelf or two in a cabinet or in the garage to store seasonal items, keep a few and replace a few every time the wind blows a different direction and you yearn for a new aroma in the house, and most of all - enjoy!

FRESH THYME – What’s in Your Bag? – by Marcy Lytle

I have been smiling for weeks now, and will be smiling even wider, by the time this story is published. It’s all because my son and his wife are expecting their first child in just a few days, and the entire family is giddy with excitement as we wait for the news! But another thing that made me smile was hearing that they have their bag packed and ready to go, once the baby comes. All parents do this, and hopefully they’re packed early enough that everything’s there to grab and rush out the door, once the movement starts! It’s one of the most exciting things in life, to await the birth of a new family member.

The things in parents’ bags always include an outfit (for the baby to come home in), maybe reading material for while they wait, and even some snacks. There also needs to be a comfy outfit for Mom to wear. I’m thinking there will be toiletries and phone charging cords, so that family members can be kept up to date on the birth. Maybe even gum for the nervous dad!

I absolutely LOVE to pack bags of all kinds, so when my kids told me their bag was packed, it made me happy to think this is really it – the baby is coming! And after this bag, will be the diaper bag, and then when the baby gets older it will be a backpack or book tote, and also little suitcases for the kids as they travel. SO many bags, for all stages in life of our kids, and for us!

So maybe by the time this actually is published, I’ll tell you at the end of this story our newborn news!

Until then, let’s keep chatting about bags! I have several I’d like to share, bags of my own that make me happy this fall season:

- Large bags from Lakeshore Collection hang in my guest bedroom closet, as I shop and fill them with Christmas gifts. It’s one of my favorite things to organize once September/October arrives. I also collect those dollar bags in the checkout lanes from Marshalls or Ross, to hold small gifts, as well. Bags that help organize are the best!
- Book bags, of which I have several, are folded in a drawer by our front door to grab and go for road trips or even just a day out. Inside we place a puzzle book, something to read, perhaps a cap if we go for a walk, and some walking shoes, etc. We keep a book bag in the car always. Sometimes, we take a nice cloth one from Barnes and Noble, and sometimes just a tote.
- Movie bags are a must for us, because we do carry in our own snacks. No one ever checks, and we often still buy something at the theater, but I have a few in which I place water bottles and nuts/dark chocolate, and sometimes our own popped corn! I carry it as a handbag, it’s not too large, and it works!
- Backpacks are the best when traveling, I’ve found. Carrying one leaves my hands free and makes for better distribution of weight, instead of slinging a regular bag on one shoulder. I have one I purchased for \$7.99 years ago at a kiosk in a mall, and I use it all the time. It’s awesome.
- Road trip bag – This is a favorite purchase because it actually says “road trip” on the front, and it’s so fun to pack it when we hit the road for a day trip or a weekend. I stuff it

full of all the goodies we might need in the car, from Kleenex to pins to books to snacks and more!

So where in the world do I store these bags? I have a huge one in the bottom of a closet in which I have many others folded and placed inside. By the front door is a hall tree with drawers, and some bags are folded and placed in there. Then finally, a hook on the back of the bedroom door is where we hang a few others.

We all carry bags, and I personally have no need for a hospital bag for newborns any more, but it's so fun hearing that my son has his packed. I don't know what we'd all do without all the cute bags to carry the things we need to fun places and new adventures. And I can barely stand to pass up the chance to buy a new one, quite often!

Enjoy packing your bags, wherever you're headed this fall...