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TIPS

The Dressing – Hues and Shoes – by Marcy Lytle

March is that month of the year that has Spring Break on the calendar, but one really never knows if Spring Break will be spent at the beach soaking up rays, or at home still by the fire because of a late cold front...even here in Central Texas! So there are ways to anticipate spring and stay warm while the temps speak winter by wearing lighter hues, and new shoes!

Tees of Color – Long sleeves might still be necessary, but we can start bringing back in color now that winter is leaving. This shirt is still warm but has some lacey detail, as well as pops of color – it's perfect for early spring!

Tees with Words – Graphic tees are great as well, worn under jackets when it's still nippy outside. But then the jacket can come off, and we can sport something fun like "Take it Easy" when it's warm and sunny.

Pink and bright! – I love this sweatshirt with a Camaro on the front I found at Target, because it's bright and cheery! A headscarf in yellow floral compliments the shirt too, as I carry a wrap in case I need it at night.

New sneakers – Do you have a pair of slip-on sneakers? Check out these gray ones that don't lace, but are so comfortable for long walks or shopping, or any of the things we do when the temperatures start to rise. I often find the best shoes at Marshalls or Ross!

Mules, yes! – I love mules and find them so versatile from dressy to casual. Emery Rose is an online site I recently ordered from, and these mules came and make me happy! They're so pretty – have a square toe for comfort – and will look great with spring trends.

Loafers are Back – These thick-soled loafers in a very light hue look amazing with cropped jeans or skirts, or whatever you're wearing this season. The light color is the best, and they're from Tillys!

Layered in Blue – Baby blue is always a great spring color, and layering two blues keeps us warm but looking fresh. Add a black and white headscarf, and you've got yourself an outfit that sings!

Long Jean Jacket – I found this at Papaya, I think! I often slip in stores of all kinds (not just department stores) to see if I can find a treasure. This jacket is SOFT not hard like some jean jackets. And it's perfect for warmth over any spring outfit I might choose to wear.

March is a great month to start your spring wardrobe, while staying warm and cozy at the same time. Hope you find some cute things to try!

Seven for You – It Still Works – by the Panel

There are some things that might be old but they're still good, and we asked our panel to share these things. It's fun to see what worked back then that still works now, what's worth revisiting, or what's just worth holding on to, because it's the best! Hope you enjoy our list...

It's interesting that the first thing I thought about was a tip from my Dad. Dad served in the military for 26 years. He learned quite a few things from his military teachings that were carried over to our home life. We had shoe-shine day, latrine cleaning day, laundry day, etc. Things had to be organized and just so at all times. One of the requirements, when he lived in the barracks, was to make his bed using hospital corners. My brother and I had to make our beds the same way. As kids, we thought he was being too strict and fussy but we did what we were told.

I have learned that some organization is necessary and using the hospital corners technique when making your bed or putting on clean sheets works! I'm not a sound sleeper but when you tuck your sheets in the way Dad taught us, they stay put.

Thanks, Dad! – Cathy

I not only wear aprons, but I love them and have about 10 in various colors (so that they match my outfit, of course!). I make them and I always wear one when I'm in the kitchen. When I was a young mom, my grandmother noted that most store bought aprons were much too short from the neck to the waist for me, so she made me a custom made one--and it was long enough in the torso so that it didn't bend my neck down! Yay, for my loving grandma who also helped me learn to sew! Since then, I've made a bunch of really fancy aprons as gifts for others. But for myself, I prefer much more functional and plain ones, in one of two styles. Either, the Japanese "crossover" back style that goes over the shoulders and not the neck (it's AWESOME) and has no ties at all, or a full bib apron, but with a long enough torso that it doesn't bend my neck down AND has long enough ties to wrap around the back and tie in the front.

Speaking of Grandma, she lived to be 96 and she was a phenomenal cook and could make something delicious out of practically nothing. Grandpa grew it, and Grandma canned or preserved it. I will also forever make her fruit cobbler recipe. It's better than any other I've ever tried. Her recipe puts the batter on the bottom of the baking dish, and pours boiling fruit, with all the juice, over the top of the batter. Then as it bakes, the batter rises up through the fruit and its liquid, thickening it and making a delicious, soft crusty top. The very best was her home grown and canned peach cobbler, but ANY fruit will work as long as it's hot and liquid-y. YUM! - Debbie

Grandma's Fruit Cobbler

(I ALWAYS double the batter for this recipe)

Preheat oven to 350

Butter a deep baking dish, at least 9x13

In medium / large sauce pan

2 quarts fruit, including juice/ liquid

Sugar to taste, if fruit isn't already sweet enough (~1/2 to 1 cup)

Bring fruit, sugar, and liquid to a soft boil, keep it at a low boil

(Add water or other fruit juice if there isn't at least 2+ cups of liquid)

Cream together:

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
1 cube of butter
1 tsp vanilla

Mix together:

1 cup flour
2 tsp baking powder
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp salt
Add 1 cup milk

Combine creamed and dry ingredients together. Add more milk if batter seems dry. It should be fairly loose. Pour batter into buttered baking dish, covering bottom. Pour boiling fruit over the batter and spread. Bake at 350 for 30-45 minutes. Batter rises to the top as the cobbler bakes.

My mom mopped her bathroom floors with a rag and her foot. I used to watch her and think – that’s good exercise – so I do it. I don’t use a mop. I place a cleaning cloth under my foot and move around over the floor until it’s clean.

Also, I’ve never owned a Kitchen Aid but prefer my old hand mixer. I don’t bake all that much, so a Kitchen Aid seems too costly and huge for my small kitchen. I love my little Sunmaid hand mixer – it works for everything I need!

A calendar on the fridge. Does anyone else have one? I don’t like using my phone as a calendar, and I’m not sure why. But I do enjoy shopping for and finding that perfect calendar each year to hang on the front of my fridge. I love finding one with pretty colors or even recipes, or gardening tips, and then I love filling in the squares as life gets full. – Marcy

There’s nothing like a good blanket. We inherited one from my husband’s parents that he used as a child. It’s worn, a little frazzled, and red, which has never been a color in my decor. But it’s the best and warmest old blanket one could ever have. As my children grew up, it became known as the “sick blanket” and has been known by this name ever since. It’s just one of those blankets that makes us feel snug and loved when we’re sick, as well as any other time. We have lots of other, newer, blankets but this is the one that always ends up being used.

We also have several pieces of furniture that we inherited from my and my husband’s families. The chest in the picture behind the blanket belonged to my father-in-law. He used it as his dresser in his bedroom. We use it in the living room to store all those special things like colors, coloring books, and other activities for our grandchildren.

The round table in the picture was in my childhood home. I can remember waking up many nights and finding my Momma sitting beside it reading a book. I have to say, we have many sentimental items in our home, but they are just that, items. They will not last forever. There’s nothing more important than the people that come into our home. The love and memories we make are so important. But watching my daughter tell her daughter to wrap up in the “sick blanket” is special. And having our grown kids show interest in owning some of these items later means so much. It means they have a sentimental feeling too, sentimental not because of the item but because of the person who owned it before. – Carole

I use old toothbrushes to clean those hard spots around the sink. I just have to be sure and store them where no one will use them. But they do work great when trying to get in those little crevices around faucets.

My dad was really particular about how towels were folded. He taught me the three-fold so you can save space. If my husband ever folds towels, I always refold since he does not do it this way. Silly, right?

My mom did give me this cookbook when I was in college. I cooked the basic recipes and I know most recipes are outdated, but it's full of a lot of useful information and I can't part with it - my mom gave it to me! - Melissa

Cousin Moms – It's Sports Season!

“Three Moms” has changed just a bit so our title followed. One cousin mom is in the middle of lots of family changes, so the other two moms are handling this column. And one of those moms just had a baby! So now, these two cousin moms, Kamrin and Charissa, will be answering the monthly questions. Charissa has three girls, kindergarten and younger, and Kamrin has two boys, ages 11 and 8, and one daughter, age almost 10. Six kids between them!

This month's question was about sports and kids, since it is that time of year when practices and games, uniforms and snacks, and starting the hectic schedules now that all of the new year holidays have passed.

Charissa

With my kids being ages 6, 4 and a newborn...we haven't quite enjoyed the full blown sports season yet. This spring will be the first time both of our girls will be in T-ball and they played soccer last fall. They've also done gymnastics or dance. So from our first season with both girls in sports, the hardest thing for me as a mom was having the kids on different teams. This made it hard to manage our schedules, where every night of the week was a practice or something else, and then games on the weekends. This created such a busy week! During the season of sports, we had to “plan” rest, on days when we made free time to take a break.

Meals and snacks were hard, partly because I was working full time and their practices were at 5:30! I tried to have snacks in my bag to hold them over until dinner. After a busy day at school, the girls were “hangry” so snacks worked, like a Lunchable, to eat on the way to practice. I never cook on practice nights – it's to-go food - or we eat out. This worked the best for us!

Game weekends were hard, too, because Saturdays were no more days of rest and sleeping in, but hustle/bustle. Again, intentionally making rest a priority is for sure what we do.

We tried our best to plan ahead for the snacks and meals during sports season. Of course, there were time when the plans didn't work, but we got through!

Uniforms and purchases were made on line or Dicks Sporting Goods. The girls are rapidly growing so using the same things each season doesn't work, as we always have to get new things. It can be a lot, especially if it's a new sport and we have no uniforms or socks or shoes!

One final thing is that we like the girls to be able to try each sport that interests them. In soccer, they were done after a couple of practices and one game. But we committed, so we finished, even though we sort of wanted to quit as well! This helped the girls learn perseverance and pushing through, going to practice and supporting teammates.

T-ball is this spring, here we go!

Kamrin

When it comes to sports for us, I probably would say there are many “hard” things;

Finances are hard, with three kids involved in activities. It gets really expensive, so I find it difficult since some payments are all up-front or others are monthly. We've tried to set aside money monthly, even during the off season. Otherwise, it's too hard to figure it all out when sports season starts. It helps to look ahead of time to see what you need to budget.

Balancing our schedule is hard, as well, with evenings and school and homework and dinner. Multiple practices a week make it so hectic...so we find crockpot or Instapot meals. We either eat earlier or later, but the meals are easy ones to prep. Sometimes, my husband takes the kids to practice and I make meals. Easy meals work best! Again, this takes prepping which is exhausting. A few times, I've done the meal planners where food is shipped to me, all prepared and ready to cook. With three kids running around, it's crazy! And make sure everyone communicates!

Weekends are hard. For example, in February we had a couple Saturdays where we had robotics, baseball and choir on the same day. We had to split time and had to ask for help. So ask for help and get to know other parents that might be able to pick up or take your kid home, and do the same for them. Never be afraid to ask for help. Other parents are in the same boat. Or ask Grandparents for help, as well, if they're close by.

Finally, which kids' performance to attend is hard – sometimes we hit all three – and other times we have to split up. Again, communicating to see which kid needs the support and talking to each other helps all to feel validated. They need to feel heard and seen and have parental attention, so being honest about split decisions once in a while, they understand more than we think.

It's all exhausting with practice, budget and going to everything. But being okay with limits, like not buying cupcakes for the team party, it's okay. If you can't even go to a team party, that's fine, too. Do what is best for your kids and your family. Taking a break is okay as well, to not play sports all year round. We take the summer off to have vacation. We say no to extra clubs and practices, so kids can be kids. Have fun and enjoy, grow together as a family in character, and don't let sports manage your family. You manage the activities together!

In the Kitchen - A Descriptive Menu – by Marcy Lytle

Sometimes, just the words used to describe a menu option at a restaurant makes our mouths water. Then if there are adjectives to go with the actual food items, we become interested in trying something new! So this month, visualize and look at the photos, read the words, and decide to try something solely based on the beautiful descriptions behind the recipes. See if you don't enjoy all five!

Flavorful Dill Pimiento Cheese

Just reading the ingredients made my own mouth water, as I saw pickles added to this classic dip I hadn't made in years. It was really delicious!

- ½ c mayo
- 2 oz cream cheese at room temp
- 8 oz extra sharp cheddar grated
- Kosher salt and ground pepper
- 1 jar piquillo pepper chopped (pimientos)
- ¼ c chopped pickled banana peppers
- 10 dill pickles chopped
- Crackers for serving

Beat the mayo and cream cheese with a hand mixer until combined, then stir in the cheddar and combine. Taste and season with S&P. Fold in the piquillos, banana peppers and dill pickles. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Dill Popcorn and Cuties

This recipe adds sour cream and onion chips to the popcorn mix, and dark chocolate to the cuties. Salty and sweet always grabs my attention. This was a great treat to eat while watching a movie at home.

4 cups popped corn

1 ½ cups Crushed sour cream and onion potato chips

2 tsp Dried dill

1 tsp Garlic powder

3 cuties, peeled and sectioned

Dark chocolate chips

–

Sea salt

Cuties

Spread popcorn on a baking sheet and spray with olive oil. Transfer popcorn to a large bowl. Add dill and garlic powder to bowl and toss. Add chips and toss. Serve immediately.

For the cuties, just peel and section. Melt the dark chocolate chips in the microwave carefully, so as not to scorch. Dip the cuties in then place on parchment paper. Sprinkle with sea salt. Place in the fridge until chocolate is hardened.

Drizzly Veggie Bowl

I've made lots of veggie bowls, but the acorn squash and turnips and brussels caught my attention – and the drizzle on top. Easy to make, this one will stay in my recipe box!

½ acorn squash, seeds out, then squash cubed (leave on peel)

2 turnips peeled and cubed

¼ c EV olive oil

Salt and pepper

1 lb Brussels sprouts

¾ c whole milk Greek yogurt

2 T lime juice

1 small jalapeno stemmed and seeded, chopped

½ c packed fresh cilantro

¼ c packed fresh dill

1 12oz frozen quinoa (about 3 cups)

½ c roasted salted pepitas

Preheat oven to 450 and put one baking sheet on each of two racks, positioned in middle and lower third of oven. Combine squash, turnips and 2 T olive oil, ½ t salt and some pepper in a large bowl, and spread on lower baking sheet. In same bowl, trim and halve or quarter the Brussels and toss with 1 T olive oil, ½ t salt and generous grind of pepper. Spread in single layer on other hot baking sheet.

Roast til tender, stirring once. 20-25 minutes for the sprouts and 25-30 for the turnips and squash.

Puree the yogurt, lime juice, jalapeno, cilantro, dill and big pinch of salt and pepper, season with more salt and pepper, and heat the frozen quinoa as label directs.

Divide the quinoa into bowls, top with veggies and pepitas in separate sections. Drizzle with dressing. Enjoy.

Sunflower Guacamole

I have made so many “bowl” meals, with various base ingredients like rice, beans, grains or pasta. This night I decided to make a guacamole bowl loaded with toppings. It was delish!

- 2 large avocados
- Salsa
- Yellow pepper, chopped
- Green or black olives, chopped
- Shredded cheese
- Pepitas or sunflower seeds
- Shredded carrots

(This is just what I had. You can use whatever you have in your pantry)

Make your guacamole as you wish. I just used salsa and two avocados. Season to taste. Spread this across a shallow bowl. Lay out the other ingredients into sections, to make a pretty circle for dipping. Provide tortilla chips!

Sheet Pan Chicken Fajitas

Anything on a sheet pan attacks my attention because it's a one and done meal! I saw “sheet pan” and decided to tear out the recipe from *Woman's Day Magazine* and was glad I did!

- 4 6-oz chicken breasts
- 2 T adobo sauce
- Kosher salt
- 2 peppers (red and yellow) sliced
- 1 onion sliced
- ½ small pineapple peeled, cored and cut into matchsticks
- 1 T olive oil
- Tortillas
- Lime wedges

Heat broiler. Toss chicken with adobe sauce and ¼ t salt. Place on rimmed sheet and broil 6 minutes, transfer to plate, and reduce oven to 425 degrees.

On same sheet, toss peppers, onions and pineapple with oil and ¼ t salt, and roast 15 minutes.

Nestle chicken amid the veggies and roast til chicken is cooked and veggies are tender, about 5 minutes. Slice chicken and serve with veggies, tortillas and lime wedges.

SUGAR + Spice

Vintage Hollywood Beauty Secrets

I have been fascinated with the beautiful actresses of old Hollywood since I was a child. They are all so glamorous and lovely, and that was before the days of Photoshop.

Recently, I came across a few articles about beauty secrets of film actresses from the mid-century and earlier era. I've always wanted to dig into their secrets...so I did!

I found several secrets that intrigued me so much I wanted to try them. I disregarded some of the stranger secrets such as how Joan Crawford used to wash her eyes with boric acid to make them appear whiter. I passed on that practice because, um, NO thank you! Any beauty task that sounded painful (or harmful) didn't make it on my "Try It" list.

So here are a few of the beauty secrets that did make it on my list. I have so many I am splitting sharing my experiments and their findings into two parts.

Enjoy Part 1 of my experimentation into old Hollywood beauty secrets:

Jean Harlow and Rita Hayworth's DIY Hair Mask

In order to keep her famous bleach-blonde hair looking soft and hydrated, Jean Harlow gave herself a scalp massage with castor oil once a week.

Rita Hayworth's wavy red mane was part of her signature look so she had to keep it in looking its best. She did this by applying oil to her hair after every wash, wrapping it in a towel, and leaving it in for 15 minutes. Afterwards, she'd wash it out with hot water and lemon juice to remove any leftover residue.

Trying it:

I combined the two beauty secrets of Ms. Harlow and Ms. Hayworth. Instead of castor oil, I used grapeseed oil, because it's what I had on hand. I'm not even sure I would know where to buy castor oil, or what I would use it for after my experiment. I use grapeseed oil to remove my eye makeup, and we also use it for cooking. It's a light oil with almost no scent.

I poured plenty of oil into my hands and rubbed it onto my scalp. It felt soothing and relaxing. When I was done massaging my scalp, I noticed my hands were covered in oil. So I pushed my cuticles back gently with my thumb nails because I was not sure I could hold a cuticle stick steady in my oily hands. Yes! Quickie manicure!

Then I saturated the rest of my hair with grapeseed oil, pinned it up, and put a cheap shower cap over my hair so I wouldn't get oil on anything else. I wrapped a towel over my head on top of that. Then I made myself a cup of lemon ginger tea (one of my favorites) and sat back and read my Kindle for 20 minutes.

I skipped the lemon juice rinse that Ms. Hayworth did, since I shampooed my hair. My hair was so soft and shiny when it was dry, which is saying something, since my hair usually feels like straw because it's so moisture-starved due to disease and menopause. And my hands and cuticles looked hydrated too. Most of all, I felt really relaxed. Just 20 minutes of quiet oil drenched relaxing made me feel revived after my little beauty treatment. Like a home spa day.

Sugar and Spice - Hollywood Secrets – by Angela Dolbear

I read in my research that Sophia Loren would do a home spa day once a week during her children's favorite television program. She would sit in a hot bath with olive oil drops in the water and slathered all over her hands. She had a strict a "Do Not Disturb" order to her kids during her spa time.

I agree with her, moments of quiet relaxation are so invigorating, and I'm going to try to have a home spa day more often.

Marilyn Monroe's Glowing Skin Secret

To get her signature on-camera glow, Ms. Monroe would apply thick layers of Vaseline or white Nivea Creme under her makeup.

Trying it:

After applying a light layer of my moisturizing sunscreen, I applied Vaseline all over my face. And then I applied a powder foundation, some concealer, and then a setting powder.

My skin was mysteriously reflecting light! It looked glowing and smooth. Although, my face felt a bit heavy, like I had applied a treatment mask and forgot to rinse it off. I wouldn't wear this look every day, but I may consider it next time I take photos.

I hope you have enjoyed my vintage beauty experiments. Please stay tuned next month for Part 2.

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

Last Month's Learning...

This might be one of my favorite columns to write, because I have to be intentional to note what it is that I'm learning or noting, every single day. I realize there is a wealth of information spread before us daily from sunrise to sunset, if we just write it down and not let it end up forgotten. Hope you enjoy, as well!

Scarves are better folded than hanging...that way they don't slip. Use a drawer organizer and candles as "bookends" – or scarf ends.

HEB has a great couscous and quinoa veggie blend in the frozen section – a great base for a veggie bowl!

I recently tried Biscoff mixed in vanilla ice cream – it wasn't bad!

I needed a scarf and popped into one of those "everything is under \$8.99" stores in the mall. Got a huge scarf I can wear...or use as a runner or picnic spread!

A bowl of orange cuties makes a great accent to a table as we transition to spring...

I heard that Cherokee purple tomatoes are the best ones to plant and eat in your garden!

Grab the cute placemats you see at discount or dollar stores to have on hand for fun tablescape!

I saw a beautiful display of art using clothespins! Who knew?

Have you ever tried an It's It ice cream? If they're available near you, eat one. The oatmeal cookie in the ice cream sandwich with the chocolate – yum!

My sister ordered a set of bathroom bottles for holding shampoo etc. and they're stunning on a shelf!

When's the last time you ordered a Monte Cristo? Maybe it's time to try one, or make one!

There's this cute dish towel scarf for using instead of an apron I found...check it out!

We revisited Mr. Gatti's Pizza – hadn't had it decades – it was STILL so good!

Gleaners are those that stoop to gather, and Pickers are those that take from above. Learned that from the movie *The Gleaners and I*!

Zumba (on YouTube), in your living room when no one is watching, is a good workout – just sayin'...

"Fear is not my future – You are" – great lyrics to a great song – by Brandon Lake – take a listen and add to your playlist. It won a Grammy!

I got this nifty "keychain" kitchen tool. It's five different tools on a ring for easy access and use – from Amazon. I love it. Great for travel, too.

Baked by Melissa – my sister told me about this account on Instagram. I ordered the tiny bite-size cupcakes at Valentine's – they're so pretty and delish – a great gift idea!

Do you have the tiny stick-on holders for your phone cords? I got one from my son and they're great for those long cords that hang on the ground and look unsightly in your home.



HOME

Practical Parenting – It Doesn't Work – by Marcy Lytle

The other night we were eating with the kids and 9 year old Ayla put my reading glasses on, as did her older brother, age 11. They didn't keep them on for very long, though. We laughed and took a few pictures, but they gave them back to me because they couldn't see well with the readers, while I couldn't see without them! They were made for eyes that were my age, but not theirs!

I realized that we as parents often get frustrated with our kids of any ages that they can't "see" what we see.

Babies can't see the danger of crawling toward a plug on the wall, but we can.

Toddlers cannot possibly see the value in eating good food, but we know the value because we've learned.

Elementary school children do not see or understand why they can't have a cell phone *all their own*.

Middle school kids can't see the harm in cheating a little on an exam.

High school kids are unable to see the silliness of comparison and trying to be like "those kids."

It goes on and on. But the truth of the matter is that the lens through which we as parents see is one that has been crafted over time, for our aging eyes. That's why my readers hurt the eyes of the kids when they tried them on. It's why I took them back and wore them home.

It's why we are given to our kids as the ones who see and then teach and train our kids to eventually see as well, with clear vision, as they age.

However, we often yell or reprimand our kids because they don't have the maturity to see clearly, and thus act accordingly with safety and caution.

There's no use in offering the kids "our wisdom" and expecting them to use it without fail. There are verses in the bible that talk about tying and binding His words and then teaching and writing about that same Word to the next generation.

It's so good to read the Word to toddlers and babies, and sing words of truth over them. It's awesome parenting to then write our older kids notes of who they are in Christ, the truth about God's love for them, and place in their lunch boxes or atop their pillows at night. We share the wisdom, the insight, the vision, but we don't place the heavy burden of seeing as we do...only learning and listening as we train.

It's then, and only then, that as they mature they will then begin to see clearly and act without stepping off a curb into traffic or going to a friend's house where no good is going on. The vision that was only ours eventually becomes the vision we've given them, through the lens of His word.

Kids always want to grab our glasses, don't they? From the time they learn to reach and hold things, they take them off our faces. And then when they're 9 and 11 they think it's funny to try them on once again. They're observing the glasses through which we peer and see, and while they hand them back, they will eventually have glasses of their own that fit their vision.

It's up to us to take care of the little eyes that are given to us, so that the lens through which they look as they mature fits their eyes and causes them to walk straight and clearly, no blurry steps along the way...

I Don't Do Teens – Remember... - by Marcy Lytle

What about those preteens, though? Sometimes, they're worse than teens, right? Their hormones are just starting to ramp up, attitudes are worsening, and they can't make decisions or tolerate siblings. And what age does this start? Well...every mom will tell you it's different, but it starts early...and it's not easy to deal. I think by definition, preteens are at the ages of 9-12 but they think they're 20.

Here are some helpful ideas as you navigate this month with your pre-teens...should you find them in your house, around your neighborhood, or among your family:

Remember, they're asserting their independence. They want to be set apart from younger siblings and have something "their own" to do or be responsible for. So give it to them. Let out the leash, so to speak, and grant them some independence in a safe area...like perhaps allowing them to choose their outfits, or make their schedules...things they can control and deliver...with little oversight from you.

Remember, their emotions are all over the place before they ever enter the teen years. One day they might feel like holding your hand and sitting closely, and the next day they might want to be alone in a corner with a book. Allow them grace, and don't take their rejection personally.

Remember, friends are important to them at this age. While monitoring and guiding them, invite one of their friends over for special fun and let them prepare the food and the games, movies, etc. Allow them their own space by one parent taking the other siblings out for a bit, so this preteen can own the space of the house for a while.

Remember, they're not adults, though they might present themselves as one. They don't need to be involved in the emotional conversations of adults. They can still only handle kid stuff, so don't lay burdens on them too heavy to carry...that you yourself stumble with.

Remember, they need assurance. Their bodies may be starting to change, their thoughts venturing out to the opposite sex, their limbs becoming awkward as they grow and ache. Give them verbal affirmation often, even if they push away or want space. Hug them tight at night, when no one is looking. And leave your door open for conversations when they feel like talking.

Navigating this time of life with our kids might be just as difficult as the terrible twos, and it just never stops...this parenting thing. Be encouraged. Your kids will continue to grow, and you as well, as you both remember to love...and keep loving.

An Adage A Day – Creamy – by Carole Gilbert

Do you think having the same interests and enjoyments within a family can make you “cream of the crop?” I do. Let me tell you how I think this can happen. I was reading a post of a friend, Heidi Gaul, and her sweet family celebrating and opening gifts on Christmas Eve.

Heidi tells in her post that she opened her first gift, and it was an ice cream maker. What a fun surprise! A few minutes later her daughter secretly told her she had also bought her husband an ice cream maker. Heidi continues her story that her daughter took a break, and while she was out of the room Heidi’s son-in-law whispers to her that he had bought his wife the same gift. Wow! That’s three ice cream makers in one family! But this story is not over.

They continued opening gifts, and when Heidi’s daughter and son-in-law opened their gift from her it was... another ice cream maker! Four ice cream makers in one family! I’m sure they were all a little tickled at their gifts. Then it came time for Heidi to open her gift from her husband. Another surprise, a soft serve ice cream maker! That’s five ice cream makers! I hope they all really enjoy ice cream! I believe one of the best family bonds is laughter and I bet Heidi’s loving family was laughing over five ice cream makers within their family of four.

Heidi ends her story with, “We all scream for ice cream.”

A family that is that close in their interests and thoughts definitely screams to me that they are “cream of the crop.”

This phrase, “cream of the crop,” refers to being of high value, or high worth. Being “the best of the best” as Will Smith says in *Men in Black*. It began before the 1800’s but wasn’t heard in English until that time. I know Heidi and her family are one of the best. But I also think any family, even those with different likes, can be “cream of the crop.” The key is to have a common bond. And it doesn’t have to be something like yummy ice cream, although that is one of our family’s favorites, too.

While our kids were growing up, we took family vacations. On these trips, my husband and I loved to stop at road cuts and look for fossils. When our three kids were little, they loved jumping out of the car with us for the hunt of these small natural treasures. As they got older, one by one, they slowly weeded out to where only one was left ready to jump out with us. The other two would sit in the car and say, “Are y’all done yet?” And “Let’s go!”

But this didn’t stop us from being cream of the crop. When we got back into the car we’d give each other a hard time, then smile and laugh and go on our way. There’s that laughter again. It’s okay to be different, or to do things the same, and it’s okay to have a sense of humor about it. Like Heidi’s family, we have that family bond, that love for each other, that joyful laughter. Even with our differences, we are also cream of the crop.

I believe, like they say, laughter is the best medicine, especially within families. And with laughter comes such heartwarming stories. These stories show everyone how they may be the cream of the crop.

In Genesis 21:6, Sarah said about having Isaac in her old age, *"God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me."*

So, it doesn't matter if you do things alike or differently, what makes you the cream of the crop is the love and laughter, and sharing it with others.

Tiny Living – Tiny Gadgets – by Leyanne Enterline

That photo to the left...that's NOT my kitchen.

In a tiny trailer, there comes a tiny kitchen with a tiny fridge. And with two growing teenage boys in such a small space, a visit to the grocery store often is a must! I try my best to only go to the store once a week, but my sons eat through things so quickly, a few more visits to the store is not unheard of!

So with all the eating, there must be some space for all the cooking items and gadgets! I've really tried to limit all the kitchen items to only essentials, but it's so hard. My largest items that take up the most space are my pots and pans, next the crockpot, my Vitamix and...my latest thing I had to have is the nutr!

What is a nutr, you ask? Something I've been dying to have! It makes your own "milk!"

We can't have dairy milk, so to buy oat milk or almond is much more expensive than regular milk. I needed a machine that could make our kind of "milk" at a much more affordable price! Seems so silly, I know, but it's my new toy and I had to basically shove it into the kitchen cabinet to fit into the tiny space!

New items rarely make it in because there is just no more room in the inn! But this nutr made it and now we have preservative-free, filling "milk," for the boys to drink, to put in coffee, shakes, and cereal, and to cook with. I love it!

Plates, bowls, and glass cups also take a lot of cabinet space and, of course, all the reusable water bottles! The drawers are filled with the usual utensils and we're very limited on spatulas, ladles, and knives. We have one measuring cup, one baking bowl, a few glass containers for leftovers and that's about it.

There's not too much space to become a hoarder, thankfully. But I sure do miss having a little more room in the kitchen to where at least two people can fit! And I could always use a few more gadgets and a larger fridge!

But for now, this space works and we eat well!

Remember. Love grows best in Tiny Spaces!

A Night to Remember - Easter Bunnies and Chocolate

There's this legend, a myth of sorts, one that started long ago about a long eared cotton tailed creature that hops from house to house to deliver baskets of treats, toys and candy to children, and even colorful eggs! So the Easter Bunny came to be associated with Easter as we know it – along with the cross on which Jesus dies and the empty tomb because He lives!

Of course, the bible makes no mention of this hare that delivers eggs. However, in ancient folklore, rabbits have often stood for fertility due to the number of babies they have – lots! It is said that the Easter Bunny made its way to America in the 1700s by the Germans who brought their tradition of Osterhase – the rabbit that lays colorful eggs for kids that were good. Over time, eggs expanded to chocolate and toys. Easter baskets have become more elaborate and full over the years!

Easter eggs can also represent Jesus' resurrection from the tomb. The history of decorating eggs may have started hundreds of years ago when eggs were forbidden to eat near the time of Lent. So at the end of the fasting period, eating and decorating them was a feast and a way to celebrate!

In Australia, there's an Easter Bilby – an endangered rabbit like marsupial, the Easter Cuckoo is in Switzerland, and in some parts of Germany the Easter Rooster!

So if you and yours are giving your littles chocolate bunnies and hiding eggs, do so with gusto and focus on the blessing of abundance and life as you do – abundant life that only comes from knowing Jesus.

Preparation: Hard boil some eggs to then dye or decorate. And purchase little chocolate bunnies for all to enjoy.

When you get the eggs: The hard shell represents the sealed tomb and the cracking of the egg represents Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Let the kids crack open an egg and give thanks that Jesus lives.

As you decorate and dye eggs: some say early Christians dyed eggs different colors to represent different aspects of the Easter story. Blue – love, red – the blood, yellow – the resurrection. Or scenes were painted on the eggs – scenes of life and hope. Let the kids color and paint and relate their creations to bible truths.

It is said that early Christian missionaries hid eggs for kids to find, so they could then tell the story of Jesus. During the time of Martin Luther, men hid eggs for women and children to find. They focused on the joy the women felt when they found the tomb empty on that first Easter morning. Hide the eggs, and anticipate the joy of the hunt.

Did you know there's an Easter egg roll at the white house at Easter? Invite your own kids to roll their eggs across the grass, to be reminded of the stone being rolled away from the tomb. Jesus isn't dead – he's alive – in us!

Those chocolate bunnies: Bunnies almost always make us smile when we see them hopping long, because hopping is like skipping, and skipping is so joyful. Bunnies have lots of babies which remind us that life is always present and happening and ongoing. Enjoy your chocolate bunnies and give thanks for the joy that comes from knowing Jesus.

Family prayer: *Thank you Jesus for dying on the cross for our sins, in our place, so we don't have to die. Thank you for defeating the power of death over us, and offering us eternal life with you. And thank you for the joy we have in knowing you, so that we can celebrate your death and resurrection outside, with eggs and bunnies, as we give praise to Jesus – the one and only Savior of the world.*

In Each Room – Small Kitchen Space – by Marcy Lytle

I don't have a large kitchen, so space is important, to use it well and efficiently. I saw a wall pot rack that I asked for, for Christmas, so that I could then move all of my pots and pans out of my cabinets to free up those shelves for other things. I also don't have the cool rolling trays found in so many newer kitchens, but I found some solutions for that as well! It was all so fun, so check out what I did:

The pot rack and the new pots and pans are from Amazon. The pots and pans had been recommended by a friend and I love the color – a neutral – to go with my ever changing décor. This rack hangs on the wall, and then hooks are also included for hanging each pan, and a shelf for a pot. I already had a magnet board on the wall that had been holding small spice tins, so I removed them and left the magnet board for a backdrop.

This entire ensemble hangs above a rolling cart I have in the kitchen, and I love how it turned out. The wooden handles on the pots and pans elevate their look and these pans are amazing – non-stick and great and easy to clean up. I am pleased!

Now, my cabinets had been freed up and I decided to use old baking sheets to create “trays” to pull out when I need dishes below. They work great! I just place a baking sheet on the shelf and then bowls or serving pieces on top. I just slide out the sheet as if it were a drawer, grab my dish, and slide the sheet back in. Voila!

I also found some really cool rolling bins from Lakeside Collections that fit perfectly on the lower shelf. I can store lids, small dishes, and other kitchen items that are then easy to pull out and find. Be sure to measure your shelves, if you order some of these! I also have one beside my trash can under my sink that holds dishwasher pods and sponges. The bins roll out, and then back in!

Small kitchens are a challenge sometimes, but then when we use our walls for storage, and search for bins to organize and corral items it sometimes makes our space so cozy and efficient, regardless of not having the extra space.



YOU

Soaring with Kindness

This was no ordinary day at the park. The boys radiated with kindness, compassion, helpfulness and gratitude. For boys with an often times competitive spirit, showing nothing but warmth towards each other melted my heart.

How did they show these qualities? Here's what happened...

Brendan expressed frustration that his plane kept taking a nose dive when he threw it unlike Matthew. I was proud of how Brendan communicated his feelings with a full sentence versus just his body language and a "ugh" sound i.e. pounding his foot on the ground and clinching his fist. It's a big deal because part of Brendan's disability of autism and speech impairment affects his communication skills. It's also a big deal because with words comes a clearer understanding of the problem. This provided Matthew an opportunity to step in and help his older brother.

Matthew heard Brendan, walked over to him, and said, "Hold your plane like this." Matthew watched Brendan follow his directions, making sure he understood what to do. When it looked like Brendan was ready, Matthew said, "Now do this." Matthew threw his plane and Brendan watched. (Brendan doing such a good job at paying attention was something to be proud of as well.)

Brendan gets into position, aims, and throws his plane. It soars and lands BEAUTIFULLY!

What comes next is sincere gratitude.

"Thank you, Matthew, for teaching me how to do it."

"You're welcome," replies Matthew.

I was so overcome with joy that I told the boys how proud of them I was. Matthew surprised me with a hug from behind.

Something ironic about that experience is that while Brendan calls himself an "indoor kid," it was his idea to go to the park to throw the airplanes.

After flying airplanes, the boys moved to climbing the playscape. Now, as it turns out, it was Brendan's turn to guide Matthew. Matthew's confidence gets shaken sometimes as he climbs on something new. "I'm scared, he said." Brendan cheered him on. "It's okay. You can do it, Matthew." Matthew paused for a moment, but eventually climbed up the whole way. I was proud of both of them. Brendan for encouraging Matthew, and Matthew for being brave and not giving up.

Cherishing days like this gives me inner strength to keep being the best mom I can with what God provides.

If I can do it, so can you!

A Hopeful Heart - Purposeful Peonies by Christina Oberon

Something about spring fills me with purpose and productivity. Maybe it's the break from winter's cold, or the feeling of sun on my face, or the sudden bloom of flowers and burst of color that energizes me and induces creativity. Just as I feel the most vibrant in spring, there is a special flower I feel connected to that only blooms once a year in late spring or early summer. One that carries a rich history of meaning, medicinal use, and myth.

Have you seen the wonder that is a peony? Layer upon layer of petals, they are blowsy, beautiful, and romantic. Many believe them to be a symbol of love, good life and fortune, and a happy marriage. Their uniqueness fascinates me. Besides their wonderful aroma, they come in every color, with the exception of blue. Despite only blooming once a year, they can live for more than 100 years!

When I became captivated by peonies, I didn't know their history or facts at the time, just simply that my spirit was drawn to them.

The peony, known as the "king of flowers," is named after Paeon, who was a student of Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine and healing. Studies have shown that peonies possess immune-system and mood-boosting properties, and can be used to effectively treat things like inflammation, blood clots, and general pain. The roots and seeds of peonies have been used in traditional Chinese medicine for centuries to treat various ailments, as well as in European herbal medicine as various remedies.

When I look at peonies, a Maya Angelou quote comes to mind, "I would like to be known as an intelligent woman, a courageous woman, a loving woman, a woman who teaches by being." I think there is deep symbolism in my attraction to this beautiful flower that I can't take my eyes off of. The flower that is believed to stand for strong and positive virtues like bravery, honor, respect, nobility and prosperity...all things I aspire to in my own life.

I wonder if God uses nature as a way to illustrate or highlight things to us that have deep personal meaning. After all, He is the great Creator, and His creations are gifts. I am just thankful He thought to include peonies!

Healthy Habits – Sitting All Day – by Marcy Lytle

Some days, work is such that I sit quite a bit at the desk clicking away on my laptop. Same with my husband. Especially, when the weather is bad, or when we have lots of work, we find ourselves tired at the end of the day from all of that sitting! Maybe you have days like that as well, where you've barely moved when 5pm rolls around. We've started noticing things we can do, when the chair is our constant space on any given day...

Drink water – Seems like a no-brainer, but we both offer to grab the other one a bottle of water often, to stay hydrated. It's easy to forget to drink when we're not up moving around to get thirsty.

Twist and shout – I often take a break and twist my upper torso and punch my arms. I don't shout, but that word seemed to go with twist! This feels good on my waistline and my arms.

Lower leg and arm lifts – Another thing to do while downloads are taking place, or we're waiting for a response to an email, is to move our legs up and down, and arms as well. As if we're lifting weights. Do this every day, and you can feel strength in your muscles!

Take breaks and skip – I love to skip through the house to do other things. Just be sure you're wearing shoes and not slippery socks. That would be disastrous, but skipping and smiling is hilarious...which leads me to the next tip.

Laugh out loud – Read something funny, or scroll Instagram for a break and laugh out loud. One of those chuckles that feels good. Laughter is healthy, always.

Butt squeezes – I've always done these, where I tighten my butt muscles as I sit. Who knows if it does any good, but I tell myself that it does.

Plan movement at day's end – If we sit all day, we try to make sure we have time to dance, walk or shop or SOMETHING that gets our heart pumping before bedtime. Yes, we feel tired from working all day, but yes we feel better if we make ourselves move instead of couch plopping all night. How's that for a term – couch plopping – not a lovely image.

You probably have your own set of movements you incorporate into a less than active day, so stick to them. Take a break and step outside and observe the sunshine now that spring is near...but don't let those all workdays pile up along with lethargy, depression and immobility. Keep moving, laughing and dancing as best you can!

Life Right Now - Like a Daisy - By Jennifer Stephens

Meet Daisy. She's the toughest little Chihuahua you ever did see! She has a favorite sweatshirt and loves exactly 2.5 people. Everybody else only sees her grumpy side. Someone from a local rescue group found her wandering around in the middle of nowhere before we scooped her up when she was six months old. That was about 14 years ago. We got her right after vacationing in Disneyworld, so when it came time to give her a name, Mickey & the gang were fresh on our minds. Would she be called Minnie? Goofy? Nope. Daisy is the name that stuck.

Even though her name originated from a Disney vacay, it's not a cartoon duck, but a simple flower she resembles most. 'Cause this little dog is FIERCE! Feisty! Determined. Just like a daisy...

In the world of flowers, the daisy is considered to be common. No frills. Kind of ordinary. While some may overlook daisies because they lack the stunning elegance of a rose, it's the daisy that delivers long lasting beauty. In fact, daisies encompass some of our most desirable human qualities. They are humble, hardy, and reliable. Daisies are one of the most resilient and adaptable flowers around. They can grow almost anywhere - high in the mountains or in a grassy field; conditions can be wet or dry, filled with sun or shade. Daisies represent the happiest of times. Who hasn't plucked the petals of a daisy to determine if "he loves me or loves me not?" Or playfully chanted "oopsy-daisy" when tossing a child into the air. To be "fresh as a daisy" is the best way to be. And we all know wearing a handmade crown of daisies is the ultimate whimsical accessory. The word "daisy" originated from the Old English phrase "daeges eage" which translates to "day's eye," meaning the daisy is the first eye to open with the morning sun each day. Like its cousin the sunflower, a daisy is designed to always stay turned toward the sun. Its petals close when pelted with raindrops or when darkness abounds.

Can't we learn a lot from a daisy? Shouldn't we stay humble as we go through each day? And be the reliable one when it comes to relationships with our coworkers, family, and friends. Aren't we called to exhibit resilience when tough times creep into our lives? When others fall into the pit, it's up to us to remain strong - growing and thriving, no matter the conditions. When faced with difficulties, we must persist. But, how?

Our little Daisy has faced it all - parasites, abdominal surgery, neurological problems affecting her ability to walk, a brain MRI, teeth extractions, and most recently nightly incontinence...but just like a daisy, despite all she's been through, she continues to flourish. Through each operation and procedure, she has bounced back with vigor. When I see her living her best doggie life, whether she's staring out the window barking at nothing, running around outside chasing squirrels, or saving me from the harmless Amazon delivery guy, I think about the strength of daisies. And I'm reminded that when I - when we - start each day seeking the son of God like a daisy seeks the sun in the sky, we are equipped to face tough times. With Jesus we can dodge the toxic thinking that hits us like raindrops on a windshield. If we feel the darkness creeping in, we can clothe ourselves in the light of Jesus, like a daisy closes its petals to avoid the darkness of the night sky.

The simple, unassuming daisy. Strong. Resilient. Persistent. What if we all tried to be a little bit more like a daisy?

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”

James 1:12

Under Pressure – Praisers – by Debbie Haynes

Let's start with a little background to my story:

There was a king mentioned in the Old Testament that was called godly, as he loved and cared for his people, walked with God, and was greatly loved by all. And because of this, other nations were fearful, while this godly king and his people experienced great peace. BUT, this godly king went into an ungodly marriage alliance and even agreed to go to war with a wicked king! Thankfully, due to God's hand of providence, the wicked king was killed and the godly king was spared.

That godly king learned a valuable lesson and returned to reigning by walking with God once again. After a while, forces surrounded and threatened this king again. This time, he remained steadfast. He even prayed and admitted his need for help against this strong army, and confessed that "our eyes are upon you," as he prayed.

What a cool response came from the Lord:

"You won't need to fight this battle, because it's mine. Fear not, for I will be with you."

The godly king and the people bowed in worship and then stood up to praise God. The king even appointed singers that would march in front of the people, praising God because of his great mercy.

Here's the scene, as the people sang and praised:

The Lord sent ambushments (what a great word) against the enemy armies and they slew each other! God fought the battle, and the enemy killed each other instead of the people that were praising.

Once again, the fear of God fell on those around them, and the godly king and his people experienced rest.

What does this mean for us today? Glad you asked:

The role of the praisers hasn't changed!

Being a praiser in the middle of enemy pursuit is often a thankless job, and the job of singing instead of fighting might sound unusual. God will actually give us the ability to praise, just by being obedient. And it won't matter how we sound, if we are skilled, or what the conditions might be – even death lurking – God's presence comes down in the middle of praise!

And the enemy will always be confused by the sound of the praisers.

Praisers are verbal reminders so that others can hear and be encouraged, they see His glory and choose to overcome by the word of God that causes prison doors to open. Praisers usher in victory.

And if we don't know what to say when we praise, we can just sing of His beauty and that His mercy endures forever – two good reasons – and enough!

I'll end my story with praise:

I recently received a beautiful sewing machine from a group called Buy Nothing Project – where everything is free. I just happened to be on the site when this sewing machine popped up and I had the machine within 20 minutes of it being posted. I decided to watch a YouTube video about the machine's functions and saw the proper way to load the bobbin, being reminded to be careful to do so counter-clockwise. I literally gasped, because all of my years of sewing I thought it was to be clockwise...but in checking my manual...the lady was correct! This explains why for years I had trouble with thread being bunched, skipping stitches and breaking! Once I followed the instructions I had beautiful stitches...my previous frustrations had all been my own error!

I personally am praising God for his mercy. I thought I knew something SO WELL but now I know a better way. I have a machine that works perfectly, and I'm gifting the machine I thought had a problem to my granddaughter.

God is so good! Who's next, in praising Him and confusing the enemy?

Praise invites His presence into our reality, in the middle of a war...or a wonky sewing machine. It doesn't matter where we are, as long as we stand and praise and celebrate in true worship from the heart...peace settles in.



MARRIAGE

In This Together – Waiting – by Bekah Holland

You know what I've been noticing? We do a lot of waiting, as women.

I mean, I'm sure men wait too, but since I have more experience with the former, we'll just stick with women for now. When we're young, we are waiting for the next fun thing, the next hug from mom, the next, "That a girl!" from dad. We wait, usually impatiently to grow up, which is stupid since being a grown up is, well, stupid. But I digress...

We wait for our curves to develop, to fit in, to gain our independence. We wait to meet that special someone we think will complete the picture we've had in our minds. We wait, looking forward to engagement and a wedding and a *Hallmarkesque* life, complete with white picket fences and babies. It seems like we're always waiting for the next thing. But how often do we see that so many of the things we've been waiting for, we already have?

I have a very love/hate relationship with waiting. I definitely wasn't one to wish and pine for a husband. In fact, after I had a taste of that independence I'd been longing for, that whole *wanting a knight in shining armor to come along* was probably somewhere near scheduling a mammogram on my proverbial to do list. My husband used to joke that I turned in my running shoes when I married him. And that's probably true. But what was I always running from? That's a question that would take a lot more paper, time, and therapy than I currently have available. However, I did run. I ran from hard conversations. I ran from confrontation and anything else I couldn't joke my way out of.

Obviously, at some point in a relationship, I had to put the jokes aside and get real. And that scared the life out of me, because I can listen and absorb other people's problems and emotions. I can be serious and encourage and speak life into dark moments for the people I love. It makes me feel needed and like I'm able to give someone a break from the hard parts of life we all experience. But I'd happily run from having to get real with myself and look at my struggles and weaknesses. I'd rather cut off my own arm that try to dig deep enough to discover the why.

People pleasing was (okay fine, is...) something that came (comes) very easily to me. Make others comfortable, take away burdens and add them to my load. Create "peace" no matter the cost, especially if I am the one the only one to pay the price. And I'll tell you, after being able to learn some of my whys, that is an expense that I can't afford.

For much of my married life, I've been a caretaker. I've cared for my husband and his struggles. I've cared for my kids and their needs. I stayed so busy cleaning up the messes left by misunderstandings, unmet expectations, anger, depression, addiction, loss along with the cheerios and dirty dishes that I didn't have time to look at my own ugly stuff. And honestly, I don't know if I could have seen it then like I see it now. Only by surviving the ups and downs and whatever darkness that always felt like was threatening every single waking moment, did I finally step back and start assessing my own mess. Let me tell you, that it was not pretty and I fought myself, my husband, my kids and God so much of the way.

I was running again. And I was waiting again.

Waiting for the next crisis so that I could get back to what I was good at and focus on someone else's pain.

At some point, though, we all hit a dead end. I did. I had nowhere else to run, no crisis looming, no incoming distractions. I don't know if it was conscious thought, but looking back, I was more afraid that my husband wouldn't be able to deal with me in crisis. Which is completely unfair and unwarranted because he has always wanted to carry me when I needed it, I just couldn't accept that he would. He loved me....loves me. Still. And when I was able to lay it all down, accept blame for my own mess, see how my "people pleasing" was really control wrapped in a prettier package, he was able to step in, step up and hold me while I fell to pieces. He's also wise and strong enough to let me put those pieces back together myself, hopefully better than before.

This is where I've found myself over the last few years. Still falling apart at times, but still finding ways to add to the puzzle. And instead of waiting, I'm trying to move. Sometimes I move backwards a little, but I'm still going, and I'm not alone. I can be honest about my struggles. I can be honest about some of my darkest places that I hid away for so long. My husband loves every piece, every paint stroke, every crazy mid-day dance party that makes me, well, me. He supports my dreams. He reminds me who I am when I forget. He encourages me to reach out to my close friends and family when he thinks they might be able to give me more than he can. It's because we're in the long game, here.

We've survived things we never ever thought we would. This is what marriage is. It's not just date nights and getaways and sex (I know, I said s-e-x and that's probably going to have some people clutching their pearls, but clutch away ladies. I said what I said.). Marriage is messy and chaotic and beautiful and embarrassing and so freaking hard and worth it all at once. The good ones are ones that allow you to mess up, maybe mess up some more, and then grow. When we grow as individuals, as people, as partners and parents, we usually accidentally grow together in the process. We see every color in the picture of our partner and learn to appreciate the things that make them uniquely them. The good, the bad and all the things in between are part of the person we love, and if we're lucky, they learn to love our special weirdness, too.

So if you're waiting, maybe take a step in any direction and see what happens. And step by step, with your person by your side, you might just find that all you were really waiting for was for you to move toward the life you've been building all along and live it.

*"We must be willing to let go of the life we planned so we can have the life that's waiting for us."
Joseph Cambell*

Date Night Fun – Anywhere Works – by Marcy Lytle

I'm all about picnics, and March is the month to start making them, planning them, enjoying them and having them...with him. Even if it's cold, you can have a picnic in the car or at home. And if it's warm, well then the possibilities of places and food and fun are limitless. It's a date night you can plan together, grab and pack, and linger and love...with others or just alone...the two of you. Or even take the kids, because picnics are romantic, no matter what.

In the car – We recently packed a pasta salad (make it or buy it) and cheese crackers and headed to a park for a picnic, only it was too windy to eat outside. So we parked and set our food on the dash, grabbed our plates, and served ourselves as we watched those that were out in the wind playing. Pack a little trash bag in your cooler for collecting your dirty plates, and yes – take little matching plates and cute napkins. It's all about the presentation, the view, and the conversation for this date in the car.

On the floor – Spread out a tablecloth or blanket or anything you want to use for the base, then use your biggest tray for charcuterie of any kind. Step into the kitchen together and scour your fridge and pantry – you look in one and he in the other. Set out all the snacky things, and then just place them on the large tray. Include olives, pickles, nuts, cheese, avocado, fruit, cookies, rolled meats, anything you see that can be a finger food. Pick a movie or show, sit on the floor, and enjoy.

In the backyard – Yes, this is a great place to have a date. If you have a picnic table or place to sit, great. If not, spread a picnic blanket. If not that, then just sit in a couple chairs. Position them in your yard anywhere you like, and get your playlist ready, as well. Each pick 5 songs for ambience while eating. For this food option, sandwiches are fun. Philly cheesesteaks are easy and tasty. Use asiago cheese bread, grill onions and green peppers with your thin sirloin – season well, and add provolone. Grab a bottle of Italian soda and some cute glasses, and enjoy time at home together as you watch spring emerge...and find cloud pictures as well.

In the garage – Seem like an unlikely picnic place? Well if your garage is packed, this won't work. But if it's clear, set up a card table or other small table, and picnic while you put together a puzzle, a small 100 piece one. One you can put together while you snack. If the garage is packed, then pick another room in the house other than the living area...it can be your bedroom. Popcorn and mix-ins are a great picnic combo for this date. Different flavored salts and cheeses, or add in candies and nuts, or make your own gourmet popcorn mix – caramel popcorn or drizzled chocolate – before you begin. What fun!

In the park – Okay, this is the usual spot for a picnic, and hopefully there will be a nice day to actually have a “normal” park picnic with others or alone. But this time, pick a park you've never been to. Make that part of the planning. Stop by the Dollar Tree for one of those red/white checked tablecloths and grab the plates and napkins to go with. Drive through KFC or some other fast-food favorite and make your picnic fare from the drive-through. And pack a game, maybe Pass the Pigs or Yahtzee (you'll need a tray for tossing the pigs and the dice).

You'll enjoy these picnics so much you'll wonder why you haven't been planning them more. So do... you've got all the spring and summer months ahead of you.

After 40 Years – Weekend Walks – by Marcy Lytle

We walk a lot, or at least we try to. And during the weekdays, that walking often takes place in our neighborhood or even at an outdoor mall, if the weather is good, due to time restraints and/or the setting sun. But on the weekends...

We find a park or somewhere obscure, or even drive out of town, or discover a new trail and we walk longer, and faster, because we walk during the time of day when we're full of energy, not after a long day's work.

Yesterday, we headed to a familiar park only to find it was completely closed due to falling limbs from our recent ice storm. We then happened upon a new park we'd never visited before, and it had a unique trail for walking. There were sports fields down below, but this sort of "mountain" or mound all around the park with a gravel trail that sat above the field. The trail had a few hills and then dips, and one could climb the small hill or there were steps available, as well.

It was a nice walk, as we were up above and could feel the breeze, so I had a scarf around my neck which I discarded after a bit, because the brisk walk made me quickly warm up. We could either look to the side where trees and valleys were, or we could look on the other side and see different teams playing and kicking and throwing balls.

We opted for the hill descent on one side and I grabbed his arm, because I didn't want to slip. But he gently guided me off to the side where grass was more secure than the loose gravel. When we looped around a second time, we opted for the stairs. We like to vary up our climbs and our descents.

It was fun to discover a new place to walk, to see new faces to which we could say "hello" to as we passed by, to look one way and then the other to observe very different scenes, all while working up our heartbeat and holding hands.

Sometimes, we think about skipping our weekend walks in favor of not packing the walking shoes, not having to grab a hat or sunscreen or water, not exerting the energy...but we're ALWAYS glad when we opt to get in the car and search and land and then grab each other's hands and move.

Sometimes we even look for a new place before the weekend so that we can anticipate the discovery on the path away from home. The day before, we had been in a small town and opted for a trail along the river there. It was the best, with old lamps along the side that stood tall beside the trees. And when we ended our walk at the small town park, there was a huge swing awaiting us (with a muddy puddle underneath.)

Weekend walking. Who knew it would be the subject of my story this month? But as I write, it's now Monday and I'm already thinking about the walks we'll take this week...and next weekend...hand in hand. Or not, when I let go so that I can swing my arms a little harder and get that heart beating faster. But when he grabs my hand again, my heart beats a little faster for a different reason...I'm madly in love with this man that walks beside me, holds me secure, and observes and wonders at every little thing without a care in the world...

For Better or Worse – Bat in the Bedroom – by Kaelin Scott

I grew up in Denver, Colorado, so I had quite a bit of culture shock when my husband and I first moved to a ranch that could only be reached by bumping along down miles and miles of dirt roads. One aspect of country living that takes a while to get used to is living in close proximity with lots of wild animals. Some of the time it's cute, like deer in our yard or a three-legged baby pig my husband rescued. Other times it can be pretty nasty, like the tarantula on the living room wall or our recent battle with mice in the kitchen.

But there's one incident that I will always remember, no matter how long I live. Because there's no way I could ever forget waking up at four in the morning to a bat flying around my bedroom.

It was ten years ago, but I can still picture it in my mind. I woke up to my husband rustling around and swatting at something. I asked him what was going on and he said nothing, so I closed my eyes and rolled over. But he kept making weird noises, so I asked again. This time, he yelled, "There's a bat in here!" And it was flying around the ceiling fan right above me. I screamed and threw the covers over my head, definitely not happy about this little surprise. Eventually, my husband managed to shoo the bat out of the room, so we shut the door and went back to sleep.

Except in the morning, when we were thinking clearly, we realized that bats are kind of gross. And that one was still in our house somewhere. We had no idea where because we hadn't paid attention to where it went. We made a quick call to animal control, who informed us that bats can bite you in your sleep without you feeling it and that they can carry rabies. So we either needed to find the bat, kill it and get it tested, or we had to get a rabies shot.

We tore our house apart looking for that dang bat. We literally searched high and low, everywhere we could think of, for several hours. Finally we found it behind our bathroom mirror – right above my toothbrush, disgustingly enough – so my husband smashed it and we put it in a shoebox. But the fiasco didn't end there. Since we lived out of city limits, the local animal control wouldn't send it in for testing for us. Instead, we had to keep that bat in the shoebox in our fridge all night then drive it three and a half hours to Austin ourselves, just so we could get it tested for rabies.

It was quite the ordeal, but thankfully the tests came back negative. Looking back now, we can laugh about it and even use it as a funny story at parties. But as we were living it, it felt like a nightmare. I mean, how does that even happen?! A bat in your bedroom while you're sleeping? It still gives me the creeps, even if it is a little funny.

All this to say, sometimes crazy things happen. Unexpected things. Things that stress you out and test you. But if you can keep your heads level and work together, these things can be an opportunity to grow with your spouse. Not that we learned any huge lesson from the bat debacle or anything, except maybe to check our room for wild animals before going to sleep. But going through the experience brought us closer. It was something we had to face together. And it's something the two of us still share now, ten years later. A crazy memory that I wouldn't ever want to relive but am thankful to be able to laugh about.

Whenever crazy things arise and you're caught up in the moment, it's easy to forget how special it is to have someone next to you. But looking back, it's comforting knowing you weren't alone.

Those little memories you share with your spouse are special and unique to only you. Whether the memory itself is great or not, it's beautiful being able to share it.

Even though that night was terrible, I smile thinking about it now. What kind of memories like that do you have with your husband?



ENCOURAGEMENT

ROOTED IN LOVE - ONE STEP AT A TIME – by Kaelin Scott

I used to hate running. Like really, really despise it. I thought people who enjoyed it had something seriously wrong with them. Who on earth would consider that fun?!

But then one day, I decided I needed to find an activity to help me stay healthy. It was spring and I needed some physical exercise. It was also 2020, which was a little bit of a crazy stressful time for everyone, meaning I needed a mental release as well. I had two little ones and just wanted a way to stay active. Since we live on a ranch, there's a lot of open space. Lots of dirt roads. And so I thought, why not start running? I can do that without driving all the way into town, and it'll be good for my body and keep my mind busy.

So I started. I laced up my shoes, went outside and started running. The first few times, I probably didn't even go half a mile. It was pure torture. I still hated running, and it didn't seem to like me either. But I was determined to do it, so I kept going. Little by little, I pushed myself until I could run a mile and then more. Sure, I had cramps in my sides and felt like I couldn't breathe, but it actually felt good to do something I never thought I could do.

The crazy thing is, after staying consistent and making myself do it, I actually started to *like* running. What?! Now I was one of those weird people. But I was okay with that, because I'd discovered more than just an enjoyable form of exercise. I'd learned something about myself too. I can do more than I think I can. I can persevere and endure and do hard things. It took embracing running for me to realize this. And the only way I was able to do it was through God's strength, so running brought me closer to Him too.

This year, I decided to sign up for a 10k. Now I'm really getting crazy! But I'm so excited about it. It's going to be challenging and fun and something I can be proud of. All because I started running three years ago, when I could only go a few hundred yards.

While training for this race, I'm pushing myself a little bit harder every time I run. I'm getting outside my comfort zone. I'm growing and becoming even better than I ever imagined. And here's what I'm learning from this journey.

Progress doesn't happen overnight. It's a process. You have to take it one day at a time. You can't decide to start running and suddenly run a marathon. You have to start small and take each step as it comes. There's no rushing to the finish. It takes hard work, determination and perseverance to get where you want to go.

Looking ahead at the big picture is great. It's helpful to have your eye on the prize and know exactly what you hope to achieve. But it's also good to embrace each milestone. Celebrate how far you've come, even if you haven't made it to your goal. Growth happens slowly, but each step is beautiful.

Whether it's running, writing a book, learning a new skill, healing or anything else, progress will happen if you give it enough time. Put in the effort, give yourself grace, and trust in God to give you strength. You *can* do amazing things, so don't be afraid to try. The first step is always the hardest, but you'll never go anywhere if you don't start.

P.S. – This photo was taken after I ran four miles. Don't give up!

My earliest memory of church is staring up wide-eyed at a giant Jesus hanging on a cross. “What happened to him?” I asked with childlike wonder. Trying not to disturb the solemn atmosphere, my mother hissed in her Tex-Mex accent, “He was killed by the juice!” My pre-school mind couldn’t comprehend this. An image of Jesus drinking OJ and then falling over dead only to be displayed in such a fashion stirred up questions that, to this day, are not answered to my complete satisfaction. Of course, I came to understand she was saying “Jews” not “juice,” and to understand the story of Jesus and the Biblical history of the Christian faith...in time.

My mother did her best to bring me up in her religion (Dad was agnostic until the last few years of his life), but it just didn’t take. I attended the Catholic Church, reluctantly, until middle school, when threats of punishment no longer worked. My innate spiritual hunger only increased in high school, but the stained glass was the only thing I could appreciate about church. None of it made sense to me. Knowing there was *something*, I explored and dabbled in things that are better left alone, but they didn’t ring true.

Most fortunately for me, a Christian coffeehouse opened in the very small and unlikely town of Falfurrias, Texas, where I lived. It was called *His Place*, the words beckoning in psychedelic colors to the second floor of an abandoned building. It was led by a group of guitar-playing, Jesus-loving high school classmates who were not much older than I was. The Jesus Revolution was in full swing, and it was during that move of the Holy Spirit, in that dimly lit unfinished attic space (as I remember it) that I gave my life to Jesus, not really knowing what I was doing. I said the words as hands were laid on me and prayers were spoken in voices of angels, or so it seemed. It was a very long time ago, but I still remember the warm heavenly sensation of love and acceptance into the family of God.

Thank God that he knows and pursues every sheep relentlessly, because I quickly wandered off. I was a high school senior when I took the step from darkness into light; but it wasn’t an illuminating light, rather a light that hid me and held me in the darkness that clung to my lost and confused soul. I left home a few months later to make my faltering way in a world I knew nothing about. I tried to be faithful to the Lord, but I was a tender plant with no roots, not connected to other believers, lacking knowledge and experience. I wrestled, questioned, and defied. I succumbed to worldly pressures. But God didn’t let me go. It took time and painful circumstances, but he brought me back, and the pinprick of light grew slowly through the years.

I could tell many stories of how the Good Shepherd chased after me, a foolish stubborn sheep. But that’s for another time. Today I want to encourage you to believe in God’s goodness and faithfulness to pursue his lost sheep. Don’t lose hope, and never stop praying.

Moving Forward – Time to Let Go – by Pam Charro

Life is all about change, but even good change is just so hard for me. If we think about it, every single thing we have here is on loan: our parents and children, our pets, our material items, even our own bodies can be recalled at any time. As we get older, the idea that life is short is so much more than just a saying.

I can understand why some people believe their best days are behind them. Maybe I'm fortunate because I don't think I ever really had "glory days." I have spent my entire life trying to find meaning in my mistakes and experiences and have never considered myself to be all that impressive. So maybe, in that regard, the only direction to go has been forward. And, here I go again, realizing that something I have long held onto is not good for me, and it hurts to say goodbye to it. But I also know that the woman I'm becoming is counting on it.

As it says in Proverbs 4:25-26:
*Let your eyes look straight ahead
Fix your gaze directly before you
Give careful thought to the paths for your feet
And be steadfast in all your ways*

And also in Isaiah 43:
*Forget the former things
Do not dwell on the past
See, I am doing a new thing
Now it springs up
Do you not perceive it?*

And once I am aware that I have outgrown something, it's time to let it go. No matter how painful that letting go might be.

1 Corinthians 13:12
*For now we see through a glass, darkly
But then, face to face
Now I know in part
But then I will know fully
Even as I am fully known*

It will all be worth it.

Simple Truths – Those that Wait – by Marcy Lytle

We wait in line for BBQ for hours. Well, I haven't done this, but I know that many that have here in the town where I live, because there's this place called Franklin BBQ that people rave about. It's made a name for itself, and so people bring chairs and sit in line and chat with strangers while they wait and wait for this food that they can then share with friends.

We wait on trains, maybe not happily, but out of necessity, because we can't pass. So we wait and hope that the train is a short one with few cars, because we're in a hurry and we need to get to our destination, but the flashing lights and the lowering bar warn us to wait...so we do...so we can live. And then when the bar lifts and the lights quit flashing, we move forward.

We wait in line for returns, after Christmas is over and we've discovered that the pants don't fit, or our kid already has that toy, or the product wasn't what we needed and wanted after all. But we don't want to lose our money, so we take the boxes and the bags and the receipts and we get in line and wait our turn...behind so many people. Maybe we chitchat with the lady behind us, or maybe we look at our phones, but we wait.

We wait for kids while they practice at their sporting events, multiple nights a week, or while he/she takes music lessons, or whatever activities our children do. It takes time and effort on a weeknight to drive our kids to their destinations, for that training and that teaching and that playing...and we must wait. We wait and talk with other parents, or we sit in our cars and read or listen to music, but there's nothing to do but wait until the lesson is over and we can then go back home.

We wait for that bread to rise that we just mixed together, knowing we have to stick around the house all day to bake this delicious thing we all love to eat, if we're a bread maker or a bread lover. Or we wait for the chocolate to harden that we just covered over the strawberries. We wait for the bagel to toast. We set the time for that casserole or anything tasty we've spent time putting together, because we know the taste and the enjoyment of the food we're now smelling is going to be sooooo good. It's worth the wait.

We're in a world full of activities that require waiting. And yet we're in a world full of activities that require hurrying. We must not be late because we've then got another activity after this one. We're in a hurry to catch that flight because the layover just isn't long enough to rest. We have to run to our next plane. And we've only got five minutes to then enjoy that tasty bread or delicious chocolate, because kids are tugging or work is calling, and we've got deadlines to make and people to meet...

And what about "waiting rooms?" They're the worst, aren't they? It's where we sit at hospitals because they won't let us in the back with our families or friends, so we wait. And we wait to hear the outcome of the tests or the injury or the examination. This waiting is torture, because we're not only waiting but we're separated.

That must be why there are so many references in the bible about waiting. Wait on Him to renew our strength. Rejoice in all things, even while we wait in hope. The Lord is good to

those that wait for him (that's in Lamentations!) Wait for the Lord and tell your heart to take courage. Remain steadfast under trial.

Next time I find myself waiting, I want to think about why I'm waiting and what it is I'm waiting for and why I'm willing to wait. Well, of course, it's because I'm expecting a favorable outcome, isn't it? But yet, so often I think that an unfavorable outcome is coming when God says wait.

It's not. Strength, joy, goodness, mercy, courage and steadfastness come to those who wait...on Him. Always.

Unearthly Thing – Cease Striving – by Angela Dolbear

A Note to Myself About Striving

Cease striving. God has you.

Remember when scleroderma, my evil auto immune disease grew so bad that I had to push myself to get through the day? Some days were easier than others when my joints were not as stiff. On other days it felt like I was wading through waist-deep water.

Remember that eventually the disease loosened its hold on me? God has and is healing me more and more every day. (Praise Him!) Persevering through the days became easier.

But when did perseverance to get through the day morph into striving? When did not accomplishing “enough” during the day become a failure, no matter how my health was?

To strive means to exert much effort or energy; endeavor; to struggle or fight forcefully; contend. It’s an unhealthy mode of operation. God opened my eyes to this bad habit. It pretty much meant I was not trusting Him. If I fully trusted Him, would I need all this force and fight in my life?

“Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light,” Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30.

Hmmm...so it seems strife does not fit in a relationship with God.

“Consider the ravens...” He feeds them and cares for them.

“Consider the lilies...” He dresses them in extraordinary beauty.

How much more valuable am I to Him than birds or flowers? So why do I continue to have strife daily?

Ecclesiastes 4:6 says, “One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.”

Ecclesiastes 6:9 says, “What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. This too is futility and striving after wind.”

The book of Ecclesiastes--the book about vain endeavors--contains dozens of verses describing how these endeavors contain striving. Coincidence? I think not.

Remember all the good things God has done for you in the past so you can use them to testify to His goodness to help and encourage others. As I get older, I experience more and more of God’s abundance of His faithfulness. No reason to strive for anything.

Most of all, remember Psalm 46:10, which says “Stop striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted on the earth.”

Cease striving, self. He’s got You. He will guide you at every moment of the day.

He will provide for you. He will pay the mortgage. He will take care of all those medical bills.

Striving is heavy, complicated, unpeaceful. It drags me and depresses me. I need to quit striving. It's a harmful addiction.

Hey me, cease striving. Trust God fully. Don't allow your heart (or mind) to be troubled. "Trust God and trust Me," Jesus says (John 14:1).

Cease striving. He is guiding. Every day, every moment. He is God, and He is good. And He loves me so very much.

Praise You Lord Jesus. I love you.

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



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - Full of Color – by Marcy Lytle

There's a song by Ellie Holcomb that says, "This world is full of color" and it's one of my favorites, because you can just see the colors as you listen, and it's such a joyful song/video. And spring is the season where color starts to emerge after winter's chill...maybe ever so slowly...but there it is. Green leaves appear and start waving in the wind, and flower beds are starting to be filled as well, with the spring hues. And if you're lucky, you might see a rainbow after a spring shower!

I personally love it when color appears on my plate, too!

- Carrots, tomatoes, herbs and olives, invite me to sit down and taste.
- Red strawberries are great as a snack, along with dark chocolate nut clusters.
- Those green or red grapes are so tasty in spring chicken salad recipes.

I love the colors that appear in the fashion world, too, vibrant and bright.

- All the shades of pink actually make us feel perky like a blooming flower!
- Blue is a favorite, whether navy or baby, but there it is – soft and beautiful.
- Yellow, have you worn that color much? Why not?

I think it's fun to add color to our homes, after winter's grays are put away.

- Snip a branch off a tree or bush and land it in a vase on your table.
- Consider swapping out your dingy dish towels for florals or stripes or brights!
- Set out a bowl of fresh fruit, limes or lemons, to add a pop of color to your table.

I enjoy adding color to the yard, front and back!

- Daisies are pretty, for spring smiles in pots.
- Green herbs are beautiful and easy to grow, and fun to pick and enjoy.
- Pretty colorful pots in a trio on the front porch add charm and beauty.

I opt for colored jewelry instead of just gold and silver or black and brown.

- How about \$5 earrings – from Lovely by Dani? She has floral ones, too!
- Pick up some bird earrings from this darling Etsy shop, they're so fun!
- Bold statement earrings in a bring color might be something new to try!

No matter your budget, your tastes, or your state of mind...color can be added to your world when this new season arrives. Color might be just the thing you need to pull your mind out of the doldrums into hope and life. Planting or plating or wearing or admiring colors of all hues brighten up the darkest of corners. After all, it's after the gray dark clouds of rain and storms when the light shines, that the rainbow appears in shades of color, and it causes us to pause and give thanks and wonder at the beauty.

Add color. Look for it. Savor it. Stare at it. And love it.

FRESH THYME – Guides – by Marcy Lytle

I just received a global prayer guide booklet from Voice of the Martyrs. It's a book that lists countries in the world where persecution takes place and how to pray for the people of those countries. As I flipped through the beautiful pages, holding this guide in my hands inspired me and made me excited to pray for these people and places. I needed this guide, this prompt, this visual, to guide me toward prayer.

And then I realized how many other guides I need on a daily basis, things I can hold, read, and handle...so that I then move and do and accomplish.

I love having a calendar on my fridge as a guide to the weeks ahead and months, so that I can plan and be ready and look forward to the things with my family, others, and reach goals, and all the things.

Gardening guides help all of us struggling planters here where I live as we navigate rain and drought and heat and freezing surprises, and all the things that Texas brings. Those guides tell us when to plant and how, and even how to keep the pests away.

My husband and I enjoy having a devotional guide, one that's written out with scripture and hope and encouragement, just little books or a few pages that we read nightly, to lessen our loads, remind us of His grace, and enable us to sleep in peace. A guide like this is so helpful!

If I didn't have the maps guide on my phone, we'd never venture out on trips and backroads and fun away from our little spot in our neighborhood. Maps enable us to wander toward adventure, make it there safely and back home, with fun stories to tell.

What about the TV guide on our remote? Oh my goodness, it's so helpful when recording shows we can't watch now but we want to watch later, or when searching for that good movie on the night we're staying in. Even in hotels, the TV guide is a must as we navigate the perfect watch and order room service for two.

Cookbooks are sorts of guides, whether we use an actual book or a recipe from the internet, or one we tear out of a magazine (my favorite). Guides on how to cook, what flavors to put together, and how long to bake or heat are imperative for good cooking! It's after following those guides that we can then experiment with new flavors, because we've learned and been guided before.

As I was looking at this new prayer guide and flipping through the beautiful pages, I became excited to pray. Also, just this morning I quoted Psalm 23, another reference to being guided.

"The Lord is my shepherd..."

"He leads me beside still waters."

"He makes me lie down in green pastures."

He set the standard, the visual, the pattern of following the Guide all the days of our lives, with goodness and mercy following us. He's the ultimate tour guide, the one that points over here and says, "Look!" or over there and says, "Don't miss that!"

Guides are important and necessary to have in our lives, and the best tour guides on a vacation are the ones that know their stuff, make the tour interesting, offer us tips and info we'd never hear elsewhere, and do it all with a smile...aren't they?

Just feeling a bit thankful today for guides, both the paper kind and the spiritual kind, and the One guide above all the rest...the one that leads me to the other kind of rest...the restoration kind of rest I need for my soul.

What and who are guiding you, today?

FRESH THYME - So What if We Do?

I heard a writing analyst state that it's easy to tell what decade a person was born by the words they use in their texts and emails. Isn't that crazy? My husband also learned that from work, as he was told that "older" people tend to write much longer emails than the younger folks. And believe it or not, some *olders* still indent their paragraphs in emails!

I don't like hearing that because it dates us. And I don't like to be dated by my clothing, attitudes, or even my writing style. It's not fun when you realize that your decade of life is recognizable with disdain by those who are younger and more "hip" so to speak.

I didn't listen further to see what language or style we use when writing that dates us, but I didn't like hearing that our writing style dates us. I remember swearing I'd never wear elastic-waist pants as I aged, because only old ladies wore them, and who wanted to look like an old lady? It seems none of us wants to look or appear old...because old isn't valued by many in this world.

But as the days passed, I began to think so what if we do look older and our writing and use of words dates us to a particular decade, or God forbid – we slip on a pair of elastic pants?

I'm thinking it's time we embrace every decade. I know that in our 20's we don't want to be seen as a kid anymore, we want to be treated like an adult so we hopefully act like one. In our 40's we panic when gray hair appears, because gray hair is only on the heads of our grandparents. Let the 60's arrive and we hope we can get up off the floor without groaning where anyone can hear.

I get it. No one wants the pains and aches and wrinkles and all the other things associated with old age.

But what if we began to embrace aging with eyes that see the things we DO well BECAUSE of the decades that we've lived?

What if we realize how we love well, because we needed and received His love all of our lives, so we now have so much to give?

What if we laugh more when the babies grab our glasses or ask why our hair is white, and laugh with them, instead of being annoyed that they noticed?

What if we smile at the young grandson that grabs our hand to help us up if we're hurting, and thank him and honor him by being the gentleman he is?

What if we write notes, even those ancient handwritten kind, to friends and family with the words that encourage and build up, even if our style predates this century?

What if we wear whatever feels good that we love, and brush our hair with pleasure, find shoes that feel good (and thank God they're cuter than they used to be) and be proud, instead of ashamed, of the years we've lived?

I haven't done this, as I'm always looking for ways to feel and look younger. However, I have quit coloring my hair and it feels good and right and okay, with me. I'm always checking my attitudes and conversation so that I'm not judgmental because of life, but rather offering words that bring life because of the life I've lived...and thanksgiving is increasing as the decades roll on.

If you're crafting an email, responding to a text, or whatever you're doing by conversing with someone, don't worry about the style or the decade you represent. Just keep connecting and talking and sharing with love – that's the key. Wear and show and move with a smile – that's the way. And seek comfort and offer comfort always – that's the best.

So what if we do pre-date most of those around us? We've come a long way and hopefully have a long way to go, with all of those young ones right behind us aging as well. And we get to hold the little ones and give them back, when we're tired. That might be the best thing we "get to do" as life keeps bringing us joy.

FRESH THYME - Though It Be Small – by Marcy Lytle

I pined for years that my house wasn't large, like hers or theirs, or those over there.
I wished we hadn't lost that big home that was ours, and ended up tiny and small.
The kids' rooms were tight, not much space for friends, but cozy and sweet.
The dining area, just a part of the den, made for family dinners near the fire for all.
No stairs, just one floor, and a small kitchen besides, still plenty of room to create.
Sandwiched between other small homes, it seemed tiny and not at all, very tall.
However, there was no place to hide or seclude, so we gathered and sat and were.
Spaces were tight, and the garage made a playroom, for when friends came to call.
A cottage of a house, with a beautiful yard, with plants that bloomed every season,
I gave thanks often for that, for the fireplace and fence, and seasons like winter and fall.
High ceilings and windows, a nice wall of shelves, and even an intercom system were ours.
The washroom wasn't fancy or big or separate, but a closet in the guest bathroom hall.
I listened in line as I picked up my children to a mom complain that she didn't have,
A playroom she needed, she would get, very soon, because she had to have it all.
Ashamed sometimes, when I thought what we lost and what we could have had
If economics and jobs and health, and the things, hadn't been part of our loss and our fall.
But though it was small, it's now ours, and a gift, from my dad who helped way back when.
And I sit at the window as the wind blows my pinwheel, and give thanks for my home - small.
If you too suffered loss of this or of that, and you sit and you wish and pine for what was;
Look around and don't be ashamed, but give thanks, for all the things in your own little walls.