



A BUNDLE OF
THYME
For Every Season

Online Women's Magazine | thymemag.com

August 2023



TIPS

The Dressing – Earrings, Yes – by Marcy Lytle

Years ago, possibly for more than a decade, I only wore stud earrings. It seemed to be a better look with my short sassy haircut, and so I had very little larger earrings. Prior to that, several decades ago, I had lots of big earrings because well...the 80's. And now here we are again with big earrings, but they're so darn pretty whether they dangle, they're handmade, or they're just so unique. There are wonderful options out there, and I have a lot!

Geometric – Ford and Fossil – I love these mustard colored geometric shaped earrings. I met this artist at a market and she's since moved to Arizona, but still sells her creations on line. A great place to shop for new earrings that just look and feel luxurious.

Big and silver, or wood and gold – Cato – I recently stopped here and found these two fantastically fun earrings. One is a big silver flower, and the other a wooden flower with gold stem. I have LOVED wearing these, as they both go with so many outfits!

Red and pink flowers in a circle – I've had these a while and can't recall where they're from...but aren't they cute? End of summer is a great time to purchase floral earrings, large and bold...look for them on clearance!

Vintage – red – and blue - We stopped at a vintage store and I was happy to find this solid red and royal blue pair of earrings – with that 60's look. I have enjoyed finding the right outfits to wear these with, as they're just unique and fun.

Button-size – Lovely by Dani – She makes all stud earrings and they're \$5 a pair – and she has SO MANY. I love all of the choices, and these sunflower earrings are among my fave. She has seasonal choices too, so check them out now and as fall and Christmas arrive.

Pink triangles or double circles – Francesca's – Sometimes this boutique store sells their jewelry at a great sale price, and that's the time to stock up on pretty earrings, like these here. Don't be afraid to stop in stores that maybe sell clothes you wouldn't wear, but their jewelry you most definitely will!

If your earrings are old, donate them or give them to the littles in your family. They'll be delighted! If you haven't felt like spending on earrings, then hunt for clearance, vintage, check out the button options, and more. Spruce up your earring collection as summer ends, and before fall begins. And enjoy each pair!

Seven for You – The Best List – by the Panel

I read in magazines and on line of other folks “best list” and I often wonder if the companies paid to be on that list! I have a skeptical mind, I guess. But we aren’t paid, and neither is our panel of women, we just all like to share! We asked the panel what their best products were in certain categories and we’ve put it together in a list, just for you:

10 categories and here’s what we think (submissions by Cathy, Melissa, Gina, Laura, Marcy, Carole, Shelley, Erin, Debbie, Gloria and Tanya):

Mascara:

- Essence Lash Princess rated best overall mascara for years and only 4.99 the green one. Amazon or Ulta.
- Maybelline Big Lash - have used since high school. Just love the way my lashes look and its cheap!
- Maybelline Great Lash (I might wear this 1 time per month, and then immediately regret it)
- Cover Girl
- Great Lash by Maybelline (regular or waterproof) This mascara is basic and reasonably priced.
- Bad Gal Mascara by Benefit – It thickens more than others which is what I need. It doesn’t smudge and it’s easy to wash off.
- L'Oreal Volume NOT Waterproof
- No real preference.
- Mary Kay Lash Love® Waterproof Mascara
- bdb Billion Dollar Beauty

*Seems like Maybelline is still a great pick by many!

Moisturizer (for face):

- Elf Hydrating scent free
- Dermologica Dynamic Skin Recovery - Has sunscreen and goes on light doesn't feel heavy
- Equate (Walmart brand) oil-free facial moisturizer for sensitive skin
- No. 7 Lift & Luminate from Target. I also use their No. 7 Eye Cream. Both are fragrance free because of allergies.
- Cetaphil moisturizing cream
- Gruene Witch Apothecary – love the smell and how it works!
- Plain coconut oil
- Nurst-I ordered it after hearing about it from an Instagram influencer Ballerina Farms. It really is a good as was promised.
- Mary Kay TimeWise® Age Minimize 3D® Day Cream SPF 30 Broad Spectrum Sunscreen and Mary Kay TimeWise® Age Minimize 3D® Night Cream
- CeraVe AM w/SPF 30 during the day; and CeraVe PM Ultra Lightweight at night.
- Neutrogena Healthy Skin face lotion with sunscreen (I love it!)

Wow, lots of choices to try!

Lipstick or lipgloss:

- Elf
- Chapstick with spf
- Chapstick before I go to bed
- Maybelline lipstick – used it for years!
- MAC
- Lipgloss of any kind, not a fan of lipstixk
- Blistek Silk n Shine, which has no color. (I'm allergic to EVERY one I've ever used with color--even vegan, plant-based, etc.)
- Whatever came free with my last Lancôme purchase.
- Mary Kay Unlimited® Lip Gloss- Nude Blush
- Neutrogena Shine lip soother

I was surprised to see that Chapstick made the list...twice!

Recipe source:

- Mom and H-E-B
- Skinnytaste.com - Her recipes are healthy and easy to make!
- allrecipes.com (their app stinks to HIGH heaven, but these recipes are used and reviewed by normal people. I've found some great recipes on this site!)
- Google
- Pioneer Woman on Food Network
- HEB website, lots of cookbooks old and new, and Instagram!
- YOUTube, hands-down
- General Google
- Pinterest
- All Recipes (however, they recently converted to a magazine format, and no longer have sharing of recipes.)
- All Recipes

All Recipes must be a winner!

Summer drink:

- Water
- Water
- VintageLemonade from allrecipes.com <https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/20486/vintage-lemonade/>
- Zero Sugar Sparkling Ice drinks - they're flavored sparkling water with several vitamins. BAI antioxidant cocofusion-Puna Coconut Pineapple or Dr Pepper - This BAI drink is very low in sugar as opposed to Dr Pepper
- Frozen coke from McDonalds – oh my gosh – it satisfies on a hot day!
- Unsweetened sun tea with 10 black tea bags in half gallon jar; usually add fresh basil, mint or lemon balm--or, sometimes all three at once
- Teavana Jade Citrus Mint teabags

- Splash of Grapefruit juice in plain seltzer water, So refreshing!
- Limeade Fizz! [use one can of frozen limeade; add seltzer water or club soda, instead of water.] very refreshing, a crowd pleaser at parties.
- Bubbly sparkling water/blackberry

We must try all of these before summer ends!

Nail polish (color and brand):

- Don't use
- Don't use
- I don't paint my nails b/c I constantly have dirt in them from gardening. So I keep my nails short. And I'm on strike for painting my toenails b/c I find the polish makes my nails discolored after it's removed. I know, I am a unique Texan. I belong in the country.
- Whatever's on sale. And I only paint my toenails. I do too much outside work to try to keep my fingernails painted.
- No preference
- Glitter nail polish – covers a multitude of mistakes and can be reapplied and looks great for weeks.
- Essie peachy pinks
- My nail strengthening sheer polish has been discontinued. So sad.
- OPI Taupe-less Beach
- Color Street Nail Polish Strips
- Essie in Tart deco (apricot)

Interesting answers, and surprised at how many don't use at all – but I get it – it takes time!

Sneaker:

- Don't wear. I love my Birkenstocks
- Hoka brand - My feet just feel good in this brand. I have tried others and have had some foot problems so these work!
- I keep tennis shoes way too long. I will wash those things in the washing machine and keep on going (last pair I had for 3 yrs). I am usually wearing off-brand Birkenstocks from Amazon that my husband calls my 1st and 2nd Corinthians (one brown pair and one black pair). Another shoe I love (for inside the house): my Clouds from Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Slippers-Massage-Bathroom-Non-Slip-Platform/dp/B093PGRMLK/ref=sr_1_6?crd=1NMAVGQ3O47HI&keywords=clouds&qid=1688398181&sprefix=clouds%2Caps%2C196&sr=8-6
- I am not loyal to any brand of Sneaker; I currently have a light pink Nike.
- Nike. I have my work pair and my “dressy” pair.
- Skechers
- Hoka – ordered on amazon – slip on and go!
- Hmmm, let me know if you find one.
- Cole Haan
- Skechers mule

- SEEBON TIOSEBO (ordered on Amazon, very comfy and easy to put on and inexpensive) Have had them over a year and still good. Launder great.

On the hunt for a new pair? You've got lots of suggestions, here!

Podcast:

- None
- None
- I don't listen to podcasts, but I watch Pasta Grannies every Friday, and Garden Answer every weekday. These are YouTube channels, so like a video blog.
- My son's, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ask-anything-w-pastor-ryan/id1523696296?i=1000615986309>
- Joyce Meyer or Priscilla Shirer - These two are spiritually up lifting. If you need a laugh, check out Anjelah Johnson.
- I don't listen to these!
- I like Give Him 15 / Dutch Sheets. Many more, but some I like to view as well as listen)
- Podcast Happy Hour with Jamie Ivy and
- Summer read The Next Right Thing (followed her for years and she's still a fav.)
- The Bible Recap with Tara Leigh Cobble
- John Eldridge's weekly Friday podcast from Wild At Heart

It seems you're either a podcast fan...or not. Now you have some suggestions, if you are.

Summer read:

- Stephen King *Fairy Tale*. Has time travel in it!
- Magazines – *Good Housekeeping* and *Real Simple*
- Well, this summer I am working through a book called *Speak It Until You See It*. It's about praying the Scriptures over our lives. The last non-religious book I read was on my vacation in Feb: https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1250080401/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_search_asin_title?ie=UTF8&psc=1
- It's called *The Nightingale: A Novel*. It was about two sisters who deal with the effects of WW2 in completely different ways while living in France. It was a good book, and will be made into a movie.
- I'm really not a reader except for my Sunday school lesson or research for writing books, my blog, and my column. I do read a daily devotion by my son and the Bible passage for it.
- *My First Magnificent Summer* by Rachel Toalson – I know the author and it's a good and raw read.
- I'm not a book reader.

You've still got time to put up your feet and enjoy a story or two...

Chocolate indulgence:

- Cadbury Flaks bars from the UK (find them on Amazon)

- Dark chocolate with pistachio. Aldi has the best chocolate. They sell a 5-pack of chocolate bars that are 1.4 oz each called Choceur. I like the milk chocolate or the hazelnut crunch, but they also have a dark chocolate. I'll say it again: Aldi has the best chocolate!
- Anything!
- Lindt Excellence 70% Cocoa-Dark Chocolate or Blue Bell -Dutch Chocolate Icecream
- Dark chocolate covered walnut clusters found in bulk area of store. Divine.
- Not really a chocolate person; Nutella? M&Ms?)
- Dark chocolate peanut butter cups from Trader Joes. Chilled (a must)
- Dark chocolate pretzel crisps
- Mint chocolate chip ice cream – anywhere I can find it.
- Cake Bites, Italian Rainbow. These are like small petite fours. If you like amaretto and chocolate, you need to try these!
- Dark chocolate almonds

Well, dark chocolate is a winner!

Cousin Moms – Healthy is Hard – by Charissa and Kamrin

It's back to school time already and parents quickly try to get the family back on schedule with sleep habits, good food choices, and all the things to promote good health...or do they? It's hard to be perfect with it comes to good health when kids are involved. But parents try, the best they can. These two moms are honest about the ups and downs and how it's not so easy to be perfect parents when it comes to staying healthy...but there are a few tips that work.

Kamrin

We are not good, if I'm being straight up honest, at being healthy at our best.

We do make sure they have vegetables and fruit in their lunches, as school starts. And we make sure they stay hydrated, as they each have a water bottle – it's extremely important to us – as we live where it's hot! We even send two water bottles sometimes, with them to school.

Our sleep habits are not great. My daughter is a night owl like I am! At least I know many send their kids to bed early, but ours get to bed a bit later in comparison to others. When they were small we were youth leaders and always on the go, so sleep habits haven't been the best. We do try to make sure they get enough rest, so we will try to shift to a new nightly routine before school starts.

Exercise isn't necessarily something we do as a family. The kids have recess, P.E., they play sports and practice and have games. Our daughter is in tumbling and hopes to be in cheer. So exercise is built into their school schedule. As adults, we really have to work on – not so great at it! It's definitely a priority to walk and worship, once the weather gets cooler, after the kids go to school.

We are big on *balance*, making sure they get healthy foods in their meals, have plenty of water and stay active. It's not an exercise "routine" but rather riding bikes, walking to the park and not just sitting around. Our kids do like to be active, except our daughter likes to draw and paint! We aren't rigid and forceful with these habits and we don't follow trends or compare to other families. So as our own family, we look at works for what works for us, and with what our doctors recommend.

Our daughter doesn't like meat, so we do make sure she gets protein in her system, so that is a focus for her, specifically. Our oldest can't have dairy, so we have to make sure to watch that for his food intake. And we all try to cut down on salty and sweet snacks. Little changes are what we try to do, as habits don't change overnight (at least for us!) We can all start with one thing, make it fun, and be creative with all the things.

It's hard when we are so busy, and dinner can be difficult. In the spring we ate out a lot because of business. So we are trying to do better with that for finances and health. So one goal it to be better with meal planning!

As far as spiritual health, we have started something new with our kids. We pray every night as a family and we implemented personal bible study this summer for each of the kids. My husband gives them a chapter or passage to read each day with a memory verse, and we talk about it together. Ayla, my 10 year old, and I are going to start our own this fall...

Charissa

Health in our kids and ourselves has multiple factors, in regards to nutrition, exercise and spiritual health!

We do try to practice healthy habits. When it comes to food, we try to talk to the girls about what “fuels” our body and what does not. We want to prioritize food that makes us stronger – proteins, veggies and grains – things without much sugar. And of course, we try to instill the practice of drinking water. We put candy and desserts and juices in more like a “treat” category, not something we *have* to have. We do still enjoy in moderation, but a belly full of sugar won’t make us feel good. Dessert is enjoyable, but instruction on what is good and what is a treat, is necessary.

Physical health is important to us, and my husband and I have tried to work on that. I just had a third baby and getting back in shape is hard. We consistently go to the gym. This is hard too, with working full time and caring for three kids, but we share the time. He goes right after work a few times a week, and a few days when I am off, I just got a trainer (this helps me workout – if I pay and have it on the calendar) and I love it. That’s my time. The girls, since they’ve been on summer break, have gone with me. They see us workout and they try to work out too with small weights, etc. If we’ve been inside a lot, we try to get up and get out for a walk and make our bodies active and stronger. It’s definitely been a priority this year, so that we are healthy as parents to take care of our bodies so we have energy for the kids! I feel so much better and stronger after my workouts, which helps me be a better mom.

Spiritual health is hard, since the girls are young, ages 6, 4 and a baby. Devotionals where we read long stretches are hard. But we do have short devotionals each morning. My daughter is able to read now, so having her read is fun. We stress the importance of coming to Jesus daily in prayer and the Word. Even if it’s just fine minutes! We are also consistent in going to church with other families, where the classes are awesome! Having conversations with the girls and doing this daily helps so much.

There are times when we fail in all of these areas, and that’s okay! Just daily to remember those three things helps us as parents be more equipped to care for our kids, and then they can take care of themselves, too!

In the Kitchen – End of Summer – by Marcy Lytle

Where I live, we all hope the end of summer is near in August...but we're always disappointed at how long it lasts! This month I'm sharing some recipes we tried this summer that were unique and tasty, colorful and easy...keepers! So I thought you might like to try them as well, before summer's end:

Broccoli couscous – I absolutely loved this meal, with some homemade tahini dressing over the top! Or just buy a dressing of your choice. Refreshing, and easy to pack to go.

- 1 T olive oil
- 4 c fresh broccoli florets, cut in small pieces
- 1 c uncooked couscous
- 2 garlic cloves minced
- 1 ¼ c chicken broth
- 1 t grated lemon zest
- 1 t lemon juice
- ½ t salt
- ½ t dried basil
- ¼ t ground pepper
- 1 T slivered almonds toasted

In large cast iron, or heavy skillet, heat oil over med-hi heat. Add broccoli, cook and stir til crisp-tender. Add couscous and garlic, cook and stir a couple minutes. Stir in broth, lemon zest and juice, seasonings, and bring to boil. Remove from heat and let it stand, covered, until broth is absorbed – about 5-10 minutes. Fluff with a fork and sprinkle with almonds.

Pimiento cheese dogs – We took the ingredients for these on a weekend away, and we really liked the flavor! So easy, and a fun summer dog.

- Franks
- Buns
- Pimiento cheese
- Sliced red cabbage
- Pickled jalapenos

Just grill your franks and place them in the bun, top with the rest! Delish!

Strawberries and cashews – A great end of summer dessert treat, whatever you want to call it. So easy to put together for guests, for the kids, for just for yourself! Deliciously refreshing and good.

- 4 c sliced fresh strawberries
- 2 T caramel ice cream topping
- 2 T maple syrup
- 1 T orange juice

- 1/3 c salted cashew halves

Place strawberries in a large bowl. Mix caramel topping, syrup and orange juice; drizzle over strawberries. Top with cashews.

Rustic Vegetable Soup – Soup in the summer? Why not? Crank up the AC, put on a movie and cozy up, and pretend it's fall already. This recipe is from *Clean Bowls*, a favorite cookbook I have.

- 1 T olive oil
- 1 small diced onion
- 2 diced carrots
- 2 diced celery stalks
- 1 sliced leek
- 2 garlic cloves chopped
- 3 T tomato paste
- 1 15oz can white beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 28oz can diced tomatoes
- 6-8 cups vegetable broth
- 2 sprigs thyme
- 2 diced potatoes
- Sea salt
- Ground black pepper
- 4-5 kale leaves stemmed and chopped

In a large pot over med heat, heat oil and add onion. Saute 3-4 minutes. Add carrots, celery and leek, cook another 5 minutes, stirring. Add garlic and cook for 30 seconds, don't let it burn. Add tomato paste and stir well. Add the beans, tomatoes, broth, thyme and potatoes. Season with salt and pepper, increase heat to high to boil. Reduce heat and let simmer 15-20 minutes til potatoes are tender. Stir in kale and cook 5 minutes til kale is wilted. Serve.

Loaded Queso – This can be made over the grill or in the oven, and it's a whole meal...seriously. We ate it as a meal because there's so many ingredients in it, and you can actually use whatever you want to create this pan!

- Cooked sausage, drained
- Chopped onion
- Two kinds of cheese (I used a Mexican blend and Velveeta)
- Corn, drained
- 1 can Rotel diced tomatoes
- Tortilla chips

Place everything in a tin square pan in little piles. Melt over a grill or in the oven, and stir. Serve with tortilla chips and enjoy.

Taco Bar – This might be the easiest family, crowd pleaser meal to have in the summer. Just line up all the ingredients you like on a taco, provide paper plates and go! We had this for a family of ten just recently, and it was so good and fun.

- Taco seasoned cooked ground meat
- Taco shells and soft tortillas
- Chopped avocado
- Black beans, drained
- Grated cheese
- Chopped tomatoes
- Shredded lettuce
- Limes
- Queso

Nothing to really tell you here, except prepare, put in bowls, and invite the family!

Coke float – When is the last time you had one? It's August, and you need one. In fact, make it a coke float party and call your friends.

- Coke
- Vanilla ice cream
- Cute glasses
- Long spoons

You know the drill. Fill your glass with ice cream and pour over the coke. A friend told me that chocolate ice cream is good, as well. I haven't tried it! And clear glasses are the most fun, as you can see the float as you enjoy. Dr. Pepper works or root beer, too!

Last Month's Learnin – by Marcy Lytle (August)

I hope the end of summer comes quickly, I'm so ready. Here is this month's list of what I've been taking in, during the last month:

I learned from my kids that *crunchy* has another meaning other than a sound...look it up and see if you knew that!

Gonoodle is on YouTube and it provides cool dances you can do with your kids. Why not?

Have you tried Good & Gather (at Target) ice cream bites? Oh, they're soooo good, so you need to!

Try serving your kids large Belgium waffles a la mode. Made our kiddos smile...

There are coin operated laundromats that also have showers...in Alaska. Have you ever seen such a place?

Before the summer is over, take your family out looking for rocks and stack and make an Ebenezer to recall God's goodness this summer. Look it up – *Ebenezer* – and build one.

Another term I learned from my kids is cheugy. Another one for you to look up, in your spare time. Learning new words is the best...isn't it?

Did you know that dogsled racers wear suits that can keep them warm up to 65 below zero?

Do you know what *efis* means? In the context of building/construction? I didn't either, until my husband said it's sort of like a hard stucco, used in railing on balconies...how about that?

Watermelon can be served lots of ways. But one easy way is cut into triangles, make a slit in the rind with a knife, and insert popsicle sticks! It's less messy!

I've been sharing this a while, now. Brushing glitter nail polish on your toenails and fingernails is a great way to keep them pretty without much fuss at all...because flaws and touchups are a cinch.

Aluminum coat hangers strung up together make for an interesting chandelier!

When is the last time you had a coke float? Enjoy one before summer's end. And try chocolate ice cream instead of vanilla – I hear it's awesome. (Also recommended on In the Kitchen page).

Sanderson sea salt dark chocolate caramels – at Costco – you need a jar in your pantry.

Do you have a Mexican blanket? They're GREAT for picnics, playing on the floor, at the end of a bed...and they're not expensive!

Just bought a ULU cutting bowl with a knife. It's so cool to use – would make a great gift for yourself or someone else! The knife rocks and the herbs, veggies, dice nicely and stay in the bowl.

Don't like the way certain meals smell up your kitchen (i.e. fish)? Take a toaster oven to the back porch and cook it there. A friend of mine does this and it works!

Any cool trivia you've learned this month? Share below!

SUGAR + Spice - 40 Lashes (or more)! – by Angela Dolbear

On days when I know I'm not going to leave the house, and/or I don't feel up to taking the time to put on a full face of makeup, applying just mascara brightens my eyes and helps me feel more put-together.

As functional as eyelashes are, their ability to add beauty to the eyes and face is amazing. I notice them on everyone, people and animals. Cows and horses have the longest and thickest lashes. And men. My husband has beautiful long, thick lashes (not fair!)

Recently, I have received several lash serums for lengthening and thickening lashes in my cosmetics sample boxes. My favorite serum and the one I have been using for about six months is [Lilly Lashes](#). Since I have been using it, my eyelashes are noticeably longer and thicker. I don't wear false eyelashes anymore because they are so long (okay, sometimes, just for fun).

There are several brands of mascara that are my favorite. I like to try new products, so I usually use whichever mascara has arrived in my [Ipsy Sample box](#). Right now, I am using [Blinc](#) mascara on the top lashes, and my diehard holy grail mascara, [Clinique Lash Power Mascara Long-wearing Formula](#) on my bottom lashes.

Blinc has been a good mascara for the summer. It coats the lashes in tiny tubes, which do not run. No summertime racoon eyes here due to the heavy Southern humidity, or from hearing a good word at church that moves me.

I have been using Clinique's Lash Power for over a decade. I'm so grateful the company has kept it in their line of mascaras. I have bionic tears ever since I had Lasik surgery in 2004 that dissolves even the most waterproof of mascaras, except Lash Power. Plus, I love the small applicator brush that comes in the tube. It's perfect for the tiny lashes of the lower lash line.

TIP: I use a soft [eyebrow brush](#) to gently comb over my lashes all the way to the tip of my lashes, after applying mascara. It smooths out all the clumps and makes my lashes look longer. Sometimes, I repeat the process if I need a more done-up look.

The beauty of blessings to you!

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



HOME

Practical Parenting – Give Them a Phone – by Marcy Lytle

Screen time is a hot topic with parents, and many have opted out of it altogether for their kiddos. Understandable. Others leave their kids with screens instead of interacting with them, give them a screen at the table to keep them quiet, and all sorts of things that aren't the best choices. Again, understandable, because parenting is hard. But why can't we have a happy medium, weigh the pros and cons, monitor our kids, and create some happy experiences?

Our entire family, 10 of us, embarked on a vacation adventure earlier this summer to Juneau, Alaska, and all three of the older littles had phones. They are ages 8, 10, and 11. Some may say that's crazy, others may not...but what I saw on vacation in particular, I loved.

Let me stop for a second and say that giving young kids phones is sort of like purchasing puppies for them. You can't expect a kid to suddenly be responsible with something that you will have to train them to use, help them out, and watch closely. If your kids have pets, you know what I mean. Parents have to be aware and care...right?

So back to the vacation... I saw all three of the kids use these devices in their hands to snap pictures and create videos of a once in a lifetime trip, taking photos of snow and mountains and wildlife and more, and they LOVED it. They were even creative in their picture-taking. A good use of a phone!

Yes, at dinner those phones popped up in those kids' hands, but their parents were good to say, "Put the phones away while we eat." Yes, the parents had to train, instruct, and monitor the phones that their kids now held.

There are perils out there lurking and waiting for our kids on social media, in the internet world, and well...everywhere. But there are limits parents can place on phones, there are timeouts parents can insist upon regarding phones, and there are amazing adventures to be had with phones.

Lots of times, parenting is a no-way game, where we just ban everything that appears "evil" from the get-go and just don't even consider that something others have downplayed might actually be a great thing for our kids. I remember when my son was small there was a lot of banter about Pokemon cards being evil. But he didn't use them for that purpose, and we didn't invite evil into our homes because he collected them, or any other such nonsense. They were a toy. That was it.

I love that the kids now have phones. Their contact list is for sure limited, but I'm on their list. I can text to see how camp went, and they can text me funny pictures they take and tell me about their lives. That's the beauty and the fun of something their parents have given them, as they watch closely and guide their children.

Considering something for your kids that others have criticized you for thinking about? Or have you bought into the hoopla of the masses, just because of fear? Consider again, and think and pray about what your family might enjoy. Make guidelines, carefully consider, and count the cost...just like you do before you buy that puppy. And just know that yes, you'll be the one

reminding those kids of those rules, and you'll have to tirelessly monitor them, but that's what parents are for...at least partly.

And your kids will grow up with memories and grateful hearts that their parents paid attention.

I Don't Do Teenagers – Krackens and All – by Marcy Lytle

Maybe your kids have seen *Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kracken*, the movie this summer...or maybe not. It's animated, but it's about a 17 year old girl that wants to attend the school prom – but she feels different and her mom won't let her go. Those two things probably describe all of our teens – as school time approaches.

Maybe your teen feels different because she hasn't "blossomed" yet like her other friends, or her skin is now breaking out, or she's put on a few pounds...or can't put on weight all!

We were talking with the kiddos in our family (pre-teens) and they called it "body shaming," basically making fun of other kids with bodies that aren't *perfect*, according to TV and social media.

In the movie, the Kracken family was from the sea but they had moved to live on dry land, not wanting anyone to know who they really were. The teen Ruby even wore turtlenecks to hide her gills. And she told kids she was from Canada, and that's why she was blue.

Maybe your son is younger than most of his friends who are learning to drive, and your son hasn't. Or you've said no until later... Or perhaps he's asking to hang out with that group of friends you're unsure of, and again, you've said no.

The mom in the movie told Ruby she was not allowed to go to the prom AT ALL, too risky. But all of Ruby's friends were going, and it was hard to be the "only one" not being allowed to follow the crowd.

While movies should never be our standard or resource for good parenting, at all, there were a couple of good takeaways for the kids, and it provided good conversation after.

Making fun of other kids because they don't look like us is never okay. So maybe this month is a good time to address body images with your own kids. Are they confident in their appearance? If skin or weight is a real issue, address it together with them, and encourage them that all teens have SOMETHING...and they will get through. But while they're working on it, they are beautiful and accepted and loved, no matter what kids say. Remind them that you are a safe haven for them, a listening ear, and their champion prayer warrior.

Feeling left out because other kids are doing something our kids are not allowed to do is hard. But each family is different on rules and allowances. It might be a good month to consider your rules and the whys, and to talk before the school year begins about wishes and wants. Explanations are great, but the kids won't always understand. And parental fears are real, and they're not good, either. Talking and praying together helps, as we always leave the door of communication open...as well as the door to our rooms. Kids need to feel welcome to share how they feel without being shamed by their parents.

In the movie, the mom mellowed out a bit, the girl realized her mom really loved her, and the entire family was "found out" and the world didn't end. All things worked together for good...kind of like what we teach our kids when they follow HIM.

Go see the movie with your teens, or watch it on TV. Teens often begin retreating to their rooms and not speaking to their parents, but don't let that happen. Talk to them, discuss the movie, listen and love. And always cast your cares on him...one of those cares being your kids.

An Adage a Day – Stitches – by Carole Gilbert

My grandchildren are getting ready to start back to school. It's been such a fun summer and now that some of them are older, we can also do more grown-up things. We've visited water parks, amusement parks, dug in the sand at the beach and swam in the waves. We shopped and rode the golf cart all around town. We have spent time and money together. We've also spent time playing in the sprinklers, being quiet at nap time, and just loving the littles, as we call our younger grandchildren.

We've done so many things this summer, but one thing will always be very dear to my heart. I got to show my older granddaughters how to sew. I grew up around my mother and grandmother sewing. My mother actually made most of my clothes, my Barbie's clothes, and even some of my stuffed animals. It's always been a craft that I love and this summer I got to pass it on like it was passed on to me. When they showed interest in sewing, I immediately started to plan how to instruct them at the same time in case one or both lost interest before the project was complete. Their mother came up with the idea and material for pillowcases for their body pillows. They did the work from beginning to end. I simply told them how. And they did wonderfully great jobs!

As we worked together, the old proverb, "A stitch in time saves nine," came to mind. I remember hearing it often as a child. But what did it mean? Did it even fit our activity? So, I looked it up. It has close to the same meaning as, "Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today," or, "The early bird catches the worm." These all refer to doing something, as you see it needing to be done instead of putting it off until later. In other words, "A procrastinator never be, use the moment at hand, it's what you see." That's my saying.

"A stitch in time saves nine," originated around the late 1600's to the early 1700's. It is uncertain who the original author is or if it is a proverb or a quote. But what is certain is that it uses the art of sewing to express that doing one stitch, or project, or maybe even tending to a problem as you see it needs attention, can save time and even more stitches in the future if left unattended to.

I couldn't find the proverb, "a stitch in time saves nine," or a similar saying in the Bible but I did find a lot of stories and verses which have the same meaning of doing things now and not waiting for tomorrow. There are many places that express the urgency for people to know Jesus and to do according to God's calling. Many times, it tells us to do it now and not put it off.

John 9:4 tells us, *As long as it is day, we must do the works of Him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.*

While raising my children, I always told them to not wait to try different things. God gives us many gifts and talents. No matter what it was at hand for them to do, whether it be something fun at school, a project or hobby, or a job. Sometimes, opportunity knocks only once, and you

might find out you like it. As for my granddaughters and sewing? One said it was okay. One said never again. Me? I had a great time! Oh well, at least they tried it.

Tiny Living – We Left! – by Leyanne Enterline

This Texas heat has been brutal! Especially in a trailer!

The air-conditioning was constantly running, the bill was getting to be pretty high, and everyone was miserable. So we left!

We're on an almost three-week adventure to New Mexico and Colorado. We have not been missing the Texas heat. That is for sure! The weather in these states where we are traveling has been fabulous.

We are at the tail end of our trip now; and believe me, not one of us is looking forward to getting back into that hot trailer! Before leaving, we had to get the trailer prepared somewhat, for while we were gone:

- We keep the front and back AC thermostat set to 80
- We make sure all the window coverings are closed to eliminate some of the sun coming inside.
- We turn off the main water. Hopefully we don't come back to everything melted!
- We also make sure to stock the outdoor fridge with lots of water so when we get back we are at least prepared with extra cold water to drink!

When we travel, we usually take our pups to the grandparents. They love it there as they are spoiled with coming inside a lot! At our place, it's too cramped to have everyone inside, so the dogs have a giant horse trough they can splash around in to stay cool. After they're all nice and wet, they like to lay down under the trailer where the gravel feels nice and cool. We'll also spray them down with a hose every once in a while to help them stay cooler.

Though we like Texas, for the most part it has definitely been nice to beat the heat in other states for part of the summer and spread out in hotels bigger than our tiny home.

Remember love grows best in tiny spaces

A Night to Remember – Anchor of Hope – by Marcy Lytle

Hebrews 6 says this... *We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*

That anchor is Jesus.

So, let's talk about anchors...as we draw one together.

Preparation – give each child a piece of paper, a pencil and a blue and brown crayon or marker.

Who knows what an anchor is? And what happens if a boat loses its anchor in a storm?

Talk about boat anchors and how necessary they are when a boat is out to sea. Otherwise, if a big storm comes, the boat is tossed around and the captain might lose his sense of direction and where he is.

Jesus is the anchor for our soul so that when hard things happen or disappointments come, we stay grounded and secure in his great love.

(Draw step one)

Did you know that a person can be an anchor, as well? The news guy or girl on TV is sometimes called a news anchor. They are the main broadcaster.

Jesus is our broadcaster. He tells us of his love for us and that love keeps us secure when we feel alone or afraid. The bible says he even sings songs of love over us, as his children.

(Draw step two)

A store can be called an anchor store too. It's usually the largest store in the shopping center, the one that attracts people to come. What anchor stores are in our town? (Target, Walmart, etc.)

Jesus is the best and biggest anchor we can have in our lives, and when we love him and love others, others will want to know Him. Isn't that cool?

(Draw step three)

The anchor was seen as a symbol of strength, as anchors hold down ships even in the stormiest of weather. It was also a popular symbol because of its close resemblance to the cross. Anchors were also used to mark safe houses for those seeking refuge from persecution.

Have you ever thought about how an anchor looks like a cross? Why is the cross important to our family as we walk with Jesus? (The work Jesus did on the cross, forgiving our sins, then dying and conquering death – secures our future!)

(Draw step four)

An anchor can also be a good friend, a parent, a teacher, someone on whom we can depend to care for us and treat us well. Who is an anchor in your life?

Let's give thanks for the anchors God has placed in our lives.

(Draw step five)

An anchor also brings about peace, because it keeps the boat steady in storms.

If we don't have an anchor in our lives, we might be afraid to venture out to try new things. We could be afraid or sad if someone mistreats us. But Jesus as our anchor says that He is a firm anchor. That means he never leaves us, he never moves, he holds us fast, and he's always our hope.

(Draw step six and color in your anchor).

Keep the anchor picture you just drew in your room this school year and remember to look to Jesus every morning and night as the anchor for your soul.

Did you know that a person can be an anchor, as well? The news guy or girl on TV is sometimes called a news anchor. They are the main broadcaster.

Jesus is our broadcaster. He tells us of his love for us and that love keeps us secure when we feel alone or afraid. The bible says he even sings songs of love over us, as his children.

(Draw step two)

A store can be called an anchor store too. It's usually the largest store in the shopping center, the one that attracts people to come. What anchor stores are in our town? (Target, Walmart, etc.)

Jesus is the best and biggest anchor we can have in our lives, and when we love him and love others, others will want to know Him. Isn't that cool?

(Draw step three)

The anchor was seen as a symbol of strength, as anchors hold down ships even in the stormiest of weather. It was also a popular symbol because of its close resemblance to the cross. Anchors were also used to mark safe houses for those seeking refuge from persecution.

Have you ever thought about how an anchor looks like a cross? Why is the cross important to our family as we walk with Jesus? (The work Jesus did on the cross, forgiving our sins, then dying and conquering death – secures our future!)

(Draw step four)

An anchor can also be a good friend, a parent, a teacher, someone on whom we can depend to care for us and treat us well. Who is an anchor in your life?

Let's give thanks for the anchors God has placed in our lives.

(Draw step five)

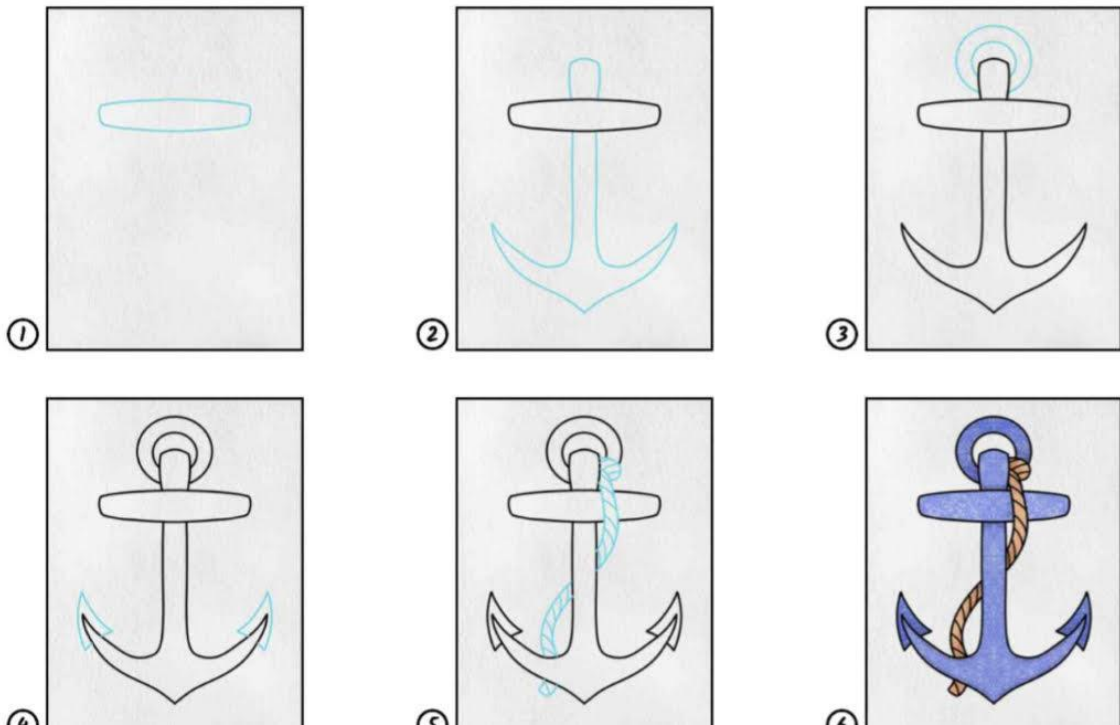
An anchor also brings about peace, because it keeps the boat steady in storms.

If we don't have an anchor in our lives, we might be afraid to venture out to try new things. We could be afraid or sad if someone mistreats us. But Jesus as our anchor says that He is a firm anchor. That means he never leaves us, he never moves, he holds us fast, and he's always our hope.

(Draw step six and color in your anchor).

Keep the anchor picture you just drew in your room this school year and remember to look to Jesus every morning and night as the anchor for your soul.

How to Draw an Anchor



In Each Room – On the Shelves – by Marcy Lytle

Curating shelves can be hard to do, and if we're not careful, they can just become a cluttered mess with no décor value at all! I have a little shelf tower near my desk that I have to declutter and organize often. But there are shelves in my living area that stay decorated and only changed out periodically.

There are a few fun ideas and "rules" to follow when arranging shelves for décor:

Try placing items in groups of three – I read this once and it's so true. Groups of three are attractive, pull the eye in, and look great when curated in this number...or in groups of odd numbers...not even.

Use bowls or items from kitchen as part of your décor – I have a pretty wooden salad bowl, and a chip/dip bowl that are both so pretty, I hate to hide them in a cabinet. So I don't! They look nice in a trio of three, curated on a shelf in the den.

Stickup lights are great for a focus on a photo or art – If you have kids art, or you've purchased a pretty picture, place a bar or circular light (one of the sticky kinds) and turn it on, to focus on your art. Looks so pretty at night!

Consider a battery operated lamp – One of my favorites, for sure. I have a few scattered on some shelves...lamps that operate by battery instead of a long unsightly cord.

Turn books around – If you have a stack of books you want to blend in with your décor, turn them all around with the page edges facing out. It looks pretty, uniform in color, and different!

Hide "things" in boxes – I have a box that holds tons of tea lights, and the box sits on the shelf. I use those tea lights often, especially in the fall season.

Plants are awesome - Got a succulent or a few fake plants? Use them for filler. Greenery is always a great thing to place on a shelf.

Maybe you have a wall of shelves, like I do. It's a challenge to keep it neat and pretty. Or perhaps you have shelves on either side of your TV, or above your bed, or even above the toilet in the bathroom. Try some of the ideas above, and see what you come up with as you decorate. It can be so fun!



YOU

Inner Strength - I Never Knew – by Michelle Wyatt

I brought out my keyboard that had been propped up against the wall in my bedroom. I was originally going to sell it, but then what I witnessed and learned made the keyboard priceless.

You see, my boys and I all have some interest in music, so I've kept the keyboard around throughout various times of our lives in case the interest to play comes about. All I needed was to bring it out one more time, and the look in Brendan's eyes said it all. This keyboard isn't going anywhere.

Brendan immediately started to play chopsticks. He wasn't sure where on the keyboard to start, but the important point was he started. I showed him a section at a time. After he copied what I did, we cheered, "Yeh!" our arms went up, we gave each other a double high five, then finally a hug. It was the best! I can still see his smile as if it's happening right in front of me. High five! Hug!

Some of the song that went from six repeats to four, he would still do six. At first, I didn't want to bring it up. I just let it go and said good job. Then, the next round I decided I wasn't doing him a favor by letting it go, especially considering he's going into middle school and he may end up taking band. Brendan wanted to get it right, so he handled being corrected beautifully. He told me, "Oh okay. Let me try it."

At the very beginning, I started teaching him by putting my fingers over his to guide them. I quickly discovered that he didn't need or want that level of assistance. (I recently learned about a hierarchy of supporting a child called prompting. What I did with my fingers over his fingers is actually called hand over hand-that is the most intense form of assistance all the way to the least which is verbally assisting). This activity was very interesting, because while I know that Brendan is a visual learner, I'm not used to seeing him pick up on things so quickly just by watching. His brother has been known for learning by observing. Brendan usually follows written directions to learn how to do something. I don't have sheet music for chopsticks though, and he doesn't know how to read music. I went as far as seeing if he could tap into some auditory learning skills by having him listen then repeat how I hummed chopsticks. I showed him that by humming it in his head or out loud, it can remind him of what keys to play. I was impressed that he used that tool as well. Brendan himself said that he didn't know he could learn to play the keyboard. He couldn't wait to play for his dad!

Every day since then, that he's been with me, he has asked me to teach him another song. I looked through the book and I showed him some options. I gave him the book while I stepped away briefly. When I got back, he was playing the G key in each octave, according to the book. Brendan was teaching himself how to play! I was so proud of him and he smiled the whole time while doing it.

This experience has brought me such unexpected joy! I have loved learning more about my son and can't wait to see what comes next!

A Hopeful Heart - Endless Summers – Christina Oberon

I grew up without ever experiencing the concept of seasons. Instead, my childhood in Hawaii was an eternal summer—a paradise of endless sunshine and boundless outdoor activities. Living in a state where the sun never took a break bestowed upon me a carefree and exhilarating state of mind. Despite the occasional challenges and setbacks, I reveled in perpetual happiness and a sense of pure relaxation. Reflecting on those golden years of my life, I can't help but wonder if the everlasting summers were the very source of my feeling of ease.

While Hawaii does boast slight variations in weather and rainfall patterns depending on the specific island and region, overall, the islands offer a magnetic allure of warmth and radiance that transforms the idea of an endless summer into a tangible reality. And oh, how tangible it was for me.

Summers in Hawaii ignited the aloha spirit within me—a vibrant blaze of brightness, cheer, and a welcoming embrace. The concept of "aloha" is etched deep into the tapestry of Hawaiian culture, celebrating kindness, hospitality, and respect for others. I was raised amidst the gentle caress of the aloha spirit, which instilled in me an attitude of inclusivity and warm-heartedness towards all. The quintessential pleasures of summer, like luxuriating in the gentle warmth, relishing the elongated daylight hours, partaking in outdoor adventures, or simply surrendering to the sun's radiant rays, etched a perpetual smile upon my face and escape from sometimes overwhelming home life. Summer was not merely a fleeting season for us; it was an enduring state of paradise. It was a continuous vacation from the mundane routines of life.

Water, a vital life force that beckons with an irresistible allure, played an integral role in the essence of summer. And in the tapestry of island life, this truth resonates like a captivating melody. The beach became our second home—a sanctuary where my siblings and I sought refuge every day after school and every weekend until the sun tucked itself away beneath the horizon. The sensation of the warm sea water on our sun-kissed skin was pure bliss. As the evening breeze whispered secrets of contentment, we reveled in the present moment, eagerly anticipating the next day's beach adventure. The beach culture nourished our deep-rooted love for the ocean and ignited within us a passionate embrace of water activities from an early age.

To be a child in Hawaii was to embark on a thrilling and unparalleled journey, guided by the intoxicating blend of natural wonders, cultural diversity, and the laid-back island lifestyle. Every day was a summer day; a sizzling medley of exploration, where we immersed ourselves in the pristine splendor of secluded beaches, gracefully swayed to the rhythmic beats of hula, ventured into lush hiking trails, delighted in the sight of waterfalls and rainbows, and enjoyed in the fusion of culinary flavors influenced by diverse cultures. And oh, the refreshing burst of flavors from the abundance of luscious fruits that were our allies in conquering the endless summer days! The islands beckoned us into a whimsical playground of natural wonders, igniting our sense of awe and stirring our insatiable curiosity.

Summer days in Hawaii ushered in constant adventures with both old and new friends, forging bonds that would withstand the test of time. Hawaii boasts a unique sense of community, a tapestry tightly woven even within its larger towns. We grew up knowing our neighbors intimately, participating in vibrant community events, and immersing ourselves in treasured local traditions. This nurturing environment fostered a sense of belonging and unwavering support that continues to resonate within me.

As I reminisce about those unending summers in Hawaii, a kaleidoscope of memories washes over me—a vivid collage that reminds me of the unique blend of natural beauty, cultural diversity, and relaxed island lifestyle. The outdoor exploration, exposure to different cultures, and a strong sense of community created a childhood filled with adventure, cultural richness, and an appreciation for the unique environment I will always call home.

Healthy Habits - Observe a Little Longer – by Marcy Lytle

On a weekend trip recently, my husband and I had a pool area to ourselves for three days, and we used it, morning and night. We swam in the evening and we sat by the pool for breakfast each morning. It was really fabulous. We swam and exercise and relaxed and we observed...a lot.

By the last day of the long weekend we had seen so many things that we had not even noticed on the first day of our stay.

There was a scaffold by the main house and a stack of railing posts on the top level, I pointed them out on the last day. My husband then proceeded to explain to me how they were made and the material in them. Who knew? I didn't.

There was a swing in a faraway tree we hadn't even sat in yet, which we finally tried on the last morning and it was so nice and fun. Why had we not sat in it every day?

Flower pots sat all around the pool with different blooms in various shapes and colors. I think we had lingered over each one, admiring its beauty, by the end of our stay.

An outdoor fireplace actually had wood stacked in it for us to use, and we looked and found long matches and struck them and sat by the fire one night...how fun was that.

We realized we could see the sun set behind the trees behind the house and we watched it go down every single evening.

There were options for sitting outside to eat – a picnic table, a metal table for two, and a large table with an umbrella. Yes, we sat at each one and had a different view from each place.

The sounds were plenty by the pool! The hum of the waterfall motor, to the wind blowing in the trees, to the birds and more...and we watched humming birds flit around constantly!

We even caught sight of a stack of beach towels up against the house for our use, should we need them.

And over to the side one of the flower pots had the owner's name etched in it, The Goldbecks, and we thought that was so cool.

What does this have to do with staying healthy, you might wonder. It has everything to do with health!

When we're in a hurry, our minds are full, or our phones are in our hands, we miss sounds, details, places to sit, provision nearby, and freedom to be and roam and enjoy life on this earth.

Observe wherever you are today and linger a little longer, stay a while and look, and then visit that space again tomorrow and the next day...and see if you don't breathe a little deeper and ignite your sense of wonder.

Life Right Now - Compliments From Strangers - By Jennifer Stephens

Compliments from strangers. Sounds like the premise of the latest psychological thriller on the Lifetime channel. I can picture it now: Well-dressed woman casually window shopping, completely unaware of the suspicious stranger following her every move...waiting for the perfect moment to nonchalantly toss a compliment her way, a compliment that will soon throw them into a tangle of murderous mayhem. EEK!

Luckily, this isn't a made-for-TV movie. It's our everyday life. Whether it's strolling the aisles for overpriced cereal at the grocery store, waiting in line to order a burger at McDonald's or picking up a giant box of detergent at Costco, each of these ordinary scenarios leave us surrounded by unknown faces and make the perfect setting to experience compliments from strangers.

So, what IS a compliment? A quick online search defines a compliment as "a polite expression of praise or admiration." Don't we all like to receive praise and admiration? I know I do! A few weeks ago while out shopping I was wandering the aisles, lost in thought, when a nice woman stopped me. My startled expression turned into a growing smile as she proceeded to tell me how much she loved my shoes and glasses and my "whole look." I thanked her before we parted ways and continued on with our shopping, me wearing a ridiculous grin on my face.

To this woman her words may have seemed small. Insignificant. She probably didn't give our encounter much thought beyond that moment. But I'm still thinking about it. Because what she didn't know is how awful I'd been feeling about myself that day. That happens sometimes. For no reason really, I felt like a toad. My dress seemed too snug, my hair wasn't cooperating, and there was an unfortunate situation with a zit (Why, oh why, do we still get these middle-aged zits?!). In fact, I almost didn't leave the house that day because of it (Yes, I know we're not supposed to focus on outward appearance, but I'm human and sometimes vanity gets the best of me!). But I'm glad I didn't let my self-proclaimed amphibian status stop me from going out. Her words served as a gift. A stranger liked my shoes and it made me forget all about that silly zit.

Mark Twain famously said, "I can live for two months on a good compliment." Isn't it funny how a compliment can transform our attitude?

If this lady's compliment could lift my spirits, maybe I could do the same for somebody else. Painfully shy, I wasn't sure how this would go, but I decided to make it my mission. I would purposefully toss out a compliment to a stranger the next time I was out. It was hard at first. I saw a lady wearing a snazzy hat, and I wanted to let her know how stylish I thought she looked, but the words got stuck in my throat. After a few more missed opportunities, I found my voice and somebody to compliment. As I watched her smile grow, I wondered if maybe she'd been feeling like a toad that day. I hope not. But if she did, I pray the compliment left her feeling encouraged.

You know who else handed out compliments? Jesus. In Luke 10, He praised Mary for sitting and listening to Him while Martha was anxiously busying herself in the kitchen. And in Matthew 25, He was full of praise when he said, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." There are many examples of Jesus expressing praise and admiration towards others. Jesus threw around

compliments like confetti. And so should we.

That's my challenge for each of you this month. Give somebody (or lots of somebody's) a compliment! It can be as simple as telling a stranger "I love your top!" or "That color looks great on you!" It could be letting the cashier know you appreciate her positive attitude. Or maybe telling your server at the restaurant, "I really admire how hardworking you are." Ultimately, it's about encouraging and lifting each other up. Let's look for opportunities to do just that. Our kind words of admiration might be exactly what somebody needs to hear!

"Worry weighs a person down, but an encouraging word cheers a person up." Proverbs 12:25

Giving compliments to strangers can be challenging - maybe even a little awkward - but Proverbs 12:25 shows us it's a necessary and good thing to do. How will you compliment somebody this month?

Under Pressure – Sustainer of Life – by Debbie Haynes

There's a story in the Old Testament about a guy that disappeared and the people wanted to search for his body. They searched for three days and found nothing. It was because God had taken this man Elijah up to heaven. Not long after that event, the same people realized the water in the city was bad and their land was unfruitful. And their new leader Elisha threw salt in the water and said the Lord was purifying the water...and so it happened.

Later, this same leader Elisha returned to the land and there was a famine, so he told a servant to put a pot on and boil stew, adding herbs and gourds. But as the men ate, they cried out and said, "There is death in the pot." And they were unable to eat. Elisha then said to bring meal and threw it in the pot, and the harm was gone.

Foul water

Poisoned soup

An interesting story

Both stories involved pollution of a critical means of sustenance for the people – the very basics of life – water and food. And in both stories, God chose common things like salt and meal to purify and cleanse. Much like he gave us Jesus – the pure water and the life sustaining bread of our lives.

When we are completely dependent on Him and recognize that, his will and power does the work, no matter what tools are available. It wasn't Elisha, the leader, nor the salt or meal that provided the healing, but it was the Lord.

One significant part to this story is that in the middle of drought and famine, God provided life in clean water and pure food for his people.

I'm sure we've all heard stories about the future of our waterways, as they become more and more polluted. On the news, we hear about severe food shortages, as well, and we hardly know the real truth. But one thing we do know is found in Psalm 37, which is full of promise.

- The Lord sustains the righteous.
- Their inheritance will be forever.
- In days of famine, they will have abundance. And the righteous are gracious and give.
- The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.
- The Lord is the One who holds our hands.
- And our descendants are a blessing.

So if God wants to add salt to the water or meal to a pot, let it be so! We don't have to fear drought or famine, because all of our resources are found in Him.

What a creative provider God is, a faithful keeper of you and me, the sustainer of life.



MARRIAGE

In This Together – Just Maybe – by Bekah Holland

When our fearless leader, Marcy, approached me a few years ago to write a monthly article for her fabulous women's magazine, I was, at first, incredibly flattered, a feeling that was quickly followed by my questioning her ability to think clearly, because I am not what I consider "a writer." I can be kind of mouthy, laugh when I should cry, and if you have read anything I have ever put online, you know I write like I talk and will hop down every bunny trail twice before I ever make my point. *So hi, besties.*

People who "know" me but aren't really a part of my everyday life tend to see the obvious outside stuff. Like my hair is never ever, ever not in an actual messy bun, and not the kind of bun others put together on purpose. I get along with almost any kind of personality, I can bring calm to some very volatile situations and sometimes I'm funny on purpose, as opposed to unintentionally quirky the rest of the time. And all of those things are true. People who *know-know me* have seen a lot of other sides. They've seen me flinch at loud noises, and put a pillow over my face when there are scary scenes on TV, bite my lower lip when I'm stressed, cry in closets when people argue and I have been known to hide in any available bathtub if it gets too people-y. They've witnessed my laughter, my tears, my rambling, and even at times my rage if my momma bear instincts kick in. This is not pretty. 10/10 would not recommend. But I'll protect my people or go down fighting.

Some of these people know me on a level I don't even know how to qualify. They know that I can feel every single emotion at the same time, mine and anyone else's emotions in the room with me, because of what the cool kids apparently call being highly sensitive. They know that when I'm really anxious I turn into someone who can't eat which is different than my regular, every day anxiety level that makes me eat my feelings, and that I can recite all episodes of *Friends*, *NCIS* and *Madame Secretary* by heart, because I've watched them on repeat for years. These people also know that so many of my struggles I tend to attempt all on my own, regardless of having an amazing support system. I have no idea why I'm like that.

While I love helping others, I can't always convince myself that I deserve the same. Actually, I think it's partially pride, because, well, obviously if I think I can juggle everything on my own, I should be someone much more successful at life than me. But mostly, it's part of my *codependent-edness* (not a word, I know, let it go). I'm afraid to share my heavy stuff, because other people have their own heavy stuff and it doesn't seem okay to add to that. My brain knows how backwards all of this is, but I spent a lot of time hearing that love is sacrifice, that it's service, and putting yourself last is next to godliness. And in my little world, wanting to keep the peace is listed somewhere near breathing.

What does this have to do with marriage, you ask? I don't know. Nothing. Everything. Both? I think that until I'm really honest with myself, I can't be really honest in my relationships. And I guess this just became a very wordy (but free) therapy session. Because I need to be honest, here. I am constantly exhausted and terrified. Every day my fears seem to be in some kind of echo chamber taking up residence in my head. I try to hide it more, using jokes to tiptoe around things that no doubt require some stomping, and eventually, I start having a really hard time finding a reason to keep putting one foot in front of the other. Now I don't mean literally, because my particular brand of crazy makes me clean more, scrub places that no one will ever see, and stay too busy to think, just so I don't have to stop long enough to address my problems. Not a great coping mechanism I realize, but, I'm going for honest, not sane.

Take right now, for instance. I've mentioned losing my job last year, but I don't know if I've really talked about the kind of effect it's had on me. While I don't define myself by my job, or title, I do define myself by the effort that I put into it, being dependable and trustworthy and never quitting until I've found the answer. That sounds healthier than it actually is, because when that rug was yanked out from under me, I lost a lot of what makes me, me. I allowed the perception of other people to dictate my success. I lost my confidence and belief that if I work hard enough and love big enough, it will eventually all work out. I felt like giving back and helping people around me was more detrimental than not, because I got burned. Badly. So now I'm much more cautious with whom I trust. And while I used to be an open book and would always give the benefit of the doubt, now I question peoples' motives and keep my heart a bit guarded. I find myself being more self-critical and more often than not, second, third and fourth guessing myself at every turn. When I make a mistake, I go on high alert, which really just looks like working harder and messing up more, which is the kind of perpetual cycle I can assure you that you don't want to find yourself in.

Do I know these things about myself? Yes. Am I aware when I'm in the middle of it? Also, yes. Or at least some of the time. Have I made steps to do better? Baby steps. But let's just consider this little not so secret confessional an additional baby step in the right direction. Does my husband know this about me? Yes, and no. Yes, he knows I struggle with all of this, because, well, therapy. But I can easily keep him in the dark by pasting a smile on my face and stuffing the other emotions down until I have time to schedule myself a breakdown. Kidding. Kind of. This is where I start wavering. Because I "know" the right thing to do. I know what I need to say. I know that I married someone who desperately wants to love me right where I am. I know all of these things and more. But I'm not always good at applying that knowledge and putting some action behind it. Or at least putting some words behind it. Preferably strung together in some kind of coherent sentence structure. Can you really love someone fully if you don't trust them fully? Even subconsciously? No idea. I love my husband even more now than I did 17 years ago when we sweated through our "I do's". More than I knew I could love another person. But I steal something from him, from me, from us, when I don't give him all of me, without trying to make my mess, well, less messy.

If you grew up in church, you probably heard every week that Jesus loves you, just as you are. There are no secrets too dark or tears too bitter for him to quit on you. However, I think the "church" has unintentionally (hopefully) amended this message over the years through their treatment of others who look, dress, live, love and believe differently than they do. So first things first, I get to decide whether I believe in the Jesus who isn't scared off by my bad habits or my doubts or my laundry list of mistakes. Or do I believe in the Jesus that religion tells us will accept us only when we have fixed up our lives and cleaned up our tears and put on our Sunday best?

Honestly, I have days where my faith is rattled and my heart wounded and I don't know what to believe in anymore. But I'm learning that if I base my faith on how I'm experiencing life at that moment, how I feel, and how everything may seem like it's falling apart, then I'm just putting a band aid on something that needs stitches. But even when everything feels like, or is, falling apart around me, I can choose to speak truth over my doubts. I remember that my feelings aren't really a great barometer on which to measure truth and my belief in God, or in myself, and that my feelings aren't the final say in my marriage, or relationship with my kids, or even in who I am and what success is for me.

I do believe in love, in mercy, in grace and redemption. I believe in second chances and sometimes thirds. I believe in my husband, my children, even at their worst and in friends who

just show up with queso and cocktails in their pajamas because that's what the best people do. And because I believe in these things, I kind of have to believe in myself, right? If I believe in myself, or at least face it 'til I make it (no that's not a typo) then I believe in a love that always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Which means that I also have to believe that the love in my marriage is always growing and changing and full of forgiveness, strength and a forever kind of ever after.

Maybe in the next 17 years, we'll be better than we are today and I'll be someone who accepts me just where I am, too. But until then, I'm just going to keep reminding myself of the important things, I'm going to try to speak up when I'm not in a good place, and I'm going to keep being honest and trying a little more every day. I'll remember that I'm loved and that I can be both a work in progress and a mess, and still, worthy of love. Because we're not in this alone and my forgiveness should be just as available for me and it is for the people I love. And maybe, I'll get a chance to love my husband more and give him a chance to carry my heavy stuff so that we can both keep loving each other better. Just maybe.

"No matter how many mistakes you make or how slow your progress, you're still way ahead of everyone who isn't trying."

Tony Robbins

Date Night Fun – Swimming, Anyone? – by Marcy Lytle

I'm not a great swimmer, but Jon is. I do love to exercise in the pool, though. And Jon loves to swim in cold pool water, and I prefer the heated water at the end of a hot day...which he says feels like a bathtub. But these past couple of years, we have compromised and started to enjoy time together in the pool, even with our differences. In fact, it can be incorporated into date night...why not? Before summer's end, consider a date together as you splash in a pool.

A weekend away – Book a hotel for a night or two, or an Airbnb with a pool, pack your suits and go. Play games in the pool, like singing phrases of songs beginning with each letter of the alphabet (We did this – so fun!) Swim in sync, playfully dance, and then exit the pool as you dry off, watching the sunset together in each other's arms.

The neighborhood pool – About an hour or two before the pool closes, put on your suits and go. The little kids will be home getting in bed, and there won't be many at the pool. Pack a snack and enjoy, and read a book or two, hand in hand. Walk to and from the pool, instead of driving. What a fun idea.

A gym membership – We have friends that belong to a gym where they swim. They've even met other couples of the same age, and made some new friendships, as they swim and mingle with others. So do this, if you please. And when you get home, enjoy a nighttime movie before you drift off to sleep, well exercised and clean and happy.

Tubing the river – If you have the energy, go to a river where tubes can be rented, and enjoy a leisurely ride down the water alone or with friends. Plan now to get a sitter for the kids. Or if they're old enough, go as a family. You can still wink at him, hold his hand, and float together as a family unit, and enjoy this day date with him. Stop for sno cones on the way home, even if the kids aren't with you.

Pay for luxury – Some cities have fancy hotel pools where you can pay for the day, even book a cabana, eat poolside, and enjoy a day of luxury. Yes, it's costly, but not really, if you stay there for hours. Get away and pamper yourselves. You deserve it.

After 40 Years – Lots of Walking – by Marcy Lytle

Being married over 40 years, we've done LOTS of walking. My gosh, since that first walk down the aisle, we had no idea how much walking we would do, nor how necessary it would be to a good marriage. Walking to and from work, around the house at night with crying babies, giving and moving and living and walking some more...it's no wonder feet need a lot of attention after several decades!

These days, my feet are finicky. No more high heels for me; and even some of the flatter styles just don't feel good, because my feet aren't young anymore! His feet also need some tender loving care, and so our feet have become an important part of our marriage. So much that we even photograph them sometimes, like we did recently!

We got this cool bin that sits in our back seat where we stash shoes when we go places. We include a pair of walking shoes, and I include an extra pair just in case my feet start to hurt, because we walk a lot and we walk often, many times staying out all day.

Just the other night we went shopping for Jon a cute pair of walking shoes. I enjoy helping him pick out a pair that looks good, and I love it when he finds a pair he loves as well. I too recently found some cool summer slides that I have enjoyed wearing so much, because they are comfy AND cute.

Walking is a part of our married life, as much as eating, sleeping, dating, working, and any other activity that comes with everyday life.

We walk on trails for exercise, and I need it to let go of stress so that I'm a better person to be married to, and live with.

We walk in stores together, hunting for this gift or that gift. Sometimes he pushes the cart and sometimes, I do.

We walk hand in hand as often as we can. On weekend trips as we sightsee and discover new places.

We walk together into church weekly, where we worship together...because we need it, and we love Him.

We walk hurriedly to catch flights, slowly to savor a cold drink, or some of both in the course of 24 hours.

It stands to reason that our feet need attention. And when we get home at night and plop on the sofa, my feet go in his lap and he grabs my feet and he rubs them...those feet that walked a few miles while we got our hearts beating faster and healthier. He doesn't really like his feet to be rubbed, but he enjoys rubbing mine.

Walking. It should be part of marriage counseling, shouldn't it? Couples need to do it often, speed up and slow down the pace, walk alongside, and walk forward. Always, walk forward.

I love snapping photos of our feet. They tell part of our marriage story, a good part, an important part, and a very sweet part...indeed.

For Better or Worse - Fun In the Sun – by Kaelin Scott

My family is very fortunate to have access to water on the ranch where we live, which means we get to do lots of summer swimming. We spend many afternoons in the water, a nice reprieve from the Texas heat. There are so many fun things to do at the lake like snorkeling, paddle boarding, fishing, etc. One activity my husband especially enjoys is wakeboarding.

The lake is actually a damned-up section of the river, which means it's pretty narrow. We can't exactly fit a boat out there for water sports, so we use a jet ski for tubing, water skiing, and wakeboarding. Yours truly gets to drive the jet ski while pulling my husband behind (or the kids when they water ski).

I used to be scared to drive the jet ski. I thought I would crash or something, so I was timid and overly cautious. But my husband taught me exactly what to do, and now I have confidence when I drive. And it's actually pretty fun!

I tried wakeboarding a few times and it wasn't my cup of tea, but I do enjoy watching my husband do it. His smile as he glides over the water is priceless, and I could pull him around all day just to watch his face light up. Plus, he's really good at it. He makes it look way easier than I know it actually is. He's even taken the kids on the board with him a few times, which was adorable.

There's no moral to this story or anything. I just wanted to share something we enjoy together. I went from being terrified of driving the jet ski to loving it, mostly because I get to watch my hubby let loose and have fun. After a long day or week at work, a little bit of fun in the sun is just what he needs, and I'm glad I can be a part of it by pulling him around the lake. When I'm old and look back at these times, I know I'll smile as I remember his look of joy as he zoomed across the water.

Share with me in the comments a fun summer activity you enjoy with your husband!



ENCOURAGEMENT

Rooted in Love - Now I Know My ABCs – by Kaelin Scott

My youngest child is about to be in kindergarten (totally not crying or anything), and we've been practicing reading. He's doing a great job, little by little getting the hang of it. Helping him learn and develop this important skill is challenging, fun and bittersweet. I can't believe my little baby is now a big boy who can read. I love watching him grow, but it also feels like it's happening way too fast.

Watching my son learn to read has also been an important reminder for me. Good things don't happen overnight. Success isn't quick and easy. It takes time and effort and sometimes a few tears. Sometimes we get things wrong and have to try again.

In many areas of my life, particularly my writing, I want instant results. I want to write and publish my book and *poof* everyone loves it and writes a raving review. But it doesn't happen that way. It takes months and months just to write and edit the book, and then it takes a few more to get it ready to publish. And then when it's finally out in the world, I have to actively market the book. It's not a one-and-done type of deal. It takes continuous effort, which means I have to be fully dedicated and refuse to ever give up.

Oftentimes we just want things to be easy. We decide to do something and then expect to instantly be successful or immediately see results. But that's not how life works, and I don't think it would be as meaningful if we didn't have to fight for our dreams.

Whether it's a workout routine, a career path, a diet, forming new habits...whatever your goal might be, don't give up when it's tough. Don't quit when it doesn't give quick results. Good things are worth fighting for, and they often take time. The hardest climbs lead to the most spectacular views.

Just like my son learning to read, we have to take one step at a time. One little step, followed by another little step, and soon enough we'll look back and say, "Wow, look how far I've come." But we have to keep taking those steps.

Firmly Planted - Got Questions?—by Dina Cavazos

One of the most pleasant times of the day during this *almost* unbearably hot summer is seven in the morning. (I say *almost* because, thanks to my stock tank pool, I can bear it, with pleasure!) There is a coolish gentle breeze ruffling the bottom of my summer dress as I move through the garden checking on my plant companions. Sadly, some aren't doing so well.

I planted a variegated ivy in mid-May that I hoped would climb the trellis to the fence. It was thriving and sending its tendrils upwards, and then, suddenly, it was withering. I gave it extra water. It's protected from the intense sun...*why is this happening?* It doesn't look like it's going to recover. One of my favorite plants is a certain variety of Euphorbia. One kind has green and yellow patterned leaves, and the other is very dark purplish green. Four plants planted close together in the exact same soil—one is now no more. It shriveled up day by day—finally, I clipped it to the stem in hopes it will resurrect. *Why did this happen?* In my converted-fountain/succulent garden, a hens and chicks turned to mush (a sign of overwatering) while everything else watered the same is just fine. *Puzzling.*

I spend quite a bit of time giving my plants specialized attention. *What is best for each and every one of these living wonders of creation?* This one needs make-shift shade, this one dead-heading, this one needs to be trained up the trellis, this one more water, etc. If we can just make it through the summer...and then the winter. Some will have to come indoors: the cold tender succulents for sure. The bougainvilleas in hanging pots might be better planted in the ground next Spring. I'm just learning about bougainvilleas, so I have to think about that.

So many things I don't know or understand—plant problems are the minor ones. Walking the garden and talking to the Master Gardener of Eternity, I ask: *Why isn't my prayer answered? What's taking so long? Why hasn't healing happened in so and so's life? When will salvation come for friends and family? When will your people be united in heart and mind?*

The answers are elusive. With my plants, I do all that I know to do and accept that I don't know what I don't know. Trusting in that, I can love and enjoy the garden as it is. With life, trusting in The One, I do the same.

Moving Forward – Unexpected – by Pamela Charro

A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord determines his steps.
Proverbs 16:9

If you are anything like me, you are not pleased when things don't go as planned. Yet, while I do believe there is value in making a plan - see Proverbs 6:6-11 - I am also realizing that if I lose my peace every time a surprise happens, I will never have peace!

This past week was a good example of things not turning out as I would have hoped; and, not just once, but multiple times. As it was a major life event that I was to attend, it was exhausting and disheartening to have to keep figuring out what to do next. I have heard many well-meaning people say that it is silly to exhaust ourselves in this way, as it indicates we aren't trusting God, but I am not going to agree with them. There are situations where we have to keep trying well past the point of feeling like it.

I will admit to you that I got discouraged and went to bed with a broken heart the night before God made a way that I never would have foreseen. I don't even chide myself for it. But it was also a good reminder that God has means that I don't have and knowledge that I won't understand until later. His reputation for making a way when there is no way exists for good reason! He keeps others awake at night when we don't even know about it, so that they can think, or pull strings, or just pray.

When I finally boarded the plane the next day, I sat next to a young man and said to him,

"I truly believe that every impossible and painful situation has treasure in it, if we will just have the eyes to see."

Did my situation occur, in part, just so I would meet him and we would have that discussion? I don't know. And I don't need to know, because I know the one who understands and makes things happen so far beyond my ability to comprehend.

May he receive all of the glory in all of my unexpected situations, and may I continue to grow and know him better as I go through them.

Simple Truths – Ruins – by Marcy Lytle

I had decided to write about this topic before we returned home from vacation, before the news of the submersible being missing, and certainly before the debris was found. Such a sad and horrible story. And until I started listening and reading about the submersible, I didn't realize they were actually going down not to just look at the sunken Titanic but to also observe the change year after year as it continued to ruin and decay. We had also just walked on a trail, in rain and cold, to observe another set of ruins of a town that is now no more.

Why do we as humans love to observe ruins? I bet peeking into the Titanic and seeing what is left, imagining what was, and experiencing the history would have been fantastic...had the crew of the sub survived. Even our little adventure of hiking through the woods and seeing old buildings that were now grown over, pieces of huge metal left in the ground, and large spikes of wood that were once the foundation of a country club was so interesting.

Years ago, we visited the Baker Hotel in Mineral Wells, Texas and were able to peer in the windows and even see old ballroom dance floor rugs still there – after all the years this monstrosity had sat empty! People drove for miles, like we did, to look at the grounds and feel the “what was” as we all walked around. We even saw an old YouTube video of the hotel in its heyday.

And I thought again, why do we all love to observe ruins? We certainly don't want to experience our own ruin of any kind, but we make a vacation stop, pay big bucks, and even step out in bad weather to observe the ruins left behind by others.

I think it's because...

We all love a good mystery, as we imagine the people that lived there when life was evident.

We're amazed at what has remained and been immovable by wind and storm.

We hope to see or discover something we've never seen before.

We are drawn to history like a moth to a flame, as it's unfolding or as it was.

Haven't you ever chased an ambulance to see where it's headed, so you can see what's happening? Or sat riveted to the television when a tragedy occurs and all stations are reporting play by play? What about driving through a town devastated by a tornado, to see the sticks and debris left where people once slept in the security of their homes?

Ruins are part of history, but they're part of our current lives as well, for many of us. Some have just experienced loss in a storm, or a ruined marriage, or have been left behind in shambles after the loss of a parent abandoning the family. And those ruins are wickedly present in our everyday life, and we ache and pine and wish for what was, and hurt deeply because of what's left...if anything.

However, we certainly don't want lookers to drive by, people to pay money, or our story to be broadcast. Rather, we want to rebuild, have our lives restored, and renew the old for something even better...we dare hope.

There will be ruins for us to visit, peer at, wonder about and more...as long as this earth exists. And we'll marvel at what remains.

The bible has a lot to say about what remains after everything that can be shaken is shaken. It's only one thing. Our relationship with the Father, the builder, the restorer and the one who renews.

Pretty cool truth, isn't it, to hold on to when history leaves us with sticks and metal and overgrown things like lichen that attaches itself to us to destroy...like it does concrete...which is often our foundation.

Next time you visit some ruins, watch a story about, or pay bucks or venture out to seek and discover what was...give thanks that your story is just the opposite of ruin – you're redeemed and refreshed – and your story is everlasting because of the Everlasting Father. No ruins in sight.



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME – Go When You Can – by Marcy Lytle

Do you recall as a child your mom urging you and then commanding you, “Go to the bathroom, now!” as you’re about to leave the house, or enter a ride at an amusement park, or head anywhere at all in the car? In fact, I’m sure you do, and if you’re a parent now, you’re doing the same with your littles. It may be one of the most verbally spoken commands that parents make of their kids, once they learn to pee in the potty...right?

No parent wants to get down the road and hear a voice from the back, “I have to pee,” where we’re running late or there’s nowhere to stop. And on a ride at a park just isn’t the time for a potty break, at all. So we all take the kids by the hand, sometimes as they scream and kick, and we make them enter the stall and try...just try.

I was thinking of this when we were out this weekend doing lots of activities that included a hike, some shopping, and long walks. We both are adults now and of course, we’ve learned to go when we have the opportunity, so we won’t have to go when there is no opportunity. Before we started a hike, we found the restroom. Before we got on a river boat ride, we entered the bathroom. And while we were shopping and about to leave, we found the places to relieve ourselves before we began driving. Our parents were successful!

Now, to what else I was thinking, and it’s the same directive He gives us when he’s speaking to us to do this or that. We have these opportunities to obey and have a pleasant day, or disobey and squirm, because we refused “to go.”

- He says give to this person or that cause, only we get busy and forget. We should have obeyed, because maybe later the opportunity is gone.
- He whispers to forgive that person or that spouse, but we shake his hand loose and walk away, because we’re not about to forgive. And waiting to forgive...it causes all kind of pressure that’s not good to carry.
- He says go there and speak kindly to that one, only we don’t even hear him because our nose is in our phone or our earbuds or in, or the music is up...and later just doesn’t work because that person is gone.

There’s a reason our parents insisted that we go when we can. They know that our bodies need to empty themselves now so that we can enjoy life, later. And we don’t have the good sense as kids to realize that, so we either obey and sit and go...or we kick and scream and still go...or we go willingly and learn...so that adult life isn’t all about pain and a full bladder.

I know, this is an odd analogy, but I just kept thinking about that phrase, “Go when you can,” as we both kept saying on that full day of activities that we better go while we can. There’s nothing worse than not going and getting on that boat as it leaves, and feeling that urge to go. Then we can’t. And we miss the scenery, what the guide is saying, and we wish we’d never embarked because we should have gone.

What have you heard to do, felt his hand grab yours to lead, but you’ve been squirming instead of obeying? If kids could only realize that their parents really do have their best interest in mind,

for future rest and peace... But we aren't kids anymore. And we know better than to ignore that call to go there and do that or say this...don't we?

FRESH THYME – Turn Around

You know the feeling...

You're driving somewhere and decided you didn't need to Google the directions; and you realize you're on a wrong road, going in the wrong direction. There's this sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach because now you're going to be late, and you're not even sure where you are. It's then that you have to make a choice. I've done this many times, just turned the wrong direction on a street and not realized it until I was way down the road in unfamiliar territory.

I did this, just this morning, only I wasn't in my car. I woke up and headed down the road of discouragement. I couldn't really pinpoint where I took this turn, but it started even before I went to bed last night. Feelings of loneliness with friendships, sadness over news I'd heard, just an overall feeling of malaise...not really definable but certainly real and present. I had taken a turn down a road of despair.

When I took a wrong turn while I was driving, the choices I had to make were just a few. I could keep driving and hope I could find my way by intuition or finding familiar landmarks. That usually never works for me, once I'm lost. I could call my husband (which I do frequently) and ask him where in the heck I am and get his help to start back to my destination. Or I can pull over, type in my location and where I want to go, and follow those directions I should have sought before I started out.

It's the same with me this morning. I started to work and felt tears rolling down my cheeks and began feeling so sorry for myself. It's then that I really started wandering and next realized that in the big scope of the world, there was no good reason for my tears to fall. After all, I just read about persecution in other countries last night, all because folks chose to follow Christ. I cannot imagine!

I decided to type out these feelings...partly because writing releases my mind and emotions (you should try it if you don't do it already!) And I'm making a conscious effort to turn my thoughts around in a similar manner as I do when I take a wrong turn on a street.

I can keep going through the day feeling blue, which I sometimes do, and it's not a good day. So that's not the choice I want to make. I could end up in a ditch!

I did text my husband and apologized for my rudeness (before he left for work) and told him I was a bit blue, and I know he'll pray for me. *Good choice, Marcy!*

I can realign my directional compass to be more in line with what He says about me, that directional map that never fails...His word. He loves me, he's with me and present every moment, and he's a good Shepherd that leads me to water, to rest, to goodness and to mercy, and even carries me when I don't know where to step.

I don't know why it's so hard to turn around when we're headed the wrong direction. But if we're in unfamiliar territory and don't recognize our surroundings, it's better that we correct our

direction sooner than later. So much damage happens to a car that runs off the road...and to the driver!

Maybe you're also in a funk with your thoughts and feel yourself veering in the wrong direction. Make the choice to turn around, seek help, and follow the Voice.

FRESH THYME – Uprooted – by Marcy Lytle

We visited Glacier Gardens in Juneau, Alaska this summer and I'm still thinking about the trees there. Not your ordinary trees rooted in the ground, but completely uprooted trees with the root system towering up high...with stunning beauty!

The tour guide told the story as we ascended up through the garden to observe the beauty of this place. It was a nursery like other nurseries, until strong winds and rain came and uprooted many trees, causing an ugly muddy mess and apparent ruin. Until the owner grabbed one of the trees and crammed it into the ground, roots up, and saw potential.

These trees are now the focal point of this lush rainforest of a garden, and the root system is up in the air with abundant and beautiful growth flowing out of the roots! It's stunningly amazing.

I've been thinking since we visited about our own lives and how we are sometimes uprooted multiple times over the course of decades, and we feel as though our lives are nothing but a muddy mess, as well. But who knew that such pretty things could grow in the roots of a tree?

I would like to think that I have a deep root system, grounded in faith, experiences of God's provision and love, and the love of my family, the Word that runs way deep in my soul, etc. But even the best of us, when storms rage, end up topsy-turvy, upside down, at the bottom of a hill after an avalanche of disappointment and loss.

How can a tree bloom again when the entire root system comes loose?

The owner of these gardens found that the root system, up in the air, provided a great nesting spot for moss and netting, and flowers could be planted there – cascading colors of all different types and kinds. In fact, it was the frustrating act of slamming the upside down tree into the mud that resulted in the vision of flower pots towering in the air on top of what was once buried.

I don't know about you, but when I've been uprooted and toppled, there are days when I feel like I'm unrecognizable, like my purpose is gone, and there's nothing left to really start over...so to speak. After all, if a tree is uprooted, isn't it left to the side to be carted off to a lumber yard or left to rot?

When a root system is intact, apparently it doesn't matter if it's completely uprooted, because something beautiful was in the eye of the tender of the garden...and he made that beauty come to life. In spite of the devastation. Maybe even because of the devastation!

In fact, these upside down trees, flower towers as they are called, were more beautiful than most "normal" trees because of the multiple colors one could create with plants in the baskets made by the tangled root system.

How can we not have hope, when we observe nature and what gardeners can do to attract the eye?

Maybe your kids are completely gone astray, or your theology has been wiped out and you yourself have toppled. And to add insult upon injury, you feel as though your head is in the mud and your feet are sticking up in the air...and life is over.

It's not. Ever. When that root system has been anchored in Jesus, anything is possible. Just sit still, allow the Gardener to start planting again, and beauty will emerge out of topsy-turvy.

Pretty cool story, right?

FRESH THYME - Wish I'd Done it Sooner – by Marcy Lytle

You know the verse that tells us to cast all our care on him, because he cares for us? Sure, you do. We've all heard it a million times. Seriously, at least maybe a hundred times. But for me, it's been such a hard thing to practice all these decades of living...until lately.

It seems when things are so out of control that you can't really get a hold of anything on your own, it's an easier task to do – cast those cares.

Right before our big vacation with the kids back in June, there were LOTS of details that were weighing me down. The forecast didn't look good. There were ten of us going...would all our flight connections work and get us there together? What about the trip itself? Would the kids all enjoy it? I suppose we all have a lot of thoughts swirling when planning trips.

However, I have a lot of thoughts swirling from the time my eyes pop open each morning until I hit the pillow. Thankfully, I do sleep well!

But over the past couple years there have been SO MANY tasks and worries and heaviness and grief and so much of life on my shoulders that I really felt heavy. *Heavy* is the best word to describe it, because I was carrying the weight of worry and fret. Those are super heavy, you know!

*I've never been good at casting my care on Him,
as long as I had options to do things myself to lighten my load.*

This time, several months ago, it was too much. So I started casting my cares first thing in the morning by just looking up and saying,

"I don't even know what I need. I don't know how to fix these things. I can't do it on my own. I don't know how to walk lightly. But here you go, God. I'm giving to you."

Even little things, like wishing for certain people in my life to be more kind, or desiring encouragement on a particularly discouraging day. I sort of blew these wishes up to the sky as one does a dandelion in the middle of summer...and I watched my cares float away.

In the past couple of months alone, I've seen God answer so many of my prayers and I've actually noticed. All those little things he granted me, and I mean lots of them. I'm thinking he probably has done this all of my life, but I never noticed because of the big things blocking my vision. I began to realize that he really does care for me, he really does listen, and he really does carry my load. And if a wish doesn't get granted, he fills me with other areas of peace and contentment.

*Gosh, I have a long ways to go.
But it's been quite delightful – this practice of casting.*

I was just on a walk this morning, early, because it's HOT later...and I felt heavy again. Even in my body, my feet felt heavy, and my shoulders were tense, because of those thoughts I'd picked up one by one yesterday, and placed in my hands again as if I could manage them all.

So I walked and talked to Him and cast those cares and sang to him, I looked at the trees and the clouds (there were very few today!) and I just told him again how I didn't have the capacity to carry or manage all the things on my plate.

It's working, my friends. It's definitely a practice, like exercise, that I will have to get up and do daily, because I can't keep carrying the weight.

Lighter feels good. I only wish I'd done this sooner...