



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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TIPS

## **The Dressing – Almost Spring – by Marcy Lytle**

We are told here in the south not to plant in the ground until after mid-March, although some wanted to so badly back in February when it was so spring-like and warm. Weather can be tricky in the month of March. And while we may be tired of heavy sweaters, the temps might not scream shorts and spaghetti straps either (none of which I wear, really...) However, it's fun to dress in the in-between seasons, although a challenge, too.

Knit Sweaters – I love short sleeved, lightweight knit sweaters. I love them from Cider Clothing, and I love them from J. Crew Factory. They're perfect for coolish days, and thin enough to still wear a coat or sweater over top, should cool breezes still be blowing.

Long sleeved blouses – Did you know that The Loft often runs huge sales on their tops, where so many are marked down to \$19? I recently purchased several and was not disappointed at the versatility and prettiness of them all! They're great for days when your arms still need to be covered, because the temps just haven't risen quite enough for short sleeves. From stripes, to interesting collars, to ones with ties, and more. Look for something unique that fits your style and suits your fancy.

A Spring Coat – Do you have one? I bought this one in a fall hue a couple years ago and have loved it so much. I was delighted to see that it was available in a bright green – so perfect for spring! It's the cutest coat and the price is amazing. I'm tempted to buy this green option... I also have a darker green lightweight jacket with a hood that's so sporty and great for damp, spring days that are sure to be ahead. Keep it in the car for outdoor game watching, too! Or pack both for that spring getaway for the weekend!

A long skirt or wide pants Oh, I found both! I was walking through the clearance aisle at Target and spotted this pale yellow skirt that I grabbed. It's great with a warm sweater, or will be perfect with a graphic tee soon. Boots for your feet, or slide on mules, depending on the weather. But the yellow hue won me over! I think so many colors will pair perfectly with it! As far as a split skirt, I think these were called pants on Amazon! I may order another pair because I love this checkered option so much! It's fun to play with patterned tops, too. And they can be dressed up...or down. I can imagine I would like several pairs for summer, and can you just see them with heeled sandals...or the cutest sneakers? OH, the possibilities!

I stand in my closet so frustrated this time of year, because the weight of winter isn't appealing any more, and I'm ready for spring...finally. But honestly, March is fickle. So be ready for whatever the wind blows in your direction...rain or shine...sunshine and warmth or coolness and chills. And enjoy the process of transitioning your wardrobe to usher in a new season.

## Seven for You – In the Fridge – by The Panel

I love reading articles about what others have in their purses, or on their shelves, or tucked away in their cars, etc. And...it's interesting to see what people have in their refrigerator that they just "must have" at all times, besides the norms of milk and eggs. So, we asked our panel and they delivered. I think I must try some of them!

Okay! I confess when I read this month's topic I thought . . . . *that's a weird question to ask*. Until I opened my fridge and realized that there are certain items that are truly must-haves.

First, and foremost, I am a milk-aholic. There, I said it, aloud. I love milk. So I make sure I never run out of milk. From the photo, you can see I have Whole Milk, and that's for making my espresso drink in the morning; a cappuccino, latte or mocha. The fat-free milk is my "full glass of milk with brownies" milk – or any sweets. I started using Fairlife Milk a few years ago; it has more protein and is lactose free. Note; I never drink milk with my dinner – maybe it's the Jewish in me!

Second; I like to keep a carton of heavy whipping cream. I have a Whipped Cream Dispenser (like you see at Starbucks) and it's so fun to serve guests whipped cream on their drinks and desserts. *But*, did you know you can quickly make a small batch of whipped cream by simply adding 2-4 oz of cream in tall glass/measuring cup and mix it with a milk frother? (add a little Italian Syrup for sweetness).

Third; Cranberry Juice & Ginger Ale. Since Christmas, I make a Cranberry Spritzer with my dinner. My guilty pleasure. Period. It's refreshing, I just make one glass. No apologies for drinking soda.

Fourth: I love Nosa yogurt. Have you tried it? It is so smooth. Lemon & Key Lime are my favorite. I often add blueberries & raspberries. Yum,

Fifth: I keep Pillsbury Pie Crusts in stock. Perfect to make a quick pudding pie, quiche, etc. Sorry, I no longer make homemade pie crusts, I was never that skilled at rolling out the dough.

Sixth: We are supposed to just share five, but I must add Chick-fil-A Sauce. I have never been a condiment person; I hate ketchup, mustard, pickles. But I found this sauce and I love it! It goes on everything, hard-boiled eggs, tacos, hamburgers, etc. - Gloria

When I open the refrigerator door I smile if these things are present, and moan if they're not.

Lindt 70% dark chocolate in the fridge, so it's hard and crunches when I bite it - well that makes me smile. One little square (or 2 or 3) is a delight for me!

Orange juice fortified with vitamin C and calcium because my doctor told me to drink it. I don't like the taste so much, but it's there and screams at me to drink for health.

Blackberries are my fruit of choice, as I love them on top of my granola, with a little milk, each morning. They float my boat...or my bowl.

Nut boxes. I have four clear plastic boxes I keep full of different nuts. I love making trail mix, taking nuts to the theater, grabbing some for toppings, knowing I need them.

A jar of minced garlic. I've used gadgets to mince garlic cloves, smashed them with a knife, etc...and I'd rather just spoon some from a jar...already minced for me. – Marcy

Dill pickles. I love dill pickles. Claussen pickles are my favorite. I even have a sweatshirt with different kinds of pickles on the front!

Butter. I am a butter girl. I am known to carry real butter with me so that I am ready for restaurants that have good bread but no real butter (I'm looking at you, Panera!).

Minced garlic. I also love garlic and use a lot of it. I buy a tub of peeled garlic cloves each week at HEB and chop them in a mini food processor. I put them back into the HEB container, cover them in olive oil, and keep them in the fridge for use throughout the week.

Ready, Fresh, Go Snack packs. I have a hard time with breakfast. I don't want to cook, but I need protein. These help me! They have meat and cheese, usually some sort of nut, and either a dried fruit or a pretzel. These keep me from skipping breakfast and ending up with low blood sugar and a bad attitude!

Sprite or Ginger Ale. By the evening time, I am tired of water. I want something to drink that has carbonation but no caffeine. Either of these are perfect to have with my dinner. - Laura

1. Olives-they were my Dad's favorite. I'm the only one who enjoyed them with him.
2. Kerrygold unsalted butter-my memories of England include good, unsalted butter. My Mom said, "Did you know if you sprinkle pepper on a buttered piece of toast, it almost tastes like egg." It was from her childhood when food was rationed.
3. Truffle butter-oh my! I get mine at HEB in the dairy section. Truffle butter grilled cheese, truffle butter on pasta, and truffle butter on potatoes. There are so many possibilities. It is not something everyone likes, but I think it's amazing.
4. Planet Oat Caramel Coffee Creamer- I can't have milk. My tummy gets angry. I love this "creamer" and have three bottles of it on hand most of the time.
5. Water-a simple thing, but with all my recent health issues, drinking water is a must. Drinking enough water is the key, so I keep 8 bottles in the fridge at all times. - Cathy

The five main things I keep in my refrigerator are as follows

1. Lettuce, because it's good for us and it's so versatile in use. I make salads and use it in sandwiches. I like different kinds, but I always have Iceberg lettuce since that's the kind my husband likes.
2. Potatoes, mainly for the same reason. They're good for us and so versatile.
3. Yogurt, again so good for us. We eat yogurt daily and always keep several flavors on hand. My husband prefers Activia but I like all brands.
4. Kefir, which is like yogurt but more of a liquid. I use this to make smoothies, and it gives me something different from yogurt. My husband doesn't like it so it's all mine.
5. And lastly, Flax Oil. I started this about fifteen years ago when I did *The 17 Day Diet by Dr. Mike Moreno*. It's one of the staples he adds to the healthy lifestyle that his book and diet use regularly. Once a week I use it in a smoothie and it's really good for your health. I lost about 35

pounds in two months when I did this diet, so I definitely support it, even now. That's what it's all about, having a healthy lifestyle. – Carole

Fridge must-haves would include

- 1) cold brew coffee - for the 2 pm slump without the high coffee house price,
- 2) coconut aminos - I use this in a wide variety of foods to get a full umami taste,
- 3) always celery, carrots, onions, bell peppers. I can change my protein, I can change my spices, but I typically use some combination of these veggies to get my recipe started. - Shelley

Oh, my! Minced garlic is a must have for me, too! However, most of my must-haves are in my freezer.

I must have my frozen chocolate covered raspberries by Tru-Fru. Best little snack that only has 90 calories for every five pieces.

I must have frozen cubes of cilantro, basil, and parsley. I add those to many of the dishes that I cook.

Frozen sliced garlic bread that I can throw into the toaster for a quick serving of bread.

And, in my fridge, my favorite soft drink, caffeine-free Coke Zero! - Anita

Hellmans mayonnaise. I prefer Hellman's mayo over other brands. I use it for sandwiches, deviled eggs, potato salad or any recipe calling for mayo. I LOVE it and take care to never run out

I try to always have red grapes on hand. They are a healthy, delicious alternative to sugary desserts. I love to freeze them and munch on them while watching TV and relaxing.

Homemade Ranch dressing is a must-have. I love Ranch dressing but I prefer it homemade. It just tastes better than bottled dressing.

I enjoy green olives in recipes and straight out of the jar as a snack. When I was a little girl my mom had to put the olive jar high up in the refrigerator to keep me out of them.

Havarti cheese slices. Havarti has such a lovely flavor. I enjoy microwaving a slice for a few seconds then eating it with a fork. - Gina

## **Cousin Moms – A Full Day – by Kamrin and Charissa**

Every mom has full days, exhaustion is a real thing, and the endless lists of tasks never ceases. Is there a perfect solution? Not really. But encouraging each other in how we survive when life is full, the kids are busy, and dinner still has to be on the table...while you keep everyone sane and together...including yourself! And moms are working moms, whether they work outside the home or at home. How in the world do we manage these always completely full days?

Kamrin

I am not wired like so many other moms, and I need a lot of help from my husband. When it comes to home stuff, keeping everything put together, I feel like he does most of it! Let me explain...

My heart has always been to stay home with my kids, and I'm glad I've been able to do that for 14 years. I've worked from the house and subbed at the school, but I have a lot of flexibility. So maybe I don't have the exhaustion from being a fulltime working mom. But choosing our lifestyle does affect us other ways, like in having one main income. Financially, one income has become harder and harder with our kids at the ages they are. So we are shifting back to me working outside the home.

My husband works from home. He's a better stay-at-home mom than I am, because he's able to balance things. I focus and have to finish from beginning to end. He's better at laundry while he's working, putting away dishes, etc. He's a morning person and I am not, so he makes the lunches and gets the kids to school. Household chores are not my favorite, but I love meal planning and grocery lists. I'm then able to other things for my family with who I am. I am better with the calendars, schedules, when homework is due, etc. So because he remembers laundry and cleaning and dishes, this gives me the freedom to manage everything else.

This is our lifestyle and I'm so grateful, and because of his help, I'm not always exhausted. I admire moms who work 40 hours and do mom life, but I just can't. Or moms who parent alone, it must be so hard.

My tips are...

- Find your people –It can be your spouse, a friend, a neighbor... Having those you can call to pick up your kid, or ask to carpool to practice. Don't be afraid to ask for help. In sports, get to know the parents, as you will all need each other.
- Intentionally plan – Even though we are both at home working, groceries and cooking meals and on the go meals, etc. is important. We are gone almost every night of the week now that I'm subbing, I have to be intentional to plan on the day that I can. For me, it's Thursday. I plan, I make grocery list, then see who can do what. My kids know this. They give me their lists of their needs, what they want for breakfast or lunch. This helps us face the weekend. I make notes of crockpot day, sandwich day, cook and go, etc. This helps me shut off the tabs in my brain!
- No is a full sentence – It has taken me a long time to learn that I don't have to say yes to everything. I don't have to be at every event or volunteer. I do say yes when I can. But saying no is just as vital. It's not healthy to always say yes, and I say that from personal experience. I had been afraid of letting people down. But not having time for rest, and

quiet time or to just be with my kids wasn't healthy. *Boundaries* is one of the best books I've read!

Although my tips aren't practical like use a crockpot, use Pinterest, etc. every family is different. Sometimes, moms feel like a failure if they can't do it all. Maybe God had parents in mind when he created a day of rest! It's exhausting to keep up with the fast-paced world. We cannot do all the things, but we can keep ourselves mentally set.

Finally, days when I don't have time with the Lord I will feel exhausted. That time is essential to my rest. We were not created to run on fumes and live in survival mode. And of course, I can't forget lots and lots of coffee! Add coffee to all of the above! And one of my favorite things to do? Sit on my daughter's bed and just listen to her...

Charissa

It is a very chaotic life when raising three little ones, owning a business, working full time, and a having house to care for. However, there are a few things I do to manage:

1. Taking care of myself. I have been prioritizing for the past six months to a year my physical health. I set aside time to work-out several times a week. It helps me physically and spiritually. Working out gives me more energy and allows me to be present with my kids. It also shows my kids the importance of taking of your body. Sometimes, our needs get put to the side and we burn out. We can't take care of others if we don't take care of ourselves. I also try to eat the best I can and fuel my body with things that give me energy.
2. Looking ahead at the schedule. My husband I share a Google calendar so we see everything that's going on, kids' commitments, our commitments, what we have to do...looking ahead. We plan so I can set my expectations correctly. Sometimes, it's like...you know what? Tuesday is going to be a very busy night. We won't have much time together, so we will eat out. Or we look for time to spend quality time together, thinking about...what are going to be the busy nights...and just setting ourselves up for what's to come. Of course, there are always surprises. Intentionally looking at the schedule and finding quality time with the family and taking advantage of that, is a big help.
3. Chores and housework – letting go of control. I've been trying to let some of the housework transfer to my kids, and let go of my expectations there. The kids are not going to do the chores the way I would do them. However, letting them do the chores instills in them responsibility and teaches them how to care for their own homes one day. This also releases the pressure of me having to do everything. My 9 and 7 year olds are learning how to do their own laundry. They have a laundry basket and are learning how to care for their own clothes. They help with the dishwasher and with taking out the trash. We focus more as a team and offer a family effort. We all live in this home and take care of it. Of course, there are days when I go in and I pick up everything and re-do what the girls did, and come behind them some. But letting go of that control, and allowing my family to step in and help, is a huge stress reliever. This helps keep our house tidy. For my husband's and my personalities, having a clean home helps us to be more relaxed in everything else we do.

Obviously, there is lots of prayer and grace as well. Especially during the busy season with sports and activities, taking time with God is important. And it's okay to give ourselves grace for those long and hard days. It's okay to be thankful for what we do have!

## **In the Kitchen – This and That – by Marcy Lytle**

I tried some new recipes lately, and some oldies but goodies. All worth sharing with you, this month! I hope you print them out and try one or two or all.

### **Cacio de pepe**

Just a few ingredients, and yet this turned out so well and yummy.

- 8 oz dried linguine
- 2 T olive oil
- ½ - 1 t coarsely ground pepper
- 1 c very finely shredded parmesan cheese, divided
- 1 ½ c chopped cooked chicken

Cook pasta according to directions; drain, reserving 2 c of the cooking water.

In a 12 in skillet, heat oil and add pepper, stirring till fragrant, about 20 seconds. Remove skillet from heat, carefully add ¾ c of reserved water. Return skillet to heat and bring to a boil.

Add pasta to skillet, tossing with tongs to coat, gradually add ¾ c of the cheese, tossing to coat and add enough reserved water to reach a creamy consistency. Stir in chicken and heat through. Top with remaining ¼ c cheese and if you like, additional pepper.

### **Carrot salad**

I can't find my recipe, but this was surprisingly so delicious, I still want to share it. Just use your best judgment – I think it's 2-3 celery sticks and carrots.

- Celery
- Carrots
- Mayonnaise
- Lemon juice
- Dill

Thinly slice celery and shred the carrots. Salt and pepper to taste, mayo to taste, lemon juice. Dill. That's it. And it's so good.

### **Chili**

This is a recipe from my own archives, and I go back to it over and over again. It's super easy and tastes great.

- 1 lb ground meat
- 1 red or green pepper, diced
- 1 small onion, diced
- 15 oz Pinto beans undrained
- 1 can 28oz whole tomatoes undrained, cut up
- 1.25 oz pkg chili seasoning
- 3 T Worcestershire

Brown the meat with onions and peppers, drain. Stir in remainder of ingredients and bring to a boil. Simmer uncovered, 10 min. stirring.

### **Cornbread**

This is a cast iron skillet recipe and I absolutely loved the cornbread. And...it was so good leftover, especially used a croutons..

- 2 c finely ground cornmeal
- 1 c flour
- ¼ c sugar
- 2 t baking powder
- 1 t baking soda
- 1 t salt
- 5 T unsalted butter, divided
- 1 ½ c milk
- 2 eggs

Preheat oven to 400. In a large bowl combine cornbread, flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Put ½ c milk in measuring cup. Add 2 T butter cut into pieces. Put in the microwave on high for 1 minute so that butter melts into milk. Pour this over dry ingredients and stir. Gradually add the additional cup of milk and stir, then add the eggs and continue stirring until thoroughly combined.

Heat the skillet over med heat and melt 3 remaining T of butter. Add batter and shake to distribute. Transfer skillet to oven and cook for 25-30 minutes, until light golden brown and a toothpick inserted comes out clean.

Using pot holders or mitts, remove skillet from oven and let bread cool 10-15 minutes before slicing and serving.

For croutons with leftover cornbread – slice the cornbread into cubes, melt butter in the pan, and grill til golden. These are great over chili or atop salads!

### **Muffaletta Wellington**

These were good, but they were even better the next day, and a great sandwich to add to a lunchbox.

18 slices thinly sliced hard salami

12 slices thinly sliced black forest deli ham

1 tube (13.8oz) refrigerated pizza crust

6 slices mozzarella

6 slices provolone

3 T melted butter, divided

6 T olive bruschetta

1 T Cornmeal

1 T sesame seeds

Preheat oven to 425°. Grease a 12-in. cast-iron or other ovenproof skillet with 1 tablespoon butter. Sprinkle with cornmeal.

Unroll pizza dough; cut into 6 portions. On a floured surface, roll each portion into a 6-in. square. Place 1 tablespoon olive bruschetta in center of each square; top with salami, ham, mozzarella cheese and provolone cheese. Bring 4 corners of dough together above filling; pinch edges to seal.

Place in prepared skillet, seam side down. Brush with remaining 2 tablespoons butter; sprinkle with sesame seeds. Bake until golden brown, 20-25 minutes. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.

### **Spinach potato**

- 3 baking potatoes
- Fresh spinach cooked
- Grated onion
- Salt and pepper
- Celery salt
- Finely chopped cooked bacon

Cook the spinach with grated onion, salt and pepper, and celery salt. Wash the potatoes and bake them til done. Cut in half lengthwise and scoop out the pulp. Mash and beat til fluffy, adding 2 T butter and ½ c milk, season with S&P.

Fill potato shells with spinach, making a border with the potatoes. Cover the spinach with finely chopped bacon.

### **Pico de gallo**

You can buy this at the store, but it has to be used quickly or it goes bad. So, just make it the day you need it!

- 1lb medium roma tomatoes, finely diced
- ½ medium white onion, finely diced (3/4 cup)
- Peppers – 1-2 serranos or jalapenos, seeded and minced
- ½ c fresh cilantro chopped
- Juice of 1-2 limes (2-4 T)
- ½ to 1 tsp kosher salt
- 1 clove minced garlic (optional)

Add tomatoes, onion, peppers and cilantro to a medium bowl. Pour the lime juice over top and season with salt. Let mixture sit in fridge 15-30 minutes to allow the flavors to meld. Add salt or lime juice if needed.

You can serve this on top whatever you like, but we had it on top of tostones, and it was a hit!

### **Strawberry milkshake**

My goodness, I could eat this alone for dinner. It's the easiest milkshake ever, and the best! Keep this on hand for dessert (or dinner) all year.

- 1 package frozen chocolate covered strawberries
- Vanilla ice cream
- Blender

Place 5-6 of the frozen strawberries in the blender with as much ice cream as you like, and blend!

### **Tartar sauce –**

I like homemade tartar sauce, better than store bought, and it's so easy to make.

- mayonnaise
- Lemon juice
- Olives
- Capers
- Pickles
- Chives

I don't know the amounts. Just mix and stir and taste until it's perfect.

### **The Best Salad Hack –**

We were having guests for lunch, unexpectedly, and wanted to serve lunch...not go out. I wasn't sure what to put together so this is what I did, and it was so delicious and perfect. I will definitely do it again and again.

3 Chick Fil A cobb salads (for four people)

Pour all in a large bowl and add in:

Avocado

Red onion

Cheddar cheese

Any fresh herbs you have

Top with the cornbread croutons

Use the salad dressing from Chick Fil A

It worked and was the best lunch in a pinch!

## Bookstore – February Read – The Set – by Jennifer Stephens

We teach them how to read. We teach them to write, add, and subtract. We show them how to manage friendships – to be kind, share toys, and take turns. But sometimes, when it comes to using things like glue and scissors, we just plo p these supplies on the table and let kids go crazy! And any parent, grandparent, or teacher that’s suffered through the ensuing clean-up knows exactly what happens with glue and scissors in the hands of an untrained six-year-old. Dripping drops, globby sticky messes, lost lids, too much, can’t open the bottle, and little frustrated fingers unsuccessfully attempting to cut something! Or worse, figuring out how to cut...but it’s their HAIR that receives a chop!

So, after decades of teaching littles, I decided if we’re giving direct instruction on every other important skill, why not teach them HOW and WHY to use school supplies safely. One thing led to another, and my lessons evolved into two published children’s books, *Bottle and Stick & Scissors*. Reading together is the perfect way to kickstart a conversation about using glue and scissors safely.

Teachers, Parents, and Grandparents love reading them with the children in their life because *Bottle and Stick* focuses on the importance of friends sticking together, being brave, as well as learning the glue rules. And *Scissors* shows us to embrace our uniqueness, believe in ourselves, and to use scissors safely. Kids easily fall in love with the colorful illustrations, relatable characters, and the confidence gained from using supplies successfully!

Follow the link on the THYME bookstore page to order signed copies today! Happy reading!

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

What did you learn last month? I learned so much just from living, shopping, waking up, observing, and spending time with others. I love noting what I’ve learned and sharing it with you!

**Weekender** – He was due a new one, and I found this perfect weekender that works for just a couple days away. It’s really nice and includes a place for shoes, lots of pockets, and plenty of room inside. Did I say how good it looks?

**Mesh bags** – Target has this mesh bag set (each one with a handle) and they’re great for travel. I love putting inside our paper itinerary, tickets, etc. and collecting ticket stubs and receipts. The bag fits right inside my backpack!

**Blind cleaners** – I know I had these long ago, but they disappeared along with all the socks that went missing. So...I bought these brushes again, this time from Amazon. They work! And you know those blinds are dusty...

**Hannah Coulter**- A good friend recommended this book and so I bought it. Wow, the writing is fantastic, and the story is one of long ago...but totally relatable to life now...and a pleasant poignant read for those rainy spring afternoons.

**Bowls** – I wanted disposable bowls for a baked potato bar we had with the kids, and found these great oblong ones on Amazon – perfect for family meals together!

**David** – Has your family seen this movie that was out in the theaters recently? I don’t even like kids’ movies very much but this one had me smiling...and crying...in good ways! (After I got over the resemblance between the David character and Amy Grant...)

**Choral** – Have you seen this film? We watched it on television and found it to be a gem of a story. Look for it, and enjoy.

**Sunglasses “chain”** – It’s not a chain, it’s more like a piece of leather – and I got it for him. He’s always laying down his glasses, and this keeps them on his neck. And it’s rather chic, don’t ya think?

**Candle bowl** – Sometimes candles come in bowls, sort of deep bowls. I wear a lot of different glasses and they all fit beautifully in this bowl, standing up, so I can see just which pair to wear!

**Journal** – I have lots, but he had none. My sister sent him this really pretty leather journal, perfect for his lists and keeping in his truck. He likes it!

**Lamp** – I love lamps, and I was excited to see this unique one on the shelf at Marshalls, a perfect place to purchase a spring lamp. It’s just beautiful!

**Paint book** – I took this book with me on a weekend trip and painted early in the morning, while he slept. The author gives you instructions, you mix and dab and streak...and you can create several paintings just like the ones in the book! Extremely satisfying...

**Towel rack** – I spent a few years frustrated with the old towel rack that hung on the cabinet door, as it was loose and often fell off. I found this one on Amazon that has little screws to keep it in place, and it’s much nicer!

**Scissors for the fridge** – Oh my goodness, these are cute, and they're from Daiso. Tiny scissors to use for cutting open bags, cutting off tags...you name it.

**His shoes** – He likes Skechers and they had a sale, so we browsed, and browsed. He found this brown pair with a cool patterned edge on the bottom. He says they're comfy and they look so snazzy!

**For your garden** – Pop Shelf has cute additions for your garden, and I love this snail that sits so pretty against a big pot by my front porch!

**Extra light** – We were in Harbor Freight exchanging an items, and spotted the movable light switches, so I bought two. I have one now stuck in my entry closet, and one inside my tiny pantry. So cute, and perfect.



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Slow Down – by Marcy Lytle**

We've been listening to a beautiful song by Porter's Gate called "Slow Me Down," a song directed to the Good Shepherd to lead us to rest and peace. Isn't that what all parents want? Just a bit of rest and peace, in this chaotic world, our lives of going here and there, all the laundry and the meal planning, fitting in quiet time and all the things.

My DIL took this photo of her two kids and it just speaks calmness and peace and a slow pace...doesn't it? But we all know that prior to the photo, and after, there were probably moments of pushing and crying and frustration and a mom that wrung her hands and shook her head!

It really seems just quite impossible to slow down in this face-paced world in which we live. However, there are a few suggestions and ideas of how to slow down, should you need the nudge to life with a little more peace:

- Say no to every party and outing. Sometimes, the best thing on a weekend is to go to the park with your own family and chill.
- Limit extra-curricular activities if the time required takes up every night of the week. Your kids won't suffer if they don't sign up for everything that interests them.
- Prioritize meal time, not meal perfection. Yes, healthy is good, homemade is awesome, but sometimes the time together is the healthiest thing you can offer your kids, even if all you could scramble up was eggs and toast...or peanut butter and jelly...or fast food.
- Make bedtime routines just that – routines. You need the quiet time, the songs you sing, and the books you stop and read...just as much as they do.
- Have a designated place for your phones when the kids are home, and it's family time. Actually watch the movie with them, play the game and focus, or just listen as they ramble. Breathe, and take in the beauty of your children.
- Realize that life is full of seasons, and you're in the one where the storms and rains fall inside your house – at least it looks like that while the kids are little. It's okay to have cleaning schedules, but it's also okay if that schedule blows out the front door on any given day.
- Incorporate the kiddos in your self-care routines. When you go out walking, go as a family. When you cleanse and moisturize, give them a little bag to do their hands and feet, as well. Pray with the kids, not just for them all the time. Let them hear your gratitude and your praise.
- Sip your coffee, while they sip hot chocolate, or lemonade...and sit on the porch...and feel the breezes blow.
- Pray with friends. Gather with a group. If that's not possible, have a couple of friends in a group text where you can ask for prayer. Don't carry the load of life alone. You're not meant to.
- Affirm each other. Take the time at least one night a week to spend time blessing and affirming, calming and reassuring, holding and hugging, forgiving and asking forgiveness. Instead of a show or an activity.

There are so many lists out there, ways to schedule your time, books on how to parent and raise the best children, and even this list above...all of which can stress a parent out on which list to choose and how to stay with it! You won't! Some days will be crazy, and that's just it. Use the next available day to corral the craziness and start fresh. After all, His mercy is new every morning...so take hold of that truth and of your kids...and hold Him, and them, close.

## **I Don't Do Teens – Ask Them – by Marcy Lytle**

In our panel of women last month (on the TIPS page), we included a 12 year old and asked her thoughts on being 12 – what she liked and disliked. Her answer was enlightening and such a fun read! It made me think how we don't know so many things about our teens that they just might be willing to talk about, if we just ask them! Of course, it has to be when they're in the mood to talk, but when they are...let's seize the opportunity! And of course, parents ask common questions like, "How was your day?" but what if we asked more specific questions? And what if we wrote down their answers in a journal, to use for prayer and encouragement for them later!

Hint: Be sure you just ask and listen, not criticize and respond. And be sure to affirm.

Here are some thought-provoking questions you might get some interesting answers to, if you just ask:

1. What do you like/dislike about being your age?
2. If you could change places with one of your friends, which one, and why?
3. What's one thing you'd change about your body if you could?
4. Are you jealous of anyone right now? Why?
5. When do you feel the closest to God?
6. When do you feel the most grown up?
7. What are you looking forward to most, this summer?
8. What does your dream vacation look like?
9. Is there a song that you listen to the most? What do you love about it?
10. What advice would you offer a kid before they become a teen?
11. If you could donate \$1000 to someone or someplace, who or where would it be?
12. What's your biggest fear right now?
13. What's the most challenging part of your life right now?
14. When you lay in bed at night, what do you think about the most?
15. Describe what a perfect day would be like.
16. What's the worst thing that has ever happened to you? Did you learn anything from it?
17. What's your favorite Bible story and why?
18. What do you love about our family and why?
19. What accomplishments are you most proud of?
20. What is one thing you own that brings you joy, and why?

Print out the above list and keep it for reference, because their answers are sure to change as your teens change and grow. In fact, you could ask your own self these questions, too! Bring the questions and the answers to Jesus. He listens. He cares. And he shares himself with us all.

## **Homesteading – Always Grateful – by Leyanne Enterline**

I started getting a bit down about my husband Brian not finding full time work. The bills started piling up and life was just hectic, with constantly worrying about when the next job would come. I wanted the kiddos to be able to play all the sports they wanted and to do all the things they enjoyed, but when you don't have much work - it turns out you just can't pay and do all the things!

I started reflecting back on the year; however, and realized that God has provided all the things plus some! And a house! He knows and loves us and wants the best for us. He knows what we need and what we want. He knows that we love to travel and Brian's past job allowed us to do that times ten! God does give us the desires of our hearts. But He also knows what and when to allow those desires to be fulfilled.

One day I was praying that we could travel a bit more (soon, if possible) but I knew right now just didn't make sense. We have the house and bills to pay for. A consistent amount of gigs for Brian were coming in, but just we are barely keeping our heads up.

Then one day, completely out of the blue, a friend texted Brian and said,

“Give me a call. I have a travel offer that you can't refuse.”

What the heck does that mean? We had no idea and actually didn't get to hear back from him until the next day. We then found out that this friend wanted to take our family to Costa Rica for their son's birthday. And pay for it all! I'm still in shock, as this has definitely been on my list of places I wanted to visit. But how?

I know God will provide for all our needs and wants to give us the desires of heart at the right moment. This surprise was completely unexpected and out of the blue, and I am beyond grateful for this blessing, as I know we deserve nothing!

“And my God shall supply all your need according to  
His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”  
Philippians 4:19 NKJV

## **In Each Room – A Spring Refresh – by Marcy Lytle**

It can be costly and daunting to think about redoing your kitchen, especially if it's a big remodel that's needed. However, maybe you just stand in your kitchen and think it just needs a little "something" to brighten, lighten, modify and make pretty for the new season. That's how I felt recently and I'm so pleased with the minor but pretty changes...

*Here are the prelude suggestions...*

Clean the clutter, first. If you have stuff all over your counters, clean it up. Tidy your space, and that's the first thing that helps you have a vision of what's to come.

Look and decide, second. Look at your space, your counters, your walls, etc. and what items are you tired of, what looks outdated? Think of what it is you want to replace with new. Maybe new dish towels, or you might want to add a piece of art somewhere. What about a couple of cute items to sit on the counter? Make a list...

Take a photo. This is crucial. Snap a picture of your current kitchen space, to take with you while shopping! It helps so much to have this when you're looking at what might go where, and how it might look.

*The action to take...*

Well, of course, the action is shopping! I actually love the aisles of Michaels for a home refresh, especially this spring. They have aisles of coordinated home décor and when I went, it was all 40% off! It made it easy to shop, because all of the items were together that matched and went well. I spotted the oranges and knew that was it! And I only needed a few items.

I spotted an art piece for behind the stove. I always keep a fresh art piece there and then coordinate from that base piece.

There was an orange oil dispenser, and a metal orange – got both! I knew exactly where I'd place both.

The last thing was a new rug. I realized that walking into my kitchen, the floor, the stove, and the counter were the first things I see. So that's where the change took place.

I also had painted a piece that I knew just where to hang! It's from Craftoria, and such a fun activity!

*The production...*

I was excited to get home and place all of these items. And above the stove, I keep a generic wreath that I can change with each season. I keep twinkle lights on it, and add stems for fall and winter. But for spring, I decided to go with just the greenery and the lights.

I do want to shop for some new dish towels, and a few spring candles. But I'm so pleased with the freshness these few items provide me. And they make me happy!

If you struggle with decorating, ask a friend that's great at it, for her help. If you have a color in mind, go for it! Look for small changes that make a big impact. And finally, enjoy the process. It doesn't have to be an entire re-do, unless it's time for that. It can be just a few touches here and there, and you'll find yourself smiling every morning when you enter your new space.



## **A Night to Remember – Worldview – by Marcy Lytle**

Over Christmas break, we had a fun World Christmas with the cousins on the deck and we used inflatable globes to find the countries for which we were praying. I realized as we were using them how helpful it is to visualize where countries are, in relation to where we live in the world. It helps the kids to have a better world view. So I'm including the link to purchase the globes, should you want to include them in the study...OR if you have a globe of your own...use it!

Preparation: Have inflatable globes or a standing globe available for the worldview study, along with sharpies. Or you could even use a giant paper map. And perhaps some popcorn for a snack.

Start with finding where you live in the globe. Mark it with a small X.

In the beginning, God made the whole earth and breathed life into mankind. Genesis 1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Later in the same chapter it says, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

So there are people all over this planet, not just the ones that live in our neighborhood. It's a big world out there. About 8.2 billion people live on the earth, and each person matters to God!

Let's find the continents: Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Antarctica, Europe and Australia. Can anyone say a word in another language or try speaking like someone from another country? Who knows what a "mate" is in Australia? Did you know that we are called a friend of God? God has friends all over this world, those that love Him. (*Ask the kids to point and mark each continent with a check!*)

There are needs all over this world, too, not just where we live. And these needs cause unrest and turmoil. (*Toss the globes or shake them, to indicate how things get shaken up.*) God has given us this precious and powerful tool called prayer, where we can come to him with the needs of those around us. Every country has different issues from poverty, to crime, to political unrest, to social injustices and more. Who knows what poverty is? Social injustice? Our prayers can make a difference. (*Let kids answer.*)

Do we know anyone from a different country other than where we live? Point to the country and tell us the name of the person you know who's from there. We could add that person and their family on our prayer list, and be a friend to them. When people move from one country to another, they don't know the language or even the food is unfamiliar, so they need a friend! (*Ask the kids to point, as you help them remember.*)

Look at all the water on the planet! God made that too, separating all the lands. And guess what? The same moon and sun hang above us all, completely visible by every person on every spot of land on the earth. Isn't that amazing? We serve a big God who sees and cares for us all. (*Look outside and see what's shining!*)

Let's hold the globe tight to our chests and bow our heads as we think of one particular country or continent that interests us the most. Pause a moment to think. Say a prayer. Then let's lift our heads and share one thing we prayed for. (*Take a few minutes for this...*)

Roll the globes to each other and play with them a minute. God is a happy and cheerful God, and he enjoys his creation and wants all to know Him, and not anyone to miss out on His love. John 3:16 says what, who can quote it? (*Quote the answer.*) God loves all the world. And it's up to us

to share the light across the nations so that all are saved, just by loving those around us well...as we consider the world view.

## Rooted in Love - A Decade of Lessons – by Kaelin Scott

My oldest child turned 10 years old this week, and I can hardly believe it. A decade of motherhood flew by in the blink of an eye. My babies aren't babies anymore. They're growing up right before my eyes. Not only that, but I've done a lot of growing too.

For this month's story, I thought I would share 10 things I've learned in my 10 years as a mom.

1. **The little things are actually the big things.** It's not only big milestones or achievements that matter. Everyday little moments are often our most precious memories. Snuggles on the couch in the morning, walks outside holding hands, reading a story together – these things are the true treasures in life.
2. **Memories last, clean houses don't.** While cleanliness is important, it's not a measure of success or happiness in your home. It's better to have a messy house full of laughter and love than to have a perfectly spotless kitchen.
3. **You're never too old or too big to say sorry.** Nobody is above apologizing, whether you're the child or the parent. Being able to admit when you're wrong is vital to the health of your family.
4. **The only way to have peace is to trust God.** You'll never be able to have all the answers, so don't stress out over every little thing. Trust God to take care of your family. His timing is perfect and His ways are good. He's in control, so rest assured in His presence.
5. **Sometimes all you need is a hug.** Life can be crazy and overwhelming and scary, but a hug can make a huge difference. It's a simple but powerful gesture. It says, "I'm with you. You're not alone."
6. **Walking the walk is just as important as talking the talk.** There is no room for hypocrisy in parenting. If I want my children to behave in a certain way, then telling them is not enough. I have to practice what I preach and lead by example.
7. **There's no such thing as a perfect parent, so give yourself grace.** No matter how hard you try to get everything right, you're bound to make mistakes. It's part of life, but it doesn't define you. Don't beat yourself up over it. Learn from it and move on. Remember that God's mercies are new every morning.
8. **Life is short; enjoy the little moments.** Don't be too wrapped up in getting everything done that you forget to stop and smell the roses. Your kids are only little for a little while, and it flies by so quickly. Slow down and enjoy it. It's okay to have fun!
9. **Life doesn't have to be perfect to be beautiful.** Honestly, life is never perfect, but that doesn't mean it's not good. Don't focus on the negative, but keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. He's given you such wonderful blessings. What a beautiful life!
10. **Love is a choice, not a feeling.** We can't live life on the whims of our feelings. We must choose to love our families every day, even when it's hard. Even when we're tired and stressed and overwhelmed. Feelings do not dictate our love. That's Jesus' job.

I've learned so much over the last decade of motherhood, so it was hard to narrow it down to this handful of things to share. I would love to hear what you've learned as a mom! Or if you're not a mom, what have you learned over the last 10 years? Feel free to share in the comments below.



YOU



## Inner Strength - Free From Pain – by Michelle Wyatt

How do you deal with pain you can't see the source of?

What do you do with pain you can see the source of, but it still doesn't seem fixable?

- Push through the pain.
- Deal with the pain.
- Distract myself from the pain.

Those are answers I've heard to those questions.

I don't like to talk about the physical pain I experience on different levels every day; but the truth is, the pain has caught up with me. Whether that has happened to you or not, I have learned that it takes great inner strength and courage to admit that.

I was diagnosed with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis when I was only 1 ½ years old. It started with a swollen ankle. I am now 49 years old and within the last two years, certain joints that have never been affected are now rebelling. I have also had very limited range of motion with my wrists. I have never been able to put my hands down on the floor, bed, couch, etc. to get up and down like most people do. I have always used my knuckles instead. *It just is what it is.* That's been my go-to saying for most of my life. I'm now reaching in to inner strength I haven't had to use before, to accept this new phase of my life.

In addition to my wrists, the range of motion in my knees also changes and my knuckles hurt. On my *not - feeling - confident* days, as I say, I more or less lean on my elbow/forearm to get on to bed. However, my elbow hurts now, and this is my new pain. I may not be able to see the pain, but I do know the source. The lack of range of motion is visible if I show people; otherwise, they don't know. My wrists look different but do people wonder if they hurt? I don't know. Recently, one person asked. The answer is usually yes or at least sometimes.

We can ignore pain only so long, before it forces us to face it. Today I hurt so badly! It was all over the inside of my body, not just one joint. That kind of pain screams, "I've got to get help now, cry, rest, and/or a version of all three." I did exactly that. I reached out to a friend. I cried on the phone with her. Then, I took a nap. She also encouraged me to let the doctor know about the severity of my new elbow pain. It may have to wait until physical therapy kicks in; but even then, I don't know what is going to help. Regardless, I need to step up and use inner strength to say, "This has really been hurting and I'm frustrated."

Not facing pain alone is important.

Support is fuel for the amount of inner strength we have.

Whether it's physical, mental, or emotional pain that we can or can't see the source of, it takes courage to face it. It takes inner strength to acknowledge it and get support for it. And if anyone says, "Deal with it," remember, that is their way of saying, "I don't know what to say/how to support you right now." At the end of the day, pain is a form of communication. Listen to what it's telling you.

Not sure what to do about your pain? Give it up to God. I say these things as a reminder to myself, as well. I certainly don't have all the answers and I've been faced with pain my whole life. What is one thing I do know? We all experience pain – inner and outward – at some point in our life. How we handle it will be different for everyone. Over time, we figure out what works and doesn't work.

We just might find ourselves going back to our old ways, kind of like I did this week, and not taking enough time to acknowledge our physical pain. I was focused on my emotional pain. The two are related, by the way, and I hope to write about that soon...

I have faith in you! If I can do it, so can you!

## Healthy Habits – Mindful, Not Mad – by Marcy Lytle

Do trends and media and advertising and must-haves get to you, some days? Seriously, there's a new hair vitamin, or a way to stave off the gray, reduce belly fat, or something...every single time we open our screens. If we visit the store, some dressing rooms have signs hanging in them that say "Must have" on a hook, where we can hang our pieces, and be reminded that we "need" them all. My goodness, every single commercial (if you watch live TV) draws us in to medicines, new cars, the lawyer that rights all wrongs, and more.

While all of this might be interesting and cool to note and be mindful of, it's not healthy or wise to go mad over it.

How do we stay mindful, but not go mad, over being bombarded on a daily basis?

- We like what we like. Sure, try a new trend if you want, but don't do it because you feel less-than if you don't.
- We avoid panic. Panic buying or grabbing isn't healthy. It causes us to spend more, place our hopes in another remedy, and feeds our fears.
- We consider common sense. If it's the one super food that will cure all, it's probably not. Maybe we should just eat in moderation all the good things.
- We change the conversation. If we're in a group with others that are discussing the latest and we start to feel shamed or less than, because we don't know about this topic, let's bring up something of value to talk about! Maybe, talk about grateful happenings in our lives, instead...
- We enjoy, but we don't obsess. Maybe you love to stroll the aisles of Target and Marshalls, or the outdoor malls, and feel this obsession to purchase something that's way over budget. Why can't we enjoy what we see, and wait for sales or buy the same style elsewhere? If you can splurge, go ahead, but don't rise up with the "must haves" and feel bad, later.
- We delete and ignore. Maybe that one Instagram account stirs up something in us and makes us feel pressure, or what she says is so annoying and make us want to lash out. Be mindful of these accounts but don't go mad over these folks.
- We give thanks instead of giving way... Maybe we just feel we'll never figure out how to look good, feel good, be thin, have hair like her, figure out the best diet, you name it. Sure, there are times to see a doctor or make healthy changes, but that's not the topic of this story. There are many times we don't need to do anything at all, but give thanks for where we are, and what's happening in our home and family.

Being mindful is listening and deciphering whether we need to listen more, or turn away and focus on something else deserving of our time, thoughts and energy. I've wasted many a day pining and wishing and looking and hoping, instead of living. I must have been mad! And those days when I'm mindful instead, well I see the sunrise and the sunset, and everything in between...in the light of both.

## **A Hopeful Heart - Small Pieces, Big Joy – by Christina Oberon**

This month, joy has been scattered all over my living room floor in the form of tiny plastic bricks. If you have a child who loves Legos, you know exactly what I mean. There are pieces everywhere; under tables, in bins, in little piles that somehow appear overnight. And yet, in the middle of what looks like chaos to me, my son sees something completely different. He sees possibility.

Legos have become one of his greatest joys. They are what he looks forward to after a long week, what he asks for as a reward for chores completed, good grades earned, or other small accomplishments. While some kids may beg for screen time or candy, my son's heart is set on building. There is something so pure about that. It's more than just a toy to him. It's motivation. It's excitement. It's pride.

And as I've watched him work on set after set, I've realized there's something quietly hopeful hidden in those little bricks, because Legos teach patience, piece by piece.

When my son starts a new set, he doesn't begin with the finished product in front of him. He begins with a box full of tiny parts. Some are easy to find. Others seem to disappear into the abyss of the pile. Sometimes he has to pause, search, backtrack, and try again. He doesn't rush it.

He sits with determination, carefully following the steps, trusting that each small piece matters, even when it doesn't make sense yet. When he can't see the finished product or final outcome but trusts that if he keeps adding pieces together, he will get to a desired destination.

*Isn't that how life works sometimes?*

So often, we want the big picture right away. We want the finished version. We want the answer, the outcome, the completed dream. But hope reminds us that most good things are built slowly. One step. One piece. One day at a time.

Legos also teach the joy of accomplishment. When my son finally snaps the last piece into place, his whole face lights up. He holds up his creation like a trophy. It's not about perfection, it's about finishing something he worked hard on. There is joy (and exhale) in that kind of completion.

And maybe that's a reminder for us, too. Hope isn't always found in the grand, life-changing moments. Sometimes hope is in the small victories like a task finished, a hard day survived, a goal reached... a tiny step forward.

**Small pieces, big joy.**

Another thing I've noticed is how willing he is to start over. If something falls apart, he doesn't stay discouraged for long. He rebuilds. He adjusts. He tries again. Sometimes he

even creates something new entirely. What a hopeful way to live. To believe that even if things don't hold together the first time, we are still capable of building again.

Maybe that's one of the sweetest lessons Legos offer; the pieces are still usable. The story isn't over. The creation isn't ruined, it's simply unfinished.

As March arrives and we begin to see hints of spring, I find myself grateful for the simple reminders tucked into everyday moments. Sometimes hope is sitting at the table with a child, surrounded by tiny colorful bricks, watching something beautiful come together slowly. Piece by piece. Trusting that even the smallest pieces matter, and that joy can be found in the building.

## Life Right Now - Team Sunrise or Team Sunset? - By Jennifer Stephens

Sometimes I want to shut off the TV, hide my phone, and race outside, forgetting the nonsense to quietly gaze at the sky. Listening to the evening news or taking a scroll through social media can make us feel like society is more divided than ever. Friend against friend. Family member against family member. It's division over unity. It's "us" versus "them."

And it's exhausting.

But tackling life's great debates is nothing new. In the eighties we locked horns over less taxing topics. Our greatest dispute was Coke vs. Pepsi. Television commercials raised the question, "Which is better?" and real-life blind taste tests determined the answer (Neither for me. Ew. I'll stick with water). Or we'll question one's preference for dogs or cats (Dogs, obviously.), coffee or tea (Both!), and beach or mountains (I'll take either.). While our differing individual answers to these questions aren't quite so relationship crushing as our personal thoughts regarding recent current events seem to be, they do offer insight into our personalities.

So, when I've finally had enough of the screaming screens and venture outside, I'm confronted with another debate. Sunrises or sunsets?

Gosh, how does one choose? Both offer a swirling palette of pinks, purples, oranges, and reds. But they bring unique characteristics too. Sunrises are calm. Soft. A refreshing beginning. Sunsets are dramatic. Vibrant. A reflective ending. Team Sunrise seeks to launch something new. They're up and ready to go. Excited. High energy. Like a lively Chihuahua. Team Sunset strives to makes sense of things. To understand. They're languid and deep in thought. Like a gentle Golden Retriever.

Sunrises offer a fresh start. A new beginning. A chance to steer the wheel in a new direction. In Luke 1:78-79 we read, "...because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

The most spectacular sunsets arise after a cloudy day. A reminder of hope. A reminder that even tough days eventually end. Isaiah 60:20 offers this reminder, "Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wait no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end."

Here's my challenge for us this month...let's turn off the TV, hide our phones, and go outside. Let's absorb the daily reminder of God's presence. And maybe answer the great debate once and for all. Team Sunrise or Team Sunset?

*"They who dwell in the end of the earth stand in awe of your signs;  
you make the dawn and the sunset shout for joy."*

*Psalm 65:8*



MARRIAGE

## **Date Night Fun – All Kinds of Weather – by Marcy Lytle**

March is that month of transition and it's most likely a battle between winter and spring. Here in the south, it's the time that thunderstorms roll through, and then the next day is sunny and clear. Or...it's warm enough to start planting a garden and then all of a sudden there's a freeze on the forecast. So...date night ideas this month are for all kinds of weather in the month of March.

*If it's raining* – What if you had a low-expectation craft night that's fun and creative, and one that makes you both laugh? Sound good? You could get blank mugs and mark a scene with Sharpies to give each other. What about drawing each other's portrait in 20 minutes flat? Grab snacks from your favorite grocery store – ones with low effort in preparation. And stop by the Dollar Tree for cute napkins and plates. Rainy night fun!

*If it's freezing* – Maybe it's just too cold to venture out, so venture in! Look on your shelves and bring out three board games. Look in the fridge and gather four ingredients to make sandwiches. Spread a huge blanket and picnic while you play games, until late at night – such a delight!

*If it's sunny and warm* – That spring day that's just perfect does come along at least once during the month, I bet! So head out for a walk where you can see your shadows. After that, head to a mini golf place and play 18 holes. Keep score and compete! The winner gets to pick the next activity. What about an ice cream cone at your local ice cream shop, where you can sit out and enjoy while the spring breezes blow.

*If it's a clear night* – If it's nice enough to be outside one evening, not too cold, but the stars are out and visible, then star gaze. Moon watch. Do it from the safety of your car atop a hill just outside the city, or your city might have a stargazing spot they advertise – look it up! Find a rooftop restaurant/bar and head there too, for perhaps appetizers and a visit with another couple that's joining you for this fun evening out.

*If it's a cozy morning* – Maybe a morning date is just what fits on your calendar in March. We used to do this with the kids but it would work well for just the two of you. Pack a bag the night before (you pack his and he packs yours) and make your room like a hotel. Bring in a tray of water and ice, and a snack basket. Maybe a basket of muffins. And have coffee ready to make (you'll have to escape to the kitchen for that!) When you awaken the next morning, linger in bed and enjoy your snacks and breakfast. Scroll your phones together. Get dressed in what the other one picked. Smile at the memories you just made. Clean up and enter your day...

Which one will you try?

## **After 40 Years – Conversations – by Marcy Lytle**

Have you ever been in a restaurant by a table where a couple is sitting, and observed the fact that they hardly say a word to each other? It always makes me sad to observe that, so I purpose fiercely to keep the conversation going while we're eating dinner...and always. Do these couples honestly have nothing to say to each other? Or are they just bitter and old and don't like each other? I always wonder...

By the time one is married for decades, it may be that they're talked out, and they know everything about each other, they're tired of each other's voices, or they just can't think of anything that interests both of them. Who knows the real reason, but here are some ways we have kept the conversations alive (and sometimes feisty) as we are married another year (47 this March!)

We still argue. Is that healthy? I don't know, but we don't always agree, or we still get our feelings hurt, and we say so. Maybe we've learned it's best not to say so sometimes, but oftentimes it's good. I still want to grow in my attitudes and treatment of my husband, and if we don't speak up, we'll keep hurting...

We play trivia games. Well, we have a stack of trivia cards where we ask questions and see if we know the answers. These questions make good conversation starters and discussions!

We watch the news. We enjoy talking about the happenings of the day, discussing the weather, and he loves watching the sports. I watch too, so I'll be able to converse later. The news is full of topics to discuss, and you're right – we don't always agree – but we talk and listen to the other one's viewpoint.

We talk while we ride. Music is nice, and scrolling the phone is great for the passenger, but just looking outside as we pass by yet another construction site, or observe the moon in its full glory, or shake our heads at that car that just cut us off...it all makes for great conversation.

We get ready together. Not always, but often we try to be in the bathroom at the same time while we put on our face and our clothes. It's then we bring up fun memories of the kids or things planned on the calendar. It's a good start to a good day!

We discuss movies. After the credits roll, we talk about characters, we look them up and we look to see if the movie was a true story, etc. Sometimes, we talk about a movie we've seen for hours, or even the next day! Movies make us happy.

We talk about God. We give thanks, we read the Word together, we pray. We didn't always do this well, and it was often a sore spot, but now it's a routine we both look forward to every night...or as much as we can. It's the best conversation of the day!

A lack of conversation is often rooted in disappointment (when I'm upset and stew...) or judgment (when I "think" he's acting or doing because of this or that) or self-focus (he doesn't engage like I want him to, therefore, why talk...) All of those are conversation killers. So when I examine my own issues, forgive and reach out, and realize we are different and both our voices make for good banter...there we go again...talking and laughing and (yes arguing some) and talking some more...

## **In Unison - Spring Attitude & Action – by Terri Barnes**

Many couples decide to start their marriages in spring, as this season is often seen as a symbol of renewal and beginning.

Spring signifies:

Growth

Vitality

Joy

Some argue that marriage can't always "feel like an endless springtime," as such expectations are just unrealistic.

Marriage, to me, creates moments that feel like spring year-round.

In marriage, it's up to the couple to delight in "springing forward" together.

It's easier if you decide what attitudes you want, combined with actions you'll bring to the commitment.

Take the attitude of hope. Pair it with optimism.

Chris & I enjoy an increase of "something to look forward to"- a lunch & shop date.

Optimism leads us to movement & planning.

The action is more social interaction, activity, and quality time with each other.

Take the attitude of giddiness. Pair it with sunlight.

Chris & I enjoy an increase of "sunny steps into spring" – such as a walk, perhaps on a trail.

When sunlight shines into a marriage, it brings a sense of liveliness and energy—a real "spring in your step."

The action is accompanied by confidence and a rise in dopamine.

When couples show a stronger dedication to flourishing together, they naturally undergo fresh personal and relational growth.

It's warm, welcoming & exciting!

Though learned, the process quickly adds vibrance.

Suddenly, you notice that your marriage is experiencing a wonderful springtime bright path.

Wow! There are new & inviting possibilities to your commitment.

What attitudes and actions do you and your spouse want to encourage? If you're unsure how to start, try bringing hope and giddiness into your relationship. What does that mean for you?





ENCOURAGEMENT

## Firmly Planted - Hurting Hearts – by Dina Cavazos

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I awoke early this morning while it was still dark—my favorite time to start the day. For the last few months my sleep schedule has been off, which has led to lingering in bed longer than I like. But, this morning, even though I had only slept about five hours, I was ready to get up, make coffee, feed the cat, light candles, and spend some time praying and pondering over the thoughts that came to me even before I opened my eyes.

My first thoughts were of hurting hearts. I can think of several people in my circle who are suffering (outwardly or inwardly) with loss, disappointment, rejection, relationship conflicts, family issues, sickness, fear for the future...there are so many things that can cause heartache, and it seems to me that a hurting heart can be one of the most difficult and painful consequences of this world of tribulation. My heart breaks for hurting hearts.

What is the root cause of a hurting heart? In one way or another, could it be Love? Love causes pain because we *care*, because we *feel*. My heart breaks because I *love* all these who are hurting and I feel quite helpless to do anything about it. It's not in my power, and it's not in their power either. What a bleak conundrum. Yes, sometimes there are steps one can take; choices one can make, ones that might make a difference. But often, there aren't. And the pain of waiting for an answer, or for something to change, or to adjust to a new reality can twist and turn a heart inside out.

Thinking back to some of my personal heartaches stirs a deep compassion because I know how it feels: the despair, lack of motivation, the fear of the unknown, regret, at times self-doubt and even physical discomfort. Sometimes the hurt is deep inside, causing anger, a bad attitude, or a constant dissatisfaction with life. Reaching far back in my memories, I can distinguish two distinct types of experiences: one before I knew the love of God in Christ, and one after; but I can't say there was a clear line I crossed over. It was a more gradual change; one I can see in retrospect.

Heartaches in both worlds, with God and without God, have been equally painful, equally difficult. Suffering is never easy. Without God, I just wanted it to end. I wanted circumstances or people to change so the hurt would go away. But once I embraced the grace and truth of Jesus (Emmanuel, which means God Is With Us), my perspective began to change. An element of hope began to grow; a belief in God's goodness and love—a lifeboat in a dark stormy sea—was planted in my heart, right next to the pain. Sometimes tenuous, sometimes disappearing from sight, but constantly there for me to grasp once again.

My heart breaks for hurting hearts, especially those without a lifeboat. They must tread the stormy sea on their own, and some are quite determined and strong, but hurting none the less. Even those who have access to a lifeboat sometimes forget it's there. That can be me, as well, if I lose focus or let the wrong thoughts dominate. Don't get me wrong. A lifeboat doesn't keep you from getting wet, cold, and hungry. But it has kept me from drowning.

Sometimes it's good to wrestle with the hurt, to examine the Why, because it could be my desire to control, a misplaced priority, or a childhood wound not dealt with. We humans are complicated creatures. If it's loss of a loved one...I can't even touch that. Only God can.

It's not for me to judge someone else's pain. Each of us has a different experience and capacity for it, and what might seem small to someone is huge to someone else. All I know is that my heart breaks for hurting hearts and God calls me to weep with those who weep, mourn with those who mourn, and share in the suffering of others, as Christ shares in my own suffering, and the suffering of the world.

I'm looking for a positive ending here, but I'm afraid anything will sound trite after sharing these very serious thoughts. I look out my window and see a bleak winter garden. I look at the current state of the world and see a bleak future. These things don't pain me with the same intensity as personal issues or the hurting hearts around me, although I *care* about them. At this moment, for me, they're a metaphor, even a visual reminder, of a broken world full of broken people. I do believe in a future hope where every tear will be wiped away; but it's often a long, narrow, and rocky road getting there.

*"In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart; I have overcome the world."*

*Jesus, our Lifeboat*

## **A Day in the Life – A Game Changer – by Bekah Holland**

Did you know there are options out there other than Introverts and Extroverts? The latest and greatest (I mean, subjective, obviously) is the Ambivert, which follows the Omnivert “discovery.”

So here’s the cliff’s notes version:

Introverts tend to be more introspective, feel best when they’re alone or in calm, quiet spaces and being exposed to loud and/or excessive social interaction is draining.

Extroverts usually thrive in social settings, are energized by being around others and are generally outgoing, active and sociable.

Ambiverts are people whose overall behavior is a happy in-between spot of introversion and extroversion. My guess is most people would call this balanced.

As someone who is rarely balanced, I’m just going to have to take their word on it because I have no clue. BUT, drumroll please...now, enters the Omnivert! This is somebody who can be either at different times. Signal angels singing!

These possibilities were a mind-blowing discovery for someone like me. As a teenager and into my 20’s, I thought I was an extrovert because I was excited and energized around people I knew, made friends pretty easily and even loved a good night out dancing in crowded places. These were also days in which I could wear three-inch stilettos for hours and not bat an eye, so it’s also possible I was a psychopath. Po-tA-to – Po-ta-to. Then came having babies, moving to small towns without taller-than-my-knees human contact, moving again, and again, sleepless decades, life doesn’t ever-stop I’m so over everything years, and I thought, *Maybe I’m actually an introvert.*

I didn’t even think I liked people anymore. Sometimes, I still don’t. But that’s a lie because I’m a relentless optimist and very rarely don’t try to justify someone’s behavior even when it hurts me, because I’m a people pleaser and have an unhealthy desire to make sure everyone likes me. Yes, I know I’m a walking contradiction, and yes, I am simultaneously a therapist’s unicorn patient and their worst nightmare. Side note – *you can’t tip a therapist because you know you are exhausting. I know this because I’ve asked...more than once.*

Therefore, I obviously don’t tend to fit nicely in either of the original categories, although I excel at forcing myself into any given box because people pleasers are extra special. But when I learned about this new, fancy box, labeled “Omnivert” I felt like maybe, just maybe, there was a Bekah-shaped box that fit me instead of the other way around. This is likely not something that a normal human obsesses over and I know this. However, I can’t even fake normal very often and my ADHD has the super fun benefit of making me hyper-focused on completely unimportant details, allowing me to procrastinate in epic fashion. *Pray for my husband, y’all. Bless his sweet, task oriented, organized heart.*

Why does this matter? Well, I mean, I guess it doesn’t really. However, to someone who always feels a little out of place – who is too much and not enough at the same time - this silly, inconsequential label is a game changer for me. I now have language to describe how I fit into

this big, crazy world. It's not all encompassing. It's not WHO I am, but it's HOW I am, and for some reason, that matters.

No label, status, or diagnosis defines us, but it can give us a little insight into our individual whys. Why we feel the way we do, or maybe what recharges our almost always-running-on-empty internal batteries. I'm very aware that this is a "pot...this is kettle" kind of thing I'm about to say, but for those of us who are the doers and knowers of all the things, we need to find whatever our personal oxygen mask is and put it on our dang faces! In case you aren't aware, I'm not calling you out. I'm basically just calling myself out because therapy is expensive and this is a nice fill-in so I don't have to see mine six times a week. Be better than me. *And I'll make you a promise...I'll work at being a better me, too.*

We all deserve to feel understood, not just by others, but feel like we understand ourselves a little, too. We deserve a break, whether that looks like brunch with a group of friends, a walk with the bestie, or a cozy closet hiding spot where we can escape all the noise of life...or a combination of breaks. Even God took an entire day of the week to rest! He gave us a roadmap and led by example. These breaks of ours, they don't have to make sense to anyone but us, and we don't have to justify taking time to re-center, find solace or fill our own cups with the things that bring us joy.

In my little corner of the world, this month brings us bright green growth, more sunshine, bluer skies and the smell of jasmine blooming. It holds a sense of hope and new beginnings. No matter what it looks like where you are, choose your fresh start, find what brings you joy, and be intentional in caring for yourself half as much as you care for everyone around you. It will, without a doubt, be worth it. Because we are worth it all.

*"I will always search for the ray of sunshine, the lone wildflower, the singing birds, the brightest star, and every other little piece of hope." CM Witter*

## **An Adage a Day – Ah Choo! God Bless You! – by Carole Gilbert**

This time of year is full of “Ah Choo’s.”  
So, let’s remember to share our “God bless You’s.”  
But from where does this come, a blessing for a sneeze.  
We don’t receive this when we scrape our knees.  
Or when we’re unhappy and want to cry.  
And it’s definitely not something we can go out and buy.  
So why a “bless you” when your nose makes this sound.  
“Ah choo!” Is it allergies, or a cold coming around?  
This phrase began in 590 A.D.  
To bless the sneezer from bubonic disease.  
Or it might’ve begun to run evil spirits away.  
The main thing is God’s blessings were given that day.  
So, say, “God Bless You,” every time you hear an, “Ah choo!”  
No matter what’s in the air, God’s love is too.  
And share this expression either close or from afar,  
And know it will carry meaning no matter where you are.

It’s a beautiful time of year when spring comes. Trees are getting their leaves and flowers are starting to bud. And although we are noticing the beauty of springtime, it’s also that time of year when so many of us are miserable with allergies or something with similar symptoms. It’s a time when it’s nice to know and be reminded that we are blessed, and especially because of what we might be going through.

Blessings are a very special gift. But do we give them a lot of thought? God first blessed the animals in Genesis 1:22. And then He blessed man in Genesis 1:28. But with all this blessing going on that we hear and learn about, do we ever stop to think about blessing our God who blessed us first?

Revelation 5:13-14 says, *And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” Amen!*

I love the way we see blessings in the Bible make a complete cycle, from Genesis to Revelation, starting with God blessing us first and then at the end us blessing Him. It’s a total and perfect completeness, and that’s our God! He’s perfect in every way and in everything He does. So, through our sniffles, “Ah Choo,” and all! I say, God bless you! And I also say, Blessings to our God!

## **Moving Forward – I Am Weak – by Pam Charro**

*But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecution, and in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. –  
2 Corinthians 12 9-10*

Our culture definitely doesn't celebrate weakness. Pretty much every action movie depicts a rebel good guy with a Lone Ranger mentality who single-handedly manages, against all odds, to defeat all of the opposing evil...and all while remaining cool!

We love to applaud these hero types, but, in real life, we seldom feel like one of them. Life is tough, and we're constantly being beaten by so many things that can cause us to wonder if we're ever succeeding at anything. At least, I often wonder it about myself.

I will be the first to admit that Paul's statement about boasting in his weaknesses isn't easy for me to fully comprehend. So much of my identity has come from the rare times that I felt "good enough" in a situation. I don't like to let people down, and have felt so much pressure to be responsible and take care of things. Sadly, though, I fail. A lot. I'm just not that strong. I got to find out just how weak I can be last month, when I participated in a three-week, church wide fast. It was hard, and it wasn't pretty. I struggled.

But the fast also brought me to the secret place in such a beautiful way, because it reminded me that I can often only really draw nearer to God when I come to the end of my strength. I began to see that my weak state was not a surprise to God, and that it was okay! He loves to remind me that he adores me; that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. He has no problem with making up for what I am unable to do. He respects and honors me. He is a servant king who loves me more fiercely than I can comprehend. And his ability to touch my fish and loaves to create miracles in my life knows no bounds. All he wants is for me to be on this journey with him, where I can be the human that I am and he can be the amazing God that he is. The God who is the true hero. That news is better than anything I can wrap my head around, and I want to better understand it every day.

So, yes, sometimes I am weak. I haven't liked it, but I'm learning to embrace it so that God can show up strong for me.

## **Unprepared – Gray Strands – by Marcy Lytle**

If you're just joining, I started last month to write a series of things in life I was totally taken aback by, because I hadn't noticed or observed, or been told or warned. And then I just felt unprepared and unlearned, and so sad and alone in the new phase that suddenly appeared in my life. I hope you'll comment with your thoughts, no matter the age you are when you read!

I think every woman gets that first gray hair at such varying ages! I had friends that had gray hair appear on the scene in their 20s and other friends that still have very few, well into their 60's! And while gray hair can be beautiful and a sign of wisdom (that's a verse in the bible somewhere), it's also alarming when you're not expecting it. That first gray hair almost speaks as if to say, "I'm coming for you!"

It was no problem for me, those first appearances, because I just used hair color – the boxed version – to cover the gray. For a while I went a bit darker, which made me feel a bit more mysterious and elegant. Then later, I decided to go somewhat blonde because, after all, my husband and kids were blondes. And I had been a blonde when I was young. However, over time I grew weary of constantly keeping up with the hair color sessions, and the smell of the solution began to bother me.

Another transformation for me was hair length. About the same time I grew tired of keeping up with coloring my hair, I thought about growing out my hair. I had short hair for decades, but I noticed something "soft" in the look of long hair...particularly gray hair. I wanted to look softer. My short hair served me well as I had been young and full of sass and pride. But I really thought about how I wanted to age...gracefully. So, I grew out my hair...about the same time I stopped coloring it!

And I just really didn't know that gray hair, at least on my head, was a different texture altogether! And there are so many shades of gray, all of which one never knows which shade will emerge from your personal roots! Mousy? Silver? Whitish? What would it be? And did I have the stamina and fortitude it would take to really let the gray emerge and take over my entire look?

I stopped trimming and let the gray palette soon become my hair color of choice. It too was a long process, but not as long as menopause was (see February 2026 article in the archives). And while my hair was turning gray, I had all sorts of thoughts to contend with. Am I going to age myself another 10 years? How will I style this new look? I wonder if the new hair color will change my complexion?

I've been totally gray a few years now, and I personally have loved the freedom that having gray hair has offered me. First of all, no more buying those boxes and coloring my hair and taking half the morning to do so. That's a bonus for sure! I've embraced what I feel was inevitable, and that feels liberating. And I've found that the different texture gets some getting used to, but it feels like me, now.

What I haven't liked is that along with the gray, my hair also thinned out! Remember, I said I lost hair during the menopause years? Well, in my 60's I lost some more! I saw thin areas that I had remembered seeing on my own mother's head. I always wondered why she pulled it back with a barrette, and now I know!

There's absolutely nothing wrong with coloring one's hair, until the end of life, if one wants to! That's the key – do what suits you! I just grew tired of the process and as my hair grew out, it felt

good to be this new version of the softer me. It was weird to me how my how went along with my persona, as I aged. Gray hair, in society, used to be so frowned upon. But I feel like we live in the time where being one's true self is cool, even encouraged. I even see young girls going gray on purpose!

The last thing I am reminded of is how God does care for us when our hair decides to turn gray. Proverbs even says gray hair is a crown of glory! Wow.

I remember sitting in our new church a few years ago, when we first attended, and I noticed several women in front of me with really white and gorgeous hair. I thought. "Wow, it's pretty but they're old." And then I realized that those women were the kindest people that had spoken to me each time we visited. They were friendly, had the prettiest smile, and seemed genuine to the heart. That made me smile, and rethink my assessment of the snow white or gray or mousy hair on our heads.

If I can gain wisdom, wear a crown of glory (what does that even mean?) and emerge with that fruit of the Spirit called gentleness and mercy as I age, then I say so be it!

(Gray hair seems to require more moisture, it longs to be brushed, and it's fun to dare to embrace!)

## **Unearthly Thing - Turning Whine into Worship – by Angela Dolbear**

Water and electricity are two essentials I will never take for granted again.

In late January 2026, Nashville was hit with a woolly mammoth of an ice storm. The northern part of the city, where I live, seemed to be the bullseye. It started with a brilliant blanket of 4 inches of snow, turning our greyish-brown landscape into a Winter Wonderland. Then, overnight, the temperatures dropped to below freezing, and an inch of ice covered everything. Giant tree limbs sagged with the weight of the ice and then snapped like toothpicks, covering roads and taking down power lines as they crashed to the ground. The cracking of the branches sounded like bombs exploding all around us. Nashville looked like a glistening white war zone.

On Sunday morning, January 25, 2026, the lights flickered, and the power went out. It would stay out for five days. Did I mention we had no internet service either (as of when I'm writing this, we still don't internet)? Accumulated ice on the wire caused it to snap. We found our cable lying in the street. Also, we lost our cell phone service. No texts or calls went through.

*No electricity, internet, or phone. I felt like a pioneer woman.*

I also felt sad for my beautiful home that was growing colder by the moment. I was praying desperation prayers. Deep in my soul, I heard the Holy Spirit tell me this was going to last a while. As in days, not hours. As soon as the power went out, my husband Tim and I went into preservation mode. We closed all the window blinds and curtains to retain as much of the 68 degrees of warmth as we could. We put our refrigerated food into a cooler with ice blocks. The frozen food we put out on the porch in a roller bag because, well, it was as cold or colder outside than in our freezer!

*Then we waited and prayed.*

I slept fitfully that night, waking every hour or so to check if the power had come back on. But the dark stillness told me we were still without electricity, so I prayed. And I fought discouragement and grief.

Monday morning was colder, and still no electricity. Our house had dropped to fifty degrees. Wool sweaters, gloves, and blankets came out. We cooked food on the stove with a few tea light candles under a cooling rack, a power outage hack I had seen on Facebook early Sunday morning. It took a long time, but it really worked! I was grateful God brought that hack into my feed. I spent the day bundled in blankets, wearing gloves and a beanie, reading on the couch. I was starting to enjoy the quieting of the noise the internet and cell phone create in my mind.

Tuesday morning was very cold. Our house had dropped to forty degrees. I could see the steam from my breath while sitting at my dining room table. I started to feel very sleepy. I thought about Googling "What are the symptoms of Hypothermia," but alas, no internet or phone service.

My hands felt frozen. All of me felt frozen. I wanted to cry, mostly from discouragement. I had been praying nonstop, begging God to restore our power. But it still hadn't. My sweet home was so cold. More grief set in.

About eleven a.m., we started calling around for a hotel. Many were fully booked by people in our same predicament. By the grace of God, we finally found a hotel room that allowed pets, since we had our two dogs with us. We packed some clothes, prayed for protection over our house, putting it in God's hands, and hit the road (which was drivable, thankfully). The hotel was in a bit of a sketchy part of town, and their WIFI was down, but we were thankful to be in a warm place. We ordered dinner from Uber Eats and settled in as best we could in a noisy, unfamiliar place.

Wednesday morning, our spirits were low. The Nashville Electric Service map still showed an outage in our area. We saw on the news that crews were working around the clock to clear away downed trees and repair power poles. But our home was still dark.

I apologized to God for whining to Him about our situation. He told me it was okay to grieve. But as I took a hot shower (another thing I will never take for granted again), He showed me how He was taking care of my family and me. We were warm, fed, and had the means to get a motel room to spend the night. I decided to turn my whining into worship. I began thanking God for all He was doing for us and all He provided. I thanked Him that the large tree that fell on our fence didn't fall on our home or on our recording studio, which houses our business.

We checked out of the motel and headed home, praying all the way that we would find the porch light we left on, shining bright with power when we pulled into our driveway. But it did not. Still no power. Our house was maintaining a forty-degree temperature, which I was grateful for. It meant our pipes were going to survive on the slow trickle of water we had.

It was still too cold to stay home, so we swapped out dirty clothes for clean ones, had a little lunch, and began to seek shelter for the night. We realized it would be better to stay at my parents' vacant house, which was three miles from our home. There was no furniture since they recently moved to Michigan and were selling the house. But there was electricity, and they were more than happy to let us camp there. It was quiet and relaxing, and we got to cook a good dinner in a fully working kitchen. But we noticed the water pressure was decreasing steadily. Oh no...

The next-door neighbor came over and told us that the water pumping station in their town had lost power, and that the water would be off soon. We had to find a new place to spend the night.

*Ugh. Tears of frustration flowed. What do we do? We prayed.*

God found us another hotel room. We hung around my parents' house until the water was properly shut off at the main, and the pipes were drained and left open so they wouldn't freeze. We packed up again and made our way to the new hotel room.

Thursday morning dawned with the NES outage map still showing our house was lacking power. Frustration and discouragement weighed heavily upon us. We had seen on the news that more households had their power restored, but not ours. I had to choose to praise God in the midst of this crazy situation and be grateful that we had food and shelter during the storm.

God showed me that it was good we were at my parents' empty house to take care of it during the water outage, so they wouldn't have a disaster on their hands while they were thousands of miles away. Again, I worshipped. God put me in a position to help.

We stopped by the local Kroger and purchased several cases of bottled water, and returned to my parents' house. After dinner, we took our dishes back home to wash them. While we were there, the power came back on! Hallelujah! Praise God!

Since the ice storm, praising and thanking God for electricity and water are part of my morning devotion time. It's good for the soul to be grateful for the basic things in life.

And whenever I feel the temptation to whine about something, anything, I turn that whining into worship, because God is always with me, taking care of me and providing for me like a Good Shepherd.

*He is so very good.*

Blessings to you!

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



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME - Father Knows Best – by Marcy Lytle**

Have you ever watched the old TV show by the same name as the title of this story? I don't think I watched it as a kid, but we recently discovered it and have been enjoying the episodes now. The actors on this show won Emmy awards, the writing is fantastic, and the stories are hilarious. And might I add...it's comedy without sex and violence...imagine that! Of course, there are old-fashioned ways that we've progressed away from (some good, some not so good!), but the lessons and the stories (and did I say the acting?) are amusing and so worth watching. A great way to spend a 30 minute down time from a busy day!

*I want to share one particular story...*

The father came home one day so excited, riding a motorized scooter, one he had gotten at a steal of a price...for his son Bud...who I suppose is about 15 years old. The father had seen the scooter, grabbed it away from another guy who wanted it, and just knew it would be the perfect gift. However, Mom had a different take on the scooter and simply forbade Dad to give it to their "irresponsible" son, as it would mean sure doom. Father and Mother bantered back and forth, and the dad succumbed to the pressure and covered the scooter in the garage, called the man who also wanted it, and away the scooter went.

Dad felt sorry that Bud didn't get the scooter, so he tucked \$20 in his son's hands and entrusted him to spend it well. Much to Mom and Dad's surprise, that evening Bud came home with excited news to share. He invited the family outside, and there it was – that same scooter! The man who got it also ran into resistance and his son was a friend to Bud – and sold it to him!

Imagine Mom's surprise and terror to see what Bud had done...and Dad's surprise and joy! The next scene, Bud tells mom not to worry because he had also ordered the safety manual and was going to follow all the rules. He was responsible!

The last scene showed the whole family enjoying this new "toy," as even Mom took a spin!

*So, why am I writing about this show?*

Our Father knows what to place in our hands, in his timing, and with his trust. Have you ever thought about the trust God places in us, when we place our trust in Him? I love that concept! Remember the story of the talents in the Bible? The man entrusted his riches to those who would use them well.

In this TV story, Dad felt it was time to give his son something spectacular, as he felt he was ready. Mom just knew their son was not. And the item ended up in the son's hands, and the son was responsible after all, and joy resulted.

I sort of teared up at the end of the story (there are so many hilarious moments in it, too so I laughed a lot!) because of the lesson in responsibility. I believe we are given things/moments/encounters daily from the Father's hand that he entrusts us with. And of course, there's grace if we fail, but there's also His help to take care and enjoy "the ride."

This father in the story doesn't always make the best decisions, but our Father does. And if he says we can manage, we can, because He rides alongside and leads the way. What great food for thought...as we look at what's landed in our hands lately...straight from the Father above.

## **FRESH THYME - Granola Bar Faith – by Marcy Lytle**

I see it everywhere. Folks grab a granola bar as they head out the door because it's quick, there's no time to sit down and eat, and the bar is loaded with what they need anyway...nuts, fiber, dark chocolate...a win win! However, I've also read that granola bars are often loaded with calories and ingredients that are NOT good on a daily basis.

I was thinking about granola bars the other day and realized that a lot of my spiritual life as an adult was like grabbing a granola bar on the run. Let me explain:

As a young adult, I had grown up with disciplines and practices that I thought pleased God and if I didn't do them, I wouldn't grow, and I would feel like maybe I disappointed God. Sometimes, I read a chapter a night (my granola bar) and called it a day, shut my eyes and fell asleep, because I'd had my fix. I don't know what I read, sure didn't know the context or to whom those verses were written, but I had grabbed some truth and ingested it.

Even as a parent, it was important to me that my kids know the bible stories about great faith. So, of course, we taught our kids the songs, read them the stories, bought them the books, so they'd know who Noah was, what Daniel did, the feats of Moses, etc. – those granola bar guys – the ones we need to have in our drawer of goody bars to keep us going. Daniel prayed, so we need to pray. Noah had great faith, so let's be like Noah. However, only those stories alone didn't really ingrain in any of us who God was...at the core of those stories! No substance, really. Just grab the story and read it.

Let's move on to devotions. I've bought my grandkids devotional books, and I have a stack of them I've started and not finished, and some I actually finished. Let me stop and say that devotionals are great, as are bible stories, but it was all I was doing and calling it a healthy lifestyle. Devotionals are quick fixes, little nuggets of truth deposited in our brains and hearts, like a granola bar...from the drawer full of them. 52 weeks of devotions, 365 days of one-page encouragements, and so on. Again, I had no idea the context, the meaning, the deep rich concepts of the snippets I was biting off in chunks and swallowing in five minutes.

Are all of these things good? Well, sure. Granola bars are fine too, if we read the labels, if we don't eat them every day, if we are careful to have a well-rounded diet. And it's the same with scripture and stories and memory verses.

I can quote John 3:16. I know all about Daniel in the lion's den, and how God rescued him, along with those three guys that were in a furnace of fire. They emerged without a hint of smoke on them. I can pull out verses that I've memorized and quote them on a bad day, for a little burst of energy.

But, guess what? Just in the past few years, I've realized what a rich diet I've missed, because I only grabbed and went. Those little snippets of truth were good, but I felt there was more, and something better. What if I knew the context of what I was reading, the big picture of who God was in the story, and his character in all of the hard? What if I knew the audience, and where this story fit in the whole narrative of the Bible? Could I stand firmer and taller, if I sank deeper and went further?

Granola bar faith, for me, often left me wanting more and wishing for what was missing. There's a whole narrative (a table full of amazing colors and arrays of healthy options) of God's love that starts in Genesis and moves all the way to Revelation. It's a complete story. There are amazing

word studies that help us experience “wow” moments and bursts of flavor not present in grab and go edibles. Whole books of the bible are rich and dense in presenting to us the character, the trustworthiness, the amazing love of the God who formed the earth, breathed life into mankind, and sustains us and leads us as he walks beside us and with us. That’s the real meat on our bones, the strength-building ingredients of a steady walk that builds a life of friendship with God.

I’ve known too many that fell away from their faith in a crisis, or when another “truth” surfaced, or when disappointments were too many...all because their diet was grab and go.

I wish I’d gotten this taste early in life, but I’m getting it now, and it tastes so good. Find a good church with solid full teaching straight from the Bible, teaching that points you to the love of God and His love for the world. Sit and listen, take notes, read it for yourself, and relish every single bite of the good that’s on his table...every single day.

## **FRESH THYME – Why Not a Day Trip? – by Marcy Lytle**

Spring break is this month, the weather will soon be warm enough to venture out without fear of ice on the roads, and all of the world is awakening to the next season. When spring arrives, I want to take day trips, pack a lunch, and explore new things! And while maybe a resort, or an amusement park, or a flight to a faraway place is on your schedule, you might consider a day trip to a small town on the map near you!

When we're in the mood to get away for the day or a couple days, we often look at the map of our area and decide first...how long are we willing to drive? It might be an hour or two or three. That's the radius in which we look.

Next, we pick a few towns and a route, and we start researching the following things: parks, eateries, history, museums, trails, landmarks, anything that makes these towns worth a stop. Some are so tiny they're only on the Texas Escapes page, a page for small towns that tells their history, how they got their name, and if there's anything left there to see. They might be ghost towns. Include one or two of these!

If your trip includes a Sunday, or even a Monday, check the times of the places you're going to visit, because small towns close a lot on those days! Friday and Saturday are usually the best times to go. But if you do venture out on Sunday, choose towns for that day with outdoor attractions you can see!

If you decide to spend the night, look for an Airbnb or hotel in the center of your travels to one town, or several. Whether you're going away for the day only, or for the weekend, bring the following:

Snacks (I like trail mix, he likes to stop and get peanuts and a Dr. Pepper)

A Book (for reading as you park under a shade tree in the afternoon at a cute small town park)

Walking shoes (surely you'll take a walk somewhere!)

Cash and a budget (for small town markets and cute stores)

Hats, sunscreen, bug spray – It's that time of year when things are buzzing and the sun is climbing higher

Umbrella – for that occasional spring shower or downpour

An agenda – or not. If you want to just drive and explore, go for it! Map out your route and go. But if you're like me and want a list, make it and write down all the things you want to see.

Sometimes, one town will be enough for the day. There might be a pretty courthouse, a cool coffee shop, an eatery to die for, lots of downtown shopping, a big park, a market on Saturdays, the cutest bookstore, etc. – all perfect for a day away. But you might choose 4-5 towns, so explore and find out what each has to offer. One might have an old-time bowling alley, or the best catfish around. Maybe another has murals all over town, ones you can drive to and snap photos.

Part of the fun in planning day trips is the planning, itself. Do it together with the ones going with you. If kids are in tow, print out the agenda and what you're doing and leave spaces for them to draw what they see and do. They'll love it!

You can even search “day trips from \_\_\_\_\_” and fill in the blank with your city, and you know lots of ideas will pop up.

Day trips can be costly or nothing at all, except your gas. That’s the beauty of them. And honestly, getting out of your own space and place, and into something new and interesting, well it feeds the soul like nothing else.

Where will you go?