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TIPS

## **The Dressing – Duos for Fall – by Marcy Lytle**

I was looking through my photos on my phone and realized I had lots of pairings in my outfits that were worth sharing. Sometimes, we put on a sweater and realize a bag we have goes perfectly with it. Or we have a pair of shoes we haven't worn in a while, but they look perfect with our new pants or jeans. What about those earrings tucked away in a drawer? Now's the time to see what they will look great with, this fall!

Sweater with sneakers – Aren't these sneakers the coolest? When I purchased them from Target I didn't realize they'd go so perfectly with this new cardigan from Amazon. Both are black and white, and a staple for the fall wardrobe because it goes with everything!

Half tee under a shirt – This is just a cozy look for those cool mornings. I found this navy pullover with a low v-neck at a store on vacation and I bought it. But it's too low to wear alone, and Halftee has a new ribbed long sleeved versions which I just received – and it works perfectly underneath! These are the best!

Retro dress with comfy clogs – I was concerned this dress from Walmart might be too short, but it wasn't – I sized up and it fits perfectly. Aren't the colors wonderful for winter and fall? I'm pairing it now with bare legs and cozy clogs (also from Walmart) but tights and booties will be great in a couple months.

Button up with leafy scarf and earrings – Emery Rose – a place I recently purchased some fall shirts. This caramel colored one is a fave. And I also have a new bundle of skinny scarves I found on Amazon. And the earrings are from Cato. This isn't a duo, but rather a pretty trio!

Scarf and earrings – Another skinny scarf, this time worn as a headband. This packet I bought includes several options and I love them all for the fall season. I found these retro earrings at a vintage stop on the road. Vintage stores are great places to find fun earrings!

Pink pants and tops – I have three pairs of different colors of pink pants for the fall season. What? Yes, they go with so much, from navy, to brown, to red, to gray...so I have three different styles. And this outfit is pink on pink. How fun is that!?

Red sweater and brown slides – I happened to stop in a resale shop that was super fun and found this red sweater – and these Madewell slides that looked like they'd barely been worn. Red is in for the fall, so snap up a few pieces. And consider a pair of slightly worn shoes, if you can find a pair you love!

What duos are you pairing this fall?

## **Seven for You – Closet Captures – by the Panel of Women**

I love seeing how closets are organized and have always wished for one of those “systems” where everything has a place and the closet looks like a small store! And maybe you have one! However, if we don’t have one, I think we’re constantly trying to make do with what we have, whether it’s a small closet with a sliding door, or walk in closets with plenty of shelves and rods for clothes. We asked our panel to share their closet captures with us – things they use to organize or keep the closet neat and tidy – or just how they use their closets! So fun!

My closets aren’t anything exceptional, stupendous, or even wonderful. They’re not overly big or fancy and they’re too cluttered and messy for me to take pictures. Also, I do not use wire hangers at all. I like plastic. And I do have a coat closet which again is nothing fancy. BUT I have one closet that has its own specific, exceptional, all around useful in a different way, purpose. It is my sewing room, or maybe I should call it a sewing nook because of its size. I had my sewing machine in my and my husband’s closet, which made it more cluttered, but when my daughter moved out, I decided it was time to have a sewing nook in her old one! And I love it! It works so well and when we have guests stay in that room, I simply close the closet doors. I can leave my latest sewing project at the machine, and no one sees the mess. Works well for everyone! So, my big tip for closets is to utilize, utilize, utilize. - Carole

I recently purchased some closet zipper bins – huge ones – to store out of season clothes. They have a clear panel which is nice so I can see what’s stored inside, and they stack, too. In another closet where I store my gift wrap, I found two organizers I love. One is one of those shelf hangers, but my newest one has edges on the shelves, which are great because items don’t slide out. The other is a new gift wrap hanger. This entire closet is devoted to gift wrap/seasonal items. And lastly, I have a jewelry hanger on one wall in my closet and I store headbands and necklaces there. A scarf hanger (very inexpensive) can be used for hair clips and bracelets, for plain viewing and wearing. I love mine! It hangs on the back of my closet door. I love organizational gadgets of any kind! – Marcy

We just recently installed an IKEA designed closet system and it was pretty straightforward and budget friendly. I love that everything has a place and that all of my clothes are in the closet and not separated. I used to have a dresser in my bedroom where some clothes were stored. This system keeps my closet more organized, making it feel bigger. - Kamrin

It seems my closets always need cleaning out or reorganizing. That’s probably because I only deal with a section or two at a time instead of emptying the whole thing and starting from scratch. However, I do have a couple of tips that help me find what I’m looking for. First of all, clear containers are a must, especially for overhead shelves. However, I do confess to having shoe box sized containers on lower shelves that are not clear, but are boldly marked with type of content. My other tip concerns gifts. I put gifts in bags with handles and hang them on hangers on clothes rods. If I leave the bags on the closet floor I tend to forget where they are. Of course, it doesn’t have to be gifts. It can be anything you don’t want in plain sight. Closets! I’m glad I can sometimes just close the door. – Gina

I have switched out all of my hangers to the black velvet style. I feel like they were a game changer because nothing falls off of them and they really are space savers. The other thing I like about my closet is the shoe rack that my husband built. It holds a lot of shoes and they are easy to access. My master bedroom closet is jam-packed full of clothes because I thrift often. But I am paring down...slowly. I can offer one more tip that I use in my drawers. I can put tons more in my drawers by folding and standing my underwear up in a line like soldiers than I can by stacking one up on another. There are 18 pairs in the first row. Yes, 18!. – Debbie

Remember in elementary school when the art teacher taught us the secret to rainbow order? Good 'ole "Roy G. Biv." Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. Well, that grade school lesson comes in handy when it's time for me to organize all the shirts, dresses, scarves, and belts that fill up my closet. That's basically the order I arrange all the things. Shirts hang together from the pinks to the black and whites. All the dresses hang together in the same order. The belts are lined up like a rainbow and the scarves stuffed inside the basket are all in rainbow order. The most frequently used scarves are hanging on hooks. And the shoes...well, maybe that can be my next goal. They're (mostly) in boxes or containers, but they haven't yet embraced the rainbow! So, rainbow order and lots of baskets help keep everything organized and make getting dressed each day a colorful experience and a reminder of Genesis 9:13 "I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth." – Jennifer

As someone who hangs on to clothes forever, one way I stay organized and decluttered is with the reverse hanger trick. You simply take your garments on hangers and put them in backward position on the racks. The open end of the hanger should face you. Whenever you wear something, turn the hanger around. At the end of the year, all the hangers facing the wrong way hold items you clearly don't wear and should donate. - Christina

## **Cousin Moms – Prepping Ahead – by Charissa and Kamrin**

By now, all the kids are in the thick of school, after-school activities, sports, lessons, practices and all the things...and Mom and Dad are either working to make things transition the best they can...or yelling, "Help! This is too much!" (or maybe both!). We asked about prepping ahead and how that works to help make the family life less hectic, and some great advice is below:

Kamrin

Our prep for the week has drastically changed, because we now have one in middle school! The kids get home at different times and of course have different activities, and more homework.

As far as meal prep goes, we don't really prep ahead. We both work from home, so my husband has his routine for the lunch making. I grocery shop each Friday and we have three baskets – one for each kid – with specific snacks for each kid. This way they have their food separate, and it helps with our budget. We tell them when to eat what. We also portion out food into baggies. We have a whiteboard in our pantry, and we write down the snacks and lunches for the week, so my husband knows what to pack each morning. He writes down whatever we run out of, so I can buy.

On Sundays, we reset, refocus and have family day. Everyone does their weekly chores, laundry is put away, and bedrooms are cleaned, as well as backpacks. We have dinner together on Sunday night at the table; we have a little Bible study, and talk about the week. Sundays are for family, even if extended family events happen. That's family, too. Mondays are the busiest day of the week for us, so Sundays are important.

During the week, our evenings are so full that I'm prepping dinner in the afternoon with a crockpot, or cooking the meat and veggies all ready to heat when each one eats. One might eat after their activity, another before, etc. We can just put out and reheat. And we're eating well. This requires more meal planning on my part!

When the kids get home from school, backpacks and lunch boxes are put away, and the kids get decompress time, then homework is done first...before dinner. This way their practices and their dinner are work-free, and we have time to pray at night together as a family. Before bed, we make sure all dishes are in the dishwasher and the clothes are washed, as well.

That's our week! We may have to change as we move through the season...and it's exhausting...so we as parents are taking things off our plate so we can refocus on our home and being more organized and intentional with our time – investing in our kids – and not burdened with our chores!

Charissa

I wish I could say that I am a great prepper with meals planned, laundry put away, always ready ahead of time for the week. In a perfect world, that would be ideal! But I'm not perfect and neither is this world!

However, there are a few things we do that do help keep ourselves somewhat planned:

If we are at home on the weekends, I do try to plan our meals, especially during the busy season. I was given a coupon and now subscribe to Home Chef, and love it. I sign up for three meals a week, I can skip or pause any time, and I've found this meal service to be so helpful. From a cost perspective, it's from \$6-\$9 per serving (quicker than fast food, sometimes!) This helps so much because these meals are easy to make and don't take much time. I don't have to think about what to make, what ingredients I have, etc.

Another thing we do for the mornings, which are chaotic getting the kids out the door, is we have the girls lay out their clothes the night before. I definitely try to get the girls to do this each evening, including their shoes, dress, shorts, pants, whatever. This helps alleviate the morning stress.

A third thing we do is purposefully planning when we're going to eat out, looking ahead at our schedule for the week. The nights that are hectic or we're not home to eat, we try to plan ahead for nights we are going to eat out. This also helps in meal planning.

Even though we plan, sometimes the best thing to do on a given night is drive through Taco Bell! But of course, less stress is good: meal service, laying out clothes, and looking ahead and planning for meals out!

## **In the Kitchen – October Pairings – by Marcy Lytle**

Making food fun makes mealtime fun, and fun eating makes for a fun evening...and that's a lot of fun! I absolutely love creating meals that are tasty, not too much of a pain to put together, and then serving them on cute paper plates or trays, or even spread out on a blanket on the floor. Fall is a perfect time to pair up some of your favorite tastes and enjoy them all.

### Waffles and Fruit on the patio

We had leftover frozen waffles from when the kids were here, so we decided to jazz them up one morning and eat outside. Stoke the fire pit if it's cool enough!

- Frozen waffles
- Strawberries and blackberries
- Sugar
- Maple syrup and butter
- Shaved chocolate
- Cool whip
- Chopped pecans

First, prepare your fruit. Slice the strawberries and toss them with the blackberries and a little sugar in a bowl. Let that sit for 30min to an hour before eating.

Just toast the waffles and spread with butter and syrup on the plate. Then spread on the now sweetened fruit. Top with nuts, Cool Whip and then shave the chocolate over the top. Enjoy!

### Grilled cheese sticks and parfaits

One night we stayed in to watch a movie and wanted something cozy and fun to eat. Grilled cheese, Fritos and layered parfaits were it!

- Grilled cheese sandwiches
- Fruit, biscuits or cake, Cool Whip
- Fritos
- Salsa

Make your grilled cheese as usual, and make them crisp. Slice into sticks for dipping. Dust some biscuits with sugar or use cake and make little parfaits, just layering the fruit, the cake and Cool Whip. Fritos are the best chip for this meal, and have you dipped them in salsa...or your grilled cheese sticks too? Well, try it...

### Sweet potatoes and Black beans

My husband loves baked sweet potatoes, and we've been topping them lately for a delightful meal!

- Sweet potatoes
- Black beans



- Onions
- Green peppers
- Pepper jack cheese
- Avocado
- Salsa
- Pepitas

Bake the sweet potatoes. Meanwhile, grill the onions and green peppers in a pan, then add in the drained black beans. Slice open the potatoes and top with butter (be sure to season as you go.) Next add the cheese, avocado and salsa. Then sprinkle pumpkin seeds on top!

### Apples and Cubed Bread

This is called Apple Betty...have you tried it? Easiest quick dessert when you have a few apples and some bread! This recipe makes two generous servings:

- 2 cups of peeled cubed apples
- 4 T Sugar and ¼ tsp cinnamon
- 1-2 cups of cubed bread (I used country white scratch made)
- Vanilla ice cream

In a skillet, saute apples in butter for 3 min til tender. Add the bread cubes. Sprinkle with sugar and cinnamon and toss to coat. Saute until bread is warmed. That's it! Then serve up and enjoy a la mode.

### Italian chopped salad and dressing

I'm pretty sure this might be the easiest, prettiest and most tasty salad for any time of the year! You'll need a big bowl to make this stunning for presentation. And it's a great meal to take someone, too.

- Romaine lettuce, chopped
- Rounds of salami
- Rounds of provolone
- Pepperoncini
- Parsley
- Red onion, thinly sliced
- Cherry tomatoes, halved

Place the romaine in a large bowl. Layer salami and provolone and roll up, then slice. Arrange on the lettuce. Then arrange the other things around to fill the bowl, with parsley in the center.

For the dressing, just used purchased Italian or make your own!

### Side Nachos with pretty plates

I love nachos and my husband recently told me he doesn't like them so much, because the chips get soggy. No problem, we created side nachos!

- Sheet tray
- Nacho topping ingredients like ground meat or fajita chicken, drained black beans, or pintos, grated cheese, black olives, avocado and salsa or pico – whatever you like!
- Tortilla chips

Prepared all the nacho toppings. Cook the meat, place on half the sheet tray. Layer with olives and cheese or things that need to be heated, and do so in the oven. Remove and top with the avocado and salsa, etc. Pile the chips on the other half of the tray.

Non-soggy nachos – pretty and tasty! And include pretty paper plates for serving!

## **SUGAR + Spice- Toss It – by Angela Dolbear**

### **When do beauty products expire?**

I will confess that I hoard beauty products. I have a drawer full of eye shadows, eye liners, blushes, and other products I haven't used in years. I'm sure they are loaded with bacteria...and I'm going to put them on my face? I think not! So, why do I keep them around?

I know I have an emotional attachment to some of the products because they were the first "high-end" products I ever purchased, which made me feel like an adult, and more advanced at my cosmetics game.

I also battle with the feeling that I am being wasteful if I throw something out that is not all used up.

So I ask God now to help me break all these unhealthy mind-sets. Old and expired products need to go. Besides, new products have advanced formulas that are healthier, and perform better.

Let's look at when to toss products.

#### **Mascara:**

I've always heard that mascara should be tossed out after three months of use. But my mascara usually runs out before then, so that's not a problem. Unless I switch brands that I'm using. Then I need to be aware how long the used tubes have been open. If I forget, a quick smell test will let me know the condition of the product. Old mascara has a funky smell, so that lets me know it's time to toss it in the trash. **TIP:** Clean the opening of the mascara tube after use. This will keep the seal tight and keep it from drying out too soon. **TIP #2:** Pumping the mascara wand in and out adds bacteria to the product! Twirl the wand on the way up to pick up product.

#### **Nail polish:**

I never thought nail polish expired. Recently, I dug into my nail polish archives for one of my longtime favorites, a glittery champagne colored polish. After I applied it, it looked dull, and started chipping off the next day. Suspicious and a little heartbroken, I queried the web, "does nail polish expire?" It turns out, it does!

Unopened polish can last between 5-8 years. Opened polish bottles last up to two years. I read that expired nail polish can appear thick and gooey, which makes a smooth application impossible. I have a much-needed nail polish clean-out in my future.

#### **Lip Products:**

Lip products have a much shorter shelf-life than nail polish. Lip glosses should be tossed after a year. Lipstick should be tossed after two years. Bacteria builds up in the products making lipstick smell odd, breakdown and appear sweaty, and even display patches of mold. Yuck.

Confession time: I have a tube of Chanel red lipstick I purchased when I got my first full-time music store managerial job in 1988. Yes, it's 35 years old. I keep it because it reminds me that

19-year-old me celebrated an adulthood milestone by purchasing a \$25 tube of lipstick at a cosmetic counter in a high-end department store.

I admire 19-year-old me. After I clean out all the expired products from my cosmetics, I think 54-year-old me needs to celebrate the accomplishment. But probably not with a tube of Chanel lipstick of which there are about 15 shades of red, all at \$55 each. Maybe I will save that milestone marker for when I turn 55 next year. But I will remember to celebrate with something that makes me happy, and I will remember to keep clean and safe by tossing out old products.

The beauty of blessings to you!

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

## **Tried and True -October**

I'm always learning, at least I hope I am. If I listen, observe, enjoy life and keep my mind free from anxiety, it seems I learn more. Here's what I learned last month:

"Spawl" – do you know what this word means? I didn't until we took a walk and my husband pointed out one in the sidewalk!

The Dollar Tree has cute fall picks you can just stick in your current wreath to make it transition to the new season!

I never shop at resale shops...until I did. And I realized that some sell new products as well, and I scored a pair of Madewell shoes for under \$19 – like new!

Marshalls seems to always have the cutest totes – and they change all the time. I just found one that says Farmers Market and it has the best pockets inside for jars and things I might buy, to keep everything separate!

Easy fall snack my DIL shared with me – square pretzels with a caramel on each one – melted. Then press in a piece of apple. Done.

A scarf hanger (very inexpensive) can be used for hair clips and bracelets, for plain viewing and wearing. I love mine! It hangs on the back of my closet door.

Have you seen the movie *What's Up Doc?* With Barbra Streisand and Ryan O'Neal? Find it, watch it, have friends over...and laugh your heads off!

Target has the cutest little baskets in the dollar spot. Consider placing one out, full of fall paper napkins (also at Target in the kitchen area), to have on hand.

Just change out your throw pillows on your bed for seasonal looks. Use pillow covers instead of pillows. They're easier to store in drawers and take up so much less room!

You can just take and walk and look for dead branches, place them in a vase, set on a table, and voila! Fall décor!

I found the coolest pancake pan 50% off at World Market for making fall shapes on your breakfast – fun for all! It's by Nordic Ware.

It's the time of year for Jiffy Pop – on the stove – for movie night! It's so fun.

We recently found an Etsy shop that makes address signs. We are so pleased with ours!

Enjoy fall sunflowers, fresh and tall in a vase...but they always fall over? Just tie with string and they'll stay up straight and pretty!

Super cute way to jazz up donut holes presentation for the kids – get some of those curly end skewers at World Market and slide on three donut holes for each serving!





HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Pumpkin Party Fun – by Marcy Lytle**

A pumpkin party with your family, neighborhood kids, or just whomever you want to invite might be so fun this year. And all you need is someone to suggest how to pull it together! So this month, we're sharing some fun ways to have the pumpkin party because it's that time of year!

### For game ideas:

Purchase skeleton hands from the dollar store and permanent markers – let the kids paint tattoos and rings or color in fingernails. Be sure to snap a photo when all of the hands are colorful and complete!

Purchase weird snacks (10) and have a “blind taste” guess event. Just go through the Dollar Store and grab a bag or snack that looks like it would taste awful. Be sure to provide bandannas for blindfolding and offer a taste of each one, allowing everyone to guess what it is. See if anyone can!

You know that black spider web netting? Let the kids place it on top of the parents' heads and create a ghastly hair-do using bobby pins and other creepy things like spiders and pipe cleaners. You could even grab a few hats at the dollar store, or any other odd little things to place in the “hair.”

Create a scavenger hunt in the backyard by hiding all sorts of Halloween goodies. Or make the scavenger hunt part of a walk through a park. Go out ahead of time and make a list of things for the kids to find, type it up and print it out! Give the kids a marker and take a family walk, as they find and mark off as they hunt.

Decorate pumpkins. Yes, decorate instead of carving this year! You can purchase pumpkin paint, stickers, pipe cleaners and toothpicks, etc. Lay out a big tarp or newspaper and let each person design a mini pumpkin, or pumpkins of all sizes. Display them on your porch after you're done!

Get tiny pumpkins for each one, provide markers and confetti (for hair) and draw names. Then create the face on the pumpkin (and the hair) of the name you draw!

### For the food:

Make it easy on yourself. There are SO MANY ideas you can google for fun food, but some are labor intensive!

Sliders are a great option, and the family can each make their own. Provide sliced black olives as edible eyes, cut the cheese and meat using pumpkin or Halloween cookie cutters, mix mayo with ketchup for a spooky spread, and slice up red peppers for added color...or whatever you think of! Let each build their own.

One easy dessert is to purchase one of those large chocolate chip cookies and give the kids a couple of frosting cans, and let them squirt on the eyes, nose and mouth to make the cookie a pumpkin.



Skewer chocolate and glazed donut holes in alternating colors, for a cute presentation and easy snack.

Halloween doesn't have to be something we avoid as a family because we're fearful. It can be a time of celebration of all things fall, including pumpkins and all! If you have older kids, invite them to create one activity or food for the family, so they're involved. Let the little ones color pages from a coloring book to hang on string for a banner. Use colorful fall plates and napkins, and consider a new drink for all to try and enjoy – like oranges tossed in your lemonade!

## **I Don't Do Teens – Exasperated? – by Marcy Lytle**

By definition, exasperated means irritated or annoyed. And yes, parents can be irritated and annoyed with their own kids! Maybe we feel guilty for those feelings, but don't! It's perfectly normal to be an exasperated parent when raising teens. After all, they try us in the most trying of ways!

Maybe you feel exasperated at their lack of attention to their rooms. Laundry, food, smells, and how they stay inside with the door shut ALL THE TIME. It's okay to have family meetings, set ground rules, and enforce them regarding bedrooms...even if your teens don't like you. But going in there and cleaning for them, yelling and screaming, and belittling and degrading won't help you or them.

Maybe you feel exasperated at their grades in school, for a multitude of reasons. If phones are an issue and you pay for that phone, then remove it...until homework is done. If your teen is struggling to understand, talk about getting a tutor, or listening to your kid's frustration and why they are struggling with grades. And if your expectations are too high because you expect perfection, consider letting that one go!

Maybe our kids exasperate us with their constant obsession with that boy or girl, with what they wear, or who they follow on social media, or how they look. We tell them they're awesome, they are loved, they are amazing, and yet they're still obsessed with finding affection and affirmation elsewhere. Continue to love and guide and point them to Him in all the ways you can by loving Him yourself, and being a good example.

Maybe our teens just exasperate us with their clumsiness, their uncanny inability to notice and be aware of things, their fickleness and their outbursts. Their bodies are changing, hormones are raging, and they deal with pressures at school of the worst kind. The home needs to be a safe place, where they can tell us anything without reproach, and we can be patient with them in their awkwardness.

So now that we've talked about these things that exasperate parents of teens, what if we just can't deal? Perhaps all of the above happens all day, every day, and we want to scream, run away and never return to these kids that seriously can't belong to us...because they're so well...exasperating!

I recall hitting a wall with both of my kids as they entered high school. It was much easier when they were small and a fun Bandaid fixed every little cut, and a hug was all they needed. I remember crying out in prayer and saying, "I don't know what to do." I know that I was hurt many times by the actions or inactions of my kids. And I wondered how these kids would grow up and what they would become.

The best thing for exasperation is to let go, ask Him, and wait for wisdom. That's it. There is so much we can do as parents, and after we've guided, taught and been there for them...they eventually need to learn to run to Him. He has what we don't...in every area. There's really a freedom and peace that results when we give our kids to Him and wait for wisdom, and just obey as He directs us, too.

It looks different in each house, and sometimes we feel like our kids are too far gone or we're too tired and frustrated. That's okay. It happens. And He knows. He knows the number of hairs on our kids' heads, and he watches over them when they sleep...and when they're not asleep. He's a better gatekeeper than we are.

Exasperated? It's okay. Take it to Jesus and love those kids the best you can.

## **An Adage a Day – Wills and Wants – by Carole Gilbert**

As we're getting ready for the upcoming holiday season, let's put into perspective what's important. And for those of us moms that like to make sure everything is tended to and perfect, our perspective might need to be adjusted. I had to learn this the hard way and if I had known then, what I know now, things could've, would've, and should've, been different. I'm talking mostly about the time when I was raising my children. I tried to fill in the gaps during situations and times I felt we were missing out because of our lack of extended family since we had lost so many of ours. I had the will and I made sure to find a way to get it done. For example, I found myself giving extra treats or gifts on holidays, when all along that was not what was needed anyway. And this all leads me to express...

One of my favorite all time proverbs says,  
"If there's a will, there's a way."  
I now believe when a way is needed,  
The very first thing to do is to pray.

Whatever I hope or will to do,  
Should always come from above.  
So, I turn all of my thoughts to God,  
And know He'll answer me with love.

George Herbert started this phrase,  
Way back in his 1640 published book.  
I like the way he said it first.  
Let's pause and take a look.

George worded this curious quaint old quote,  
"To him that will, ways are not wanting."  
But for us who hope to put God's will first,  
Simply makes this phrase seem quite daunting!

To put our will first and God's to the side,  
Is not the best for our life.  
It can cause disruption, and dissension with Him,  
And completely fill our days with strife.

It's fine to want and also to will.  
It's what all normal people do.  
But as we look to God for our guidance,  
He wills us the best wants to choose.

1 John 2:17, *And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

## **In Each Room – The Fall Table – by Marcy Lytle**

I used to never have my dining table “set” as we just have a small living area/dining, so mostly the table was just against a wall with décor maybe in the middle. But the past few years I’ve wanted to actually have it “set” for the different seasons, just for fun. I’ve begun to collect sets of dishes (inexpensive and pretty melamine) and placemats and glasses and candles, etc. I keep all of these things in a cabinet in the garage, to pull out as the seasons come and go.

Here’s an idea for your fall table, should you decided to set yours as well:

Tip: Always include height, texture, color and light when decorating your table!

I found the prettiest set of square plates, large ones, on Amazon. I usually start with the plates and then find things to go with those as I build the table.

At an antique store, I happened upon an old tablecloth with napkins set that looked like it had never been used. I don’t always have a tablecloth or even a runner, but I thought this one would be great for fall, since it was a neutral color.

Hobby Lobby had the prettiest set of drinking glasses in that amber hue, with fall designed etched on them, and they were on sale. Grabbed them!

And I love finding sets of cutlery in gold or silver at places like Marshalls or TJ Maxx.

Now, for height I just looked around the house and found a tall plant that I moved from its place on a shelf, to the center of the table.

I have a drawer full of cloth napkins and added these to mix and match.

And finally, I added two small candles and two pumpkins to line down the center.

The height is the plant, the color is the pretty oranges and golds from the sunflowers on the plates, the texture is the tablecloth and the different feels of the things sitting on the table. And light – well that’s always some kind of candles.

You can vary it up and add placemats, or use your fancy silverware instead of plastic, or even glam up your table or pare it down, all depending on the look you want!

Somehow, as I walk by that table every day, all decorated and pretty, I feel calm and thankful and peaceful that we have food to eat, a place to enjoy it, and the wonderful season of fall to take it all in with friends and family.

## **A Night to Remember – Ghastly Hair – by Marcy Lytle**

It's the month of Halloween when we decorate all things pumpkin, eat candy corn, and enjoy the fall season. And dressing up is so fun, in costumes, to become another character for a night, to create quite a fright! Gather the family, and let the kids create ghastly hair-dos, take photos, laugh out loud, all while you learn about what the bible says about hair!

Preparation: Gather black netting, bobby pins, plastic spiders and worms, spooky stickers, and anything else that can be used to create a crazy hair-do for this devo.

In the OT there are mentions of goat hair, of long hair that is not to be ever cut - and even hairy arms! Hair is mentioned a lot in the bible!

As you go through this family devo, after each consideration about hair, have the kids design the spookiest hairdo they can conjure up, with the craft pieces you have.

Matthew 30 says the hairs of our head are numbered! What an amazing Creator we have, that he knows how many hairs are on our heads!

Take a minute to describe each other's hair color, texture and length. Now try to count how many hairs are on your own head. It's just an impossible task! But nothing is impossible for God!

(Place the netting on the hair of the parents and secure with pins)

This means he cares for us SO much, even when we lose a hair!

Proverbs 16 says gray hair is a crown of splendor. This means it's magnificent! Do we know anyone with gray hair? Grandparents, right? They deserve the utmost of love, because their hair is gray – it's like they've earned a crown for living so many years.

(Place a few stickers on the head or add a headband)

Remember the story of the three guys that were thrown into a fire-furnace? It says when they came out of the fire, not a hair on their head was singed. No sign of a burn! God was with them in the fire! They were thrown in the fire because they wouldn't bow to other gods, so God went with them in the fire and not even their hair smelled like smoke.

(Add a worm or a spider to the hair)

In Luke 7 a woman knelt beside Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair and worshiped him. Jesus was pleased with this lady and her adoration for Him. He is pleased when we worship him, as well.

(Now mess up the hair and make it look ghastly or frightful!)

Finally, in Revelation it says when Jesus returns his hair will be white like wool. White is a symbol of purity and cleanness, and that's what we are when Jesus forgives our sins and wipes

them away forever! When something is dirty and it's wiped clean, it shines for all to see. And that's what Jesus does for us!

(Take family photos and laugh out loud.)

Now, pray together:

*Thank you Lord Jesus for knowing us so well, and even knowing about our hair. Thank you for protection, for forgiveness, and for wisdom that comes with age. You are a good Father and we love you, always and forever. And thank you that we can have fun as a family with you as our Lord. Amen.*

## **Tiny Living – Bits and Numbers – by Leyanne Enterline**

Living tiny this past summer, one would think that it would have been quick and easy to cool the place down! At least I thought that! But with the super high temps we endured, it seemed it took a “bit” longer than usual and never got as cold inside our space as we wanted it to. It was maddening!

We have two temperature controllers, one in the main area and then another in the “master” bedroom. In order to keep it cooler during the day while we were at home we had to set both to around 75 and closed the vents that are in our bedroom. We also kept two box fans going in the boys’ room and the vent fan on in the bathroom. Our bill had literally been double these past few months...even on into September! I can’t imagine what it costs to keep a larger home cooler but this seemed outrageous!

When we were out and about or on vacation, we kept both temperature controls set to 80. That at least kept things inside from melting. But when we returned home it took more than a bit to cool it back down to where we could breathe inside! When we were gone, we also made sure to keep all the blinds closed so not let in any type of sunlight, because that made our home warm up way too much. I felt like we were vampires, sometimes! I mean we went outside a lot but when we were inside, we had to keep it as dark as we could to stay cool.

We keep a large dog crate inside that holds both of our very large dogs inside together, in case of bad storms or extreme heat. They are by far outside farm dogs, but even they will come running in for some cooler air. We let both of them stay in for a bit and kept a box fan on them as well.

Luckily, the nights cooled down and we did sleep comfortably. We kept both the controls set to 68 and that seemed to be the magic number that worked to keep everyone cooler. We did have to prop the boys’ room open with the box fan and we had two more going in there, and those did help some.

How’s that for bits and numbers? It was all about doing everything we could to change things a bit, and setting the digits to what we needed for comfort. With how hot our Texas summer was we are looking forward to the cooler fall temps where we can actually open our blinds again in the trailer and watch the birds out the window!

Hopefully, October will be the month for us to experience a bit of a chill and less number watching...

We are so ready!





YOU

## **Under Pressure – Those Wise Ants – by Debbie Haynes**

I recently had a dream where there was a bed with a crisply ironed, snow-white bottom sheet and a black headboard, but no other bed linens. On the wall behind the headboard was an electrical outlet. Next, I saw an army of black ants marching out of the holes in the plug and they marched down the wall and onto the bed. They were in a very straight line, and marched back on the opposite side back into the wall. This went on for some time, and I could see that they entered the “hub” – with a domed top – and I could vaguely see inside. Inside the ants were working intently, quietly, and cleanly. They were not deterred from their mission in any way.

When I awoke, I immediately ordered a bug sprayer...just in case. I don't mind dreaming about ants, but I don't want to live with them!

I also began praying....

Ants represent hardworking teams, cooperating teams, always working for the benefit of the whole and never with selfish motives. They're always aware and wise concerning the future, storing up provisions. Because of their size, ants know that cooperation and teamwork are the only way they can accomplish a task.

There are verses in the book of Proverbs that tell us to go to the ant and observe her ways and be wise. It further says that ants are small, and exceedingly wise.

I read that ants are the most laborious insects in existence, having astonishing systems of organization – always to the best of the whole unit. They are more efficient at tilling soil than are earthworms! They are better at seed disbursement than are birds. They are ingenious parents, carpenters and masons. Each has their own specific job, yet together they can lift 5000 times their body weight.

So it makes sense that the scripture warns us to watch them and pay attention. The ants do all of these things without a ruler standing over them.

Maybe we can consider the ant, to be prepared. If we're wise and cooperate together, we can accomplish anything because we have the Lord as our leader.

I read further about my specific dream and what a bed might represent, and I read that beds represent rest, healing and intimacy. Electrical outlets might indicate plugging into power – being “grounded” in the Spirit.

Yes! What a great thing to pray for and believe!

After my dream, after considering the ants, I offered this prayer:

*Dear Jesus, we do have a king and you are our King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We look to you to give us wisdom and guidance in all things we need to do, to prepare for, and to accomplish in your name. Help us accomplish these things without show, without fanfare, without selfish motives...but with great determination. Amen.*

## Inner Strength – The Other Me – by Michelle Wyatt

What does it mean to have inner strength? I think of it as regulating what's going on in the inside with what's happening on the outside.

Oftentimes, we are going through something that's hard to put aside, in order to do a job or other task we are faced with. Similar to the phrase "mind over matter" I like to think of inner strength as heart and soul, over body. My body is often in physical pain, but as a mom and teacher, letting my heart and soul take the lead gives me relief from the pain. On extreme days I may not get full relief, but that's when my heart becomes filled with joy at my boys' compassion and helpfulness.

Previously, I have shared stories of inner strength from being with my boys as their mom. In addition to being a mom, my life as a special education teacher requires a lot of inner strength. I would like to share other aspects of me in my life. Not only am I a mom, but I am a special education teacher with chronic rheumatoid arthritis.

One of my favorite teaching stories is of the time one hour took everything I had to walk from my car to my classroom. Once I sat down at my teaching table, I wasn't sure how effective I was going to be as a teacher. I was fighting back tears from the swelling and pain of my knees. My students rose to the occasion and made a 100 on their math assessment. We celebrated so much that I got a break from the body pain by having the inner strength to be present for my *boys*, as I call them. With a caring heart, putting their needs above my own, and being present, took an Inner Strength – and it was completely worth it!

"How are you?" one of the boys asked a couple days later as my knee was so swollen. I propped it up on a chair with a pillow under it from the reading corner. A couple of my students have always been helpful, but on this day my boys were practically competing for how to help. It took inner strength for me to accept my limitations. I'm so glad I did, because seeing the boys help me brought me such joy.

Kids really can't be leaders if we never give them the opportunity. Of course, none of this would have been possible had it not been for my faith in God and strength from the Holy Spirit to get me through all of this.

Sweet surrender, full of love  
Feel the warmth of heaven above

Light color nature, so sweet  
I fell before Jesus' feet

For he is my Savior, true and true  
He's here for me, he's here for you

Shining shimmering stars of night  
Let there be light  
Let there be light  
God will make everything all right

I hope this story and poem inspires you to think of inner strength as it applies to your life.

If I can do it, so can you.

## **A Hopeful Heart - Fear or Love – by Christina Oberon**

"There are only two emotions: love and fear. All positive emotions come from love, all negative emotions from fear." Have you ever heard that quote? It was spoken by author and speaker Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, who was known for her work in the field of death and dying, particularly the stages of grief.

When I first heard this, it really made me think critically about the possibility that every decision we make is rooted in either fear or love. Fear and love are opposite emotions, so it is impossible to be in both states of being simultaneously. "If we're in fear, we are not in a place of love. When we're in a place of love, we cannot be in a place of fear."

The concept of 'Fear or Love' has stuck with me for years, almost serving as an internal compass when I find myself in situations, causing me to check in with my heart and determine whether my actions are driven from a place of fear or love.

A great example of this was when my husband and I were faced with years of infertility. I had many moments of fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear over whether I'd ever be a mom. Fear of fertility treatments. But I leaned in to love. I had to connect to God's love, first and foremost, to keep me grounded in the vision of love I had for the child I desired and the love for my husband and the life we were building. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." 1 John 4:18

In choosing a response rooted in fear, I am saying that I am helpless and controlled by the circumstance or event. When looking at fear, we have the choice to 'Forget Everything And Run' or 'Face Everything And Rise'. Fear fosters negative emotions like anger, guilt, worry, and sadness. How often do we operate from, or make a decision based on fear, and feel good and fulfilled afterwards? It's rare. Fear keeps us from saying what we feel. It carries pain and regret.

In my homeland of Hawaii, Aloha, at its essence, represents coming from the heart, symbolizing love. There's a strong emphasis on approaching all aspects of life with aloha, making decisions, working, and engaging with the world from a place of love.

When we choose love, it gives us a choice. It cultivates positive emotions such as joy, peace, and contentment. Love's strength surpasses that of fear, yet fear prevails unless we harness love to fuel selfless deeds in our world. Love's might shines brightest when we actively engage with it, entrusting ourselves to its embrace and letting it nourish our hearts.

## Healthy Habits – Better Than Sleep – by Marcy Lytle

I'm not sure there are many that would say there's anything better than sleep for good health! Well, drinking water and eating and exercising go along with sleeping well, don't they? And we are bombarded on all forms of media about getting enough zzz's at night, to promote health. Of course, this is true! But I have found that for my mental health, there are sometimes other things better than sleep! On occasion, of course.

When my mind and heart is heavy, sometimes it just helps me to go ahead and *wake up and pray*. I've even awakened my husband when I'm in desperate need of sleep, because he has asked me to do so. He prays with me and holds me, and THEN the sleep and rest comes.

When I'm wide awake due to whatever reason (sometimes, it's because I had an Icee too late!) I just *get up and work*. It's silent, I feel most creative to write, and I enjoy the time to do so early, early in the morning. Sometimes, I go back to bed and sometimes I don't. But I feel great when I get caught up and hit the day refreshed...even without sleep.

When my daughter calls or my sister texts, and I've already been asleep but I'm awakened with their call for prayer or help, I'm *happy to answer*. There's nothing more reassuring than having a person to be there when you can't sleep, and I'm happy to be that person for them.

When a baby awakes in the night to be fed, I remember dreading getting up and out of bed, especially in the winter, and I just hoped and longed for that first night when the kids slept all night. But then again, those middle of the night feedings are the *most intimate of times* with those kids in your arms in the stillness and the dark.

I'll stop here and say that yes, sleep is awesome, if it's sound and restful. But there are times when the reason we are awake or we are awakened is a good one...and we can hopefully catch up on sleep the next day.

I've found out that multiple nights of waking up and staying awake certainly drains me and is not healthy. But once in a while, that middle of the night wide-eyed person I become is actually fun and gets a lot done when she's up and doing...

Back to a few more...

When the alarm goes off for that early morning flight, it's a joy to awaken and pack the car and leave. I can't sleep anyway, in *anticipation of the fun that's coming*...so early morning flights are our favorites.

When the phone rings and my husband gets an emergency call in the middle of the night for work, those folks in need are thankful he's on call...even though sleep is interrupted. And *problems are solved*...in the dead of night.

While there's nothing worse than losing sleep and being tired the next day, there might be a time when losing sleep at night is necessary, a delight, and something to be analyzed as to why we're awake. If we're waking up with worry, we need prayer. If we're stirring with ideas, we

might need to write. If our kids are in need, we might need to pray. If vacation is here, we may have well rejoice.

Sometimes...just sometimes...there's something better than sleep at a given moment. And then later, when sleep comes...it's sweet and restful and we're energized once again.

## Life Right Now - The Right Light - Jennifer Stephens

There was stomping. Crying. Definitely whining. And a generous dose of dramatic arm flailing. Typical toddler behavior? Maybe. But this wasn't a two-year old acting out. It was (gulp)...me. Yikes! Now, here me out. I don't usually react this way. Really. And it only lasted a minute or two (Um, don't fact check that with my husband...). Here's the deal. We were on a road trip and I was attempting to get ready for the day, applying all the lotions and potions that make me feel presentable to the world, but the lighting in the room was HORRIBLE! The eyeliner went on all wonky. The blush too clownish. And the lipstick? Ugh. Remember Endora from *Bewitched*? We were twinning.

I was having a meltdown.

Unreasonable behavior? Perhaps. But haven't we all been there? Attempting to get ready in a strange place and the lighting is just...off. And getting ready for the day does require a certain type of light. It shouldn't be too harsh (please no fluorescent bulbs highlighting every facial flaw), but it also can't be too faint (like the dingy diffused lighting this particular hotel room offered). Lighting sets the mood and proper illumination is important. I was clearly in the mood for bright lights that morning! Something a wall sconce or an accent lamp might offer. If Zooming our way through C-O-V-I-D a few years ago taught us anything, it's that lighting matters! Sometimes the wrong lighting can be just plain scary! I can't be the only one frightened by the ghastly sight of my own face looking back at me on the screen during that first online meeting (And ordering a ring light ASAP!).

On our next stop along the route, we discovered another lighting issue. When there's not enough of it. In an isolated boxcar rental in the middle of the west Texas plains, turning off the lights left us in pitch black darkness. Not even the moon and stars were strong enough to peek through the curtains. As any middle-aged person knows, that is NOT going to work for those late-night trips to the bathroom! With the help of a well-placed shoe propping open a barely cracked bathroom door, we had precisely enough light to guide the way.

Whether it's basic track lighting, a trendy pendant fixture, or an ornate chandelier, the right light matters. On this trip a well-placed lamp would've prevented the Endora makeup vibes (and possibly avoided a tantrum) and a night light plugged into the wall would've kept us out of the dark.

Sometimes we find ourselves in the darkness of life, don't we? Maybe that looks like disappointment, feelings of despair, or just feeling lost and alone. Light was one of the first things God created. He saw the goodness of light and separated it from the darkness. When we feel overcome and overwhelmed with sadness, we can remember the gift we have in Jesus. He is our light when we can't see. When the path ahead looks murky, He will guide the way. His light is always the right light.

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'" John 8:12





MARRIAGE

## **For Better or Worse - King Size Bed – by Kaelin Scott**

My husband and I had the same comforter for seven years. We had upgraded to a king size bed and bought a cute comforter that we both liked. Only after a while, we noticed that it didn't hang down very far on the sides of the bed. If either of us pulled the covers toward us, the other's leg was hanging out. It was rather annoying, but we just thought maybe that's how comforters were on king beds, since we'd never had one before. After a while, we got used to it and it became normal. I still noticed it sometimes when making the bed, but I just made it as even as I possibly could.

Well, after seven years of using that same comforter, it started to get worn and dingy. I washed it and fluffed it, but it was just getting old. So around Christmas time, we decided it was time for a new one. We looked in the home aisle at Walmart and found one that looked nice and would match our room fairly well, and it landed in the cart to come home with us.

When I made the bed up with this brand new comforter, I was overjoyed to find that it actually went down on both sides of the bed! It was a beautiful sight to behold, and quite luxurious after seven years of trying to stretch the blanket over the bed. We felt like kings with our new comforter, especially since no one's leg was hanging out that night.

Incidentally, I was cleaning out a closet not long after that, and I came across the plastic case our old comforter had come in. I was about to throw it away when I noticed something that made me shake my head and laugh at the same time – it was a queen size comforter! For seven years, we had slept on a king bed with a queen size comforter. Boy, did I feel silly!

Isn't marriage like that though? Life doesn't always fit into the perfect box we have imagined, and sometimes we have to make do with what we've got. Sometimes we get in a game of tug of war with our spouse, like my husband and I did with that comforter some nights. Each having their own opinion on how things should go. Having to compromise somewhere in the middle.

Some seasons are long and tough, but you get through them together, hand in hand. And when the good times come, they're that much sweeter because of all you've been through. You learn to lean into each other and appreciate what you have, enjoy the little moments, look at the glass as half full.

And sometimes you just have to laugh at yourselves, because you bought the wrong size comforter and then suffered through it for seven years.

## **Date Night Fun – Visit the Old – by Marcy Lytle**

I don't know why old places are so fun to visit and enjoy, but they are. Anything "other than" the norm or where we live now is fascinating, and can make for really fun date experiences. We've found old places to visit near home and down the road, and we come away with more knowledge and a good time together...the best kind of date to have!

Old theater – I've mentioned this before in other months, but it really is a charming night out if you can find a town that has one of the old theaters on the square. There's nothing like it. Maybe they're showing a movie or a live theater play, but both are good. And it's fun to get dressed up and go out to dinner before...at a place near the theater. And then walk hand in hand to the venue!

Old district – Lots of big towns have old districts, and it's listed on Trip Advisor as a must-see place to visit should you vacation there. Maybe your own town has an old district...the oldest part of town. And maybe they have a walking tour you can take on your own. Check with your Chamber of Commerce or Visitors Center and see. Lots of times the buildings have historical markers on them. Read them. Stop for coffee and discuss what you saw.

Old museum – The museums in tiny towns are sometimes overlooked and not frequented by many visitors. But often, the person behind the desk in that museum has amazing stories to tell. And walking around to see artifacts and old photos, and read the history...it's so fun...doing it together on a date. We recently visited an old clock museum – fascinating! Go for old timey shakes afterwards!

Old neighborhood – If it's chilly or cold, it's fun to pack a thermos and head to an old neighborhood to drive and look at old houses...like really old ones. Observe the architecture and see if you know the style. Look at the yards and the disrepair or the reconstruction! Get out and walk if it's not too cold. And then find the local grocery in this old neighborhood and buy a few goodies for dinner as you head back home.

Old people – Well, maybe you're getting old yourselves...or not! But invite a couple from another generation to go out with you! Converse over dinner and ask them what they do. Old people often don't get asked any questions at all! Ask about their kids. Or if you're old and you're inviting a younger couple, pay for their meal! Invite their kids along if you want, or maybe they will get a sitter. Get to know these folks and encourage them!

## **After 40 Years – Nights at the Movies – by Marcy Lytle**

We watch a lot of movies at the theater...and from the sofa...at night. And I'm thinking lots of couples do, too. It's the topic of almost every conversation we have with friends, when we visit. "What movie have you seen lately that's good?" someone asks. And then we all share the latest series or movie we've enjoyed, and we even make a note on our phones if one sounds good!

Maybe watching a movie with your spouse isn't the BEST thing to do, because you can't have conversations (during the film). But you CAN do lots of other things. And there are so many great reasons we enjoy the movies together.

We learn to compromise. He loves mystery movies and I do too, but I also love romantic ones – well some of them. So we take turns picking when we're at home.

We both love fun food. So if we're home, we usually enjoy nachos or charcuterie, some sort of finger food we can linger and enjoy as the movie plays.

We can hold hands. I love it when he grabs my hand in the dark theater and holds it the entire movie (after we've finished our popcorn, of course.)

We have great conversations AFTER the movie. We love to look up the actors and actresses, discuss the plot and whether we liked it or not, and talk about our favorite scenes.

We share our snacks. He holds the bag of popcorn and we share the bites. We often share a bag of peanut M&Ms too. It's fun, in the dark, at home or at the movies.

We relax. Like most couples, we work hard all week and a Friday night movie is relaxing, especially at the theater. We get comfy in our seats, I take a sweater or a wrap, and we unwind in front of the big screen.

We skip dinner. We cannot eat a big meal AND popcorn at the movies, it's just is too much! So our dinner IS the popcorn and whatever else we enjoy with it. Sometimes we take dark chocolate and nuts, other times we dip cuties in dark chocolate and refrigerate, and take those. We really enjoy our snacks as our meal!

We even love the drive-in! We've found a few small towns near us that have the old-fashioned snack shacks and we LOVE seeing the big films outdoors or in the car!

After the movie credits roll, we're back home or we've cleaned up our snacks, we head to bed. We still discuss the movie, the characters, the good and the bad, lessons learned or how the movie could have been better. Sometimes we shake our heads at the plot or the twist, or wonder how we missed that important piece of information!

Movie nights help us unwind, create great conversation after, and create intimacy for a couple of hours as we hold hands and sometimes rub toes.

I know some couples that don't watch many movies because he doesn't like what she likes and vice-versa. And I get it. But taking turns, creating the atmosphere and cozying up – well those are all worth the time spent together watching what the other one likes and enjoying the evening with him/her anyway.

## **In This Together – Consider Listening – by Bekah Holland**

*Through good and bad, for richer or poorer,  
in sickness and in health, until death do us part.*

I always get a little anxious at that part of traditional wedding vows. Not because I'm worried on my end, but more because part of being a highly sensitive person means that while I have no doubt that I can get through pretty much anything, my heart does funny things when I think about the people that I love having to struggle, or fight or something else I can't fix. Did I mention I'm a fixer?

It's kind of funny(fine, not funny, toxic) because everything I read talks about women being frustrated because they just want to complain without their significant other jumping in with suggestions on how to fix it. Apparently, people don't like that. And my husband and I are completely flipped. I can't tell you how many times he just wanted a space to vent and I'd just jump in with suggestions or 9 times out of 10, just do whatever I thought needed to be done to make it better. Ask me how well that went. Just kidding, don't ask. It was bad. Not even in the "oops I did it again" (sorry Britney) kind of way. More commonly in the "why can't you just shut up and listen because if I wanted to fix it, I'd just fix it but you make me want to throw stuff" sort of way.

Why am I like this? I'm a good listener. I even like listening. I like being a safe place for people to verbally vomit all of the things so they don't implode. But it takes an embarrassing amount of self-control for me not to "do" something to help. Ask my therapist. Or my teenager. Don't ask my husband though, because he's usually a witness to my people-pleasing-codependent behaviors, and I'd rather there be a few people remaining who don't know the full level of my *crazy-pants-edness*.

Are there worse things than being a fixer? Of course. I'd list it somewhere below leaving toenail clippings anywhere people exist, but worse than squeezing a tube of toothpaste from the middle. However when you are doing the whole day in and day out with the same human while trying not to shake them thing, then fixers are really freaking annoying. Do I know this? Yep. Does it make me less fix-y? Unfortunately, I'm a work in progress. But it does make me more aware of my own shortcomings...even more aware of my tendency to overcompensate. Which gives me the opportunity to bite my tongue and just listen. Or to let people deal with big emotions in their own way.

I've spent a large part of my life trying to avoid conflict, much to my therapist's chagrin. Except for the part that my sessions over the years have more than likely paid for many much-deserved vacations and provided plenty of funny stories at parties (you're welcome, Leslie).

So what, pray tell, does this have to do with anything, you ask?

Even though I may feel things more intensely than most and my intentions might be somewhere near the right place, my real issue is fear. Fear that big (normally angry) feelings will become bigger than I can handle. And maybe some fear that I won't be enough to protect my people from the consequences of that anger. I guess if you want to get down to the nitty-gritty, that fear is related to control. That is not the kind of thing I want to admit, but, here we are anyway. Because no one needs my fixing or control. And trying to do either is just my selfishness standing front and center. I want everything to be sunshiny and comfortable and I'd throw myself

into a woodchipper before I would willingly allow my husband, kids, friends, probably strangers, to experience hurt that I have deluded myself into thinking I can prevent.

This sounds like an admirable quality. And I guess it can be. But I know that deep down, my motives aren't always pure. Sometimes my attempts at controlling situations that feel out of my control are really a way for me to avoid being uncomfortable. And what makes me think that my comfort level matters more than someone else needing to say the hard stuff? Even if what they say is hurtful or angry or words they wish they could take back, it's not my job to be the feelings police (but if that's a real thing, I'd be AWESOME at it!). It is my job, however, to be kind, to listen to understand not just to reply. It's my job to be understanding and offer forgiveness and mercy because the Lord knows I need the same from others more often than not. And I get to re-learn that fun lesson all the freaking time, as it's clear I can be a slow learner.

Thankfully, I have a partner who loves me even when I'm unbearably annoying and gives me grace to try to do better. And I get to offer him that same grace when the big football game he's watching makes him completely bat-crap-crazy and cranky and scares the dogs when he yells at the refs (on TV, where they can't hear him and if they could, still wouldn't care. Sorry – not sorry). And we both keep trying to be better, learn from our mistakes, and love each other a little more than the day before. For me, that means that I have to stop and sit in the uncomfortable and love my people enough to let them mess up without trying to "save" them. Mostly because (*let's be real*) I'm not a savior. But thankfully I know one. And His mercy that covers all of my stupid is available for other peoples' stupid too. Who am I to offer any less?

So let's try something different this month.

If you're a fixer, stop before busting out your proverbial tool kit and maybe, just, and I mean this in the kindest way possible, we all have to shut up. Or if we tend to complain more than not, well, we might consider shutting up here, too. We can listen, not only to what's being said, but also what's not being said, and more importantly listen to that still small voice that reminds us to shut it and just love louder (even though I'm sure that God would say it much nicer but He's definitely given me a few well-deserved "shut ups" in my life).

See what a difference a little attitude and mouth-itude (just me?) can make. Speak some life and some goodness even when the bad stuff is shouting louder, and sit back and see what happens. I'll wait.....

"Duct tape can't fix stupid...but it can definitely muffle the sound."



ENCOURAGEMENT



## Simple Truths - A Little or a Lot – by Marcy Lytle

It seems women everywhere at the moment are a little depressed about something, or a lot about everything. I'm no psychologist or therapist by any stretch, so this story isn't for those that have a chemical imbalance or desperate situations and need professional help. However, this story is for those of us that have a little or a lot of depressed feelings from time to time, either for no good reason we can think of, or because life is just too much some days.

Some days I feel a bit depressed about getting older, or my thoughts take me down trails of why this or that is happening. I can have a very good day with all things going my way, and still feel this sinking feeling just fall over me like a dark shadow. There are days when I've just listened to so much on the news, heard of yet another failed relationship between friends or spouses, or just had pitiful thoughts about myself and my purpose and even my looks...on those days when I've looked in the mirror a bit too long. Depression comes in all sorts of forms and can hit us on any given day when we were just minutes before feeling great.

Again, I'm not talking about a general feeling of depression that lingers and causes spiraling downward toward despair...but rather the kind that makes us just feel frumpy, worthless and without purpose for a bit of time. I think it happens to most women, maybe once a day or week, or month, and we just don't really know how to define it or what to do about it.

So I'll just share what I do when those unbidden thoughts of depression hit me and I don't feel like doing anything, I'm not interested in anyone or anything, and I panic a bit because I feel out of control...

Here are a few suggestions:

- Ask for help. Sometimes I don't, and it's a mistake. But asking my husband or my daughter or a friend to pray for me relieves me of the burden of praying for myself. It helps!
- See if you can figure out the trigger. There are often times when I've just been hit with thoughts and lies and I know it, and realizing that and tuning them out with the truth that I am loved and wonderfully made in His image as His child, causes me to sit up straight and smile.
- Dance, exercise, or take a walk. There are days when I step outside in the sunshine and walk a few blocks, and my whole mood is lifted...IF I look up while walking and think of nothing but God's awesome creation. And dancing in the kitchen? Well, it's awesome.
- Drink something refreshing. It can be water, lemon basil tea, or a frozen coke at McDonalds, something cold...or hot like apple cider or hot cocoa...whatever makes you happy. Get hydrated. That might be all you need.
- Listen to an uplifting song. Find just one song with great lyrics about the wonderful God that loves you, and play it five times if you need to...until the truthful lyrics are replacing the lies in your head. When's the last time you listened to *You Say* by Lauren Daigle?

- Plan an outing. Invite a friend or go alone. I love just walking the aisles at Marshalls, or heading to the movies on a weeknight instead of waiting until the weekend. Think outside the box you've shut yourself inside of, and go enjoy yourself. No guilt allowed.
- Hope again. Feeling hopeless is the worst. You've hoped over and over again for a certain outcome. But this time just place your hope in Him that he knows best, his timing is awesome, and He has the ability to give you peace and joy while you wait. In fact, He's with you right now.

These are just seven suggestions against depression, to try before it starts to settle on us and weigh us down. Nipping depression at the onset is key to staving off its heaviness that lingers. Be encouraged. Depression might visit often, but we can turn it away and shut the door to it taking up residence in our homes and hearts.

## Rooted in Love - Heart on the Page – by Kaelin Scott

“A Bible that’s falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn’t.”

In a way, I guess that’s true. God’s word is a source of hope, encouragement, peace, and truth. Spending time in it daily is an important part of growing in faith, like taking vitamins to keep up your health. But that saying is also misleading.

I’ve had my current Bible for five years now, and it’s definitely falling apart. I’ve had to glue it back onto the spine before, and I’ll probably need to again. I open those pages every day, but I don’t feel any more put together than anybody else. I still fall apart all the time. I’m still a broken, imperfect person in desperate need of a savior.

But it’s not about me. Reading the Bible isn’t something I do to make life easier or smoother or less stressful. Yes, there is so much I can get out of reading my Bible, so many valuable lessons and tools for life. But the main purpose is to get to know my Father, to let Him speak to me. To discover more and more about who He is, and who I am in Him.

He loves us so much, and He wants us to be near Him. He gives us His word as a way to bridge the gap, to reach us and pull us closer. Spending time with Him brings me deeper into His embrace, closer to His heart. Reading the Bible helps me look more and more like Him, dying to my flesh over and over again.

It’s not that it makes things easier, nor does it make us better or stronger than anyone else. As John the Baptist said, *He must become greater and I must become less*. It’s about humbly serving and worshiping and recognizing that we’re lost without Him. The more we learn about Him, the more we realize we need Him so very much. Reading the Bible becomes like drinking water; sustenance to get through each day. We still fall apart sometimes; we still mess up, we still have moments of doubt. But like a child running to their parent, we run back to Him again and again, trusting Him to love us and keep us safe.

Friend, let me encourage you today. You are so loved. You are a treasure to Jesus. He wants to spend time with you. He wants to show you His grace and His truth and His love. All it takes to discover those things is opening up His book. His heart is right there on those pages, all for you. He wants to heal the broken places; comfort you in your sorrow, strengthen your fight against sin. He already knows you inside and out. He’s just waiting for you to get to know Him.

I don’t have all the answers, and I never will. I’m no less human than anyone else. But I know our Savior is good and kind and I know He loves us more than anything. Knowing that doesn’t make life easier, but it does give me hope. It reminds me that I don’t have to face it alone. I can run into His arms every day and trust Him to hold me tight. And you can do that too.

## Unearthly Thing - One Desire – by Angela Dolbear

I love when God recommends a book to me. It's also a bit scary. But I'm old enough to know it's good when He does. Very good indeed.

I've been reading [Hinds' Feet on High Places by Hannah Hurnard](#) for at least two months now. Reading it has been like prescription medication for my heart, mind, and soul, treating the ideas, views and mindsets that needed healing.

There are several portions of the book I had to stop reading because my vision went blurry with tears. I quickly learned how to use the "highlight" feature on the Kindle app on my tablet, so I could make note of the text that spoke to me.

This portion of the book, where the main character reflects on the Sheperd's work in her heart, grabbed my own heart's attention, as if God were speaking to me Himself:

"She felt nothing but a great stillness in which only one desire remained, to do that which he had told her, simply because he had asked it of her. The cold, dull desolation which had filled her heart in the cave was gone completely; one flame burned there steadily, the flame of concentrated desire to do his will. Everything else had died down and fallen into ashes."

One flame, one desire. To do His will. Everything else needs to die and fall away as ashes. My soul was ruled by many desires. But there is only one desire that should live in my heart's home. The desire to do what God asks of me.

The simplicity of this washed through me, bringing great relief. The phrase from the Bible, *His yoke is easy, His burden is light*, rang out in my mind. The stress of trying to do or be so many things had left me.

My strongest desires included closeness with God, and success in the world. Those two desires don't work together. One had to go.

I learned in last week's sermon at my church that the book of Ecclesiastes describes success and any pursuit that is not God alone, as "a wisp of air" (see Ecclesiastes 1:2), and getting what you want is futile, or "vanity" (see Ecc. 2:11). Pursuing anything outside of Jesus is futility (see Ecc. 12:13-14).

One desire, one thing. I had allowed things I thought were just for entertainment to become idols and cloud my vision. I also allowed things that I thought brought me comfort to rule me, and they turned into unhealthy habits, which ended up hurting me and infusing me with guilt and shame. But now, the one thing I desire is doing God's will.

Our time on earth is short. I need to be all about my Heavenly Father's business.

I look forward to books God recommends to me in the future. His correcting hurts for a time, but it is ultimately like salve to my spiritual wounds, and peace to my soul.

God is so good. I will say it again and again.

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her novels are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relatable, and*

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

## Firmly Planted -Natives Take the Heat - Dina Cavazos

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By the time you read this, the brutal summer of 2023 will be over. But, as I'm writing, the stinging tail end of this monstrous heat is still wreaking havoc. I dare not remove the shade cloths yet, and I still have to hand water almost every day. All in all, I think my garden has survived pretty well, but there are always losses in war. This past summer declared war between the climate and my plants.

My garden is mostly natives and adapted plants, but there are some things I just love, like succulents, euphorbias and clematis, to name a few, that I keep trying—hoping they'll somehow make it. Some succulents are doing okay, especially if they're shaded, but others have succumbed to the heat and dried up. A few I brought inside. The plants that struggled the most are the ones I planted in late spring. Their roots just weren't developed enough to help them resist the heat without a lot of support in the form of water and shade. Who knew it would be over 100 degrees day after day after day?

There are actually quite a few hardy troopers who held their ground and have been victorious. Pride of Barbados, Snakeherb (a ground cover), Wedelia (can take over in peace-time conditions), Crossvine, Yucca, Texas Sotol, Nolina, Esperanza, Skeleton Leaf Golden Eye, Foxtail Fern, Anacacho Orchid, Butterfly Vine and others. These Texas wonders can take the heat; however, they've had drip irrigation once a week and supplemental hand watering. I was not willing to drastically test their drought tolerance.

I heard we can expect a cold and wet winter, which translates to "ice." Sigh. That's another kind of war.

My plant friends have to be able to survive extremes in the weather: intense heat and drought and then freezes with ice. I'm here to provide help—some shelter, water, shade, mulch; but without an established (at least somewhat) root system, and the DNA to hang in there by their little tendrils, they won't make it.

As usual, these thoughts about plants, climate, support, and survival bring to mind "wars" that we face every day, especially in these turbulent times. Crisis in our culture, the climate, water shortages, energy shortages, diseases, families divided, common sense gone out the window...I feel a blazing sun burning, only to turn around into a blizzard. It makes me wonder: *do I have a strong enough root system and the "spiritual DNA" to take it? Can I weather the climate of the times?*

Jesus said in this world we would have tribulation but not to be afraid because he has overcome the world. I help my plants overcome with, shelter, water, shade, and mulch. For me, this translates to Jesus, the Word, his promises, and prayer. Yes, there's a war going on. There always has been, hasn't there? It's a war of unseen fire and ice, and like the climate, it feels like it's intensifying. But maybe, just maybe, it's the Refiner's fire calling out his true Kingdom natives.

## Moving Forward - Refining – by Pamela Charro

If you regularly read my articles, what I'm going to write won't surprise you, but I'm just going to put it out there anyway. Every time I ask the Lord what to write about, he always says, "Well, what's going on?" So, the answer to that question is that I'm sick and tired (pretty much literally) of some of the things I'm going through.

*Anyone else?  
I bet I'm not alone.*

I have walked with Jesus long enough to have developed a good amount of patience through trials, and my trust and faith in him haven't really wavered. I know he is good, smarter than I am, and all-powerful. But that hasn't stopped my emotions from feeling the way they do. My heart hurts. I'm tired and disappointed. I have such a deep sadness that it seems to have permeated my bones. It has been such a long, hard wait, one that seems unreasonable and unnecessary. And, if you knew my situation, you would probably agree.

This is hard.

The Lord recently reminded me of the following scripture concerning refinement:

*Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;  
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.*  
Isaiah 48:10

You may have heard the story of the refining process years ago, as I did. It is a very specific task that requires a high level of mastery, because the fire must be hot enough for the impurities to come out of the metal without harming the metal itself. It takes the master's constant attention to scoop the unwanted material out as soon as it rises to the top, and to adjust the temperature as needed. Lastly, the refiner knows he has reached his goal when he can see his own image in his work.

And I thought that God being a master refiner, when I first heard the story years ago, was very touching and sweet. But, to be honest, it doesn't really move me as much as it used to, or really encourage me in my situation as much as I would like. But I will tell you what does motivate me about that story: it's the finished product. It can't be obtained any other way, and neither can the end result of what God is doing in me. I do hate the process sometimes, and I'm sure all of us could say the same about our own refining, but I'm also so grateful that it doesn't stop him from doing what he knows he needs to in order to make me my very most beautiful. I don't want a single second of the temporary pain and discomfort taken away, because I know it won't go on a moment longer than it needs to in order for me to be made pure, holy, and perfect. And that, despite all of my protests, is my heart's truest and deepest desire. It's worth anything I have to endure in this short life.

So, Master, continue your good work, and I'll keep waiting.



FRESH THYME



## **FRESH THYME – Armed and Ready – by Marcy Lytle**

Do you have some friends that you'd call prayer partners in your life? I have a few trusted ones, and guess what? Our lives and our situations are really nothing alike. It seems we want to have friends that are experiencing what we're going through, so they can empathize. And while empathy is good, I'm finding out that having faith is better.

If we have a friend with the exact same issues as we have, we're both struggling and going through the same thing, that might bring a form of intimacy. Maybe we both have aging parents; therefore, we can have good conversations about what it's like, how hard it is, and all the things. But if we have a friend that's on the other side of it, removed from the current pain of it, she can pray with fervent faith for us while we're in the middle of the pain.

Sameness brings comfort, which is great.

But don't we want someone with faith that can move mountains?

One of my closest friends and I are definitely prayer partners. We found out years ago that we struggle with a common thing – our fearful thoughts that overtake us sometimes. But our lives with our grown children are different. She has serious prayer needs for her kids and the family is disconnected at the moment, while I am currently not in that situation. However, I have needs outside my immediate family that are way different than hers. When she asks me to pray for her kids, I have all kinds of faith and can pray without my own pain getting in the way. And when I ask her to pray for my extended family, I know she will...in faith! We are very different in our needs, but very willing to pray when asked.

It's hard to share deep needs with anyone at all for fear of judgment, or someone trying to fix us or tell us what to do, or just embarrassment perhaps at the needs we have. So to have someone in our corner, fighting in faith for our battles that we're just too weary to fight, is amazing. But if we're both weary, it's hard to support each other except by crying together (which, of course, is a great thing.)

I have a couple other friends that I know I can text at any moment, and they will stop what they're doing and pray. I try to be the same friend for them. They don't really relate to my needs, nor do I to theirs, because we're different. But have I so much faith for them and theirs, and they do me, BECAUSE we're going through different battles.

It's sort of like this little army of women we are. One of us might be carrying a shield, the other a strong sword, and still another wearing shoes completely ready to run. We're not all standing in the same line of fire, so we are able to join together as once force and shoot down the enemy for each other.

There's no shame in needing prayer partners. And there's nothing wrong with seeking out friends that have similar circumstances for comfort and an arm to lean on. But if we want some real damage done in time on our knees, let's connect arms together with women with all different needs...each bringing our strengths to the front line of battle.

When my parents were aging and dying, I couldn't really offer others a lot of power in prayer, because I was so weary, I could barely keep my head up. However, my friends that weren't in the thick of that particular battle, prayed big...for me. And it helped, knowing they were standing there while I sat and rested.

Find your prayer partners. Suit up in your individual strengths. Stand firm. Armed and ready.

FRESH THYME - Look Up – by Marcy Lytle

This morning I set out to walk early, because it was hot, although it was September 1. I hope every year that September will bring cooler temps here in Central Texas, but it just doesn't. And I was feeling a bit emotional and blue as I began walking, not due to the heat, but just because of special needs in my family. Walking always helps me put things in perspective, but this morning was especially a good mind shift as the morning breezes blew.

I turned on the street of my usual route and looked up (something I've been training myself to do). I used to just plod my way through my walks, thinking and thinking, and never noticing my surroundings. And when I looked up I saw that the moon was still visible. I know, that happens often, but not every morning. And I don't see it often. This time I did, and I realized that the light that governed the dark night was still hovering over me.

*Point taken, God, you are still with me.*

As I started down another street, going in a different direction, there was the sun rising as big as a boulder, climbing its way upward in the sky, and I was shaken by its beauty. The sunrise always gets me. There it was, the light that rules the day, that shows up faithfully even if I miss its sighting. Even if it's cloudy. It's there.

*Those are my bookends, He said.*

I smiled as I realized that the moon shows up at night to shine in the dark when I'm asleep, and sometimes it lingers to see the sun rise that again reminds me that He is faithful...always. And everything in between; those books that line the shelves of my life, stay together and don't tumble because of these bookends, these lights that govern the day and the night.

I was also feeling a bit weary about life itself, wondering if I've done enough, if what I have done is pleasing to Him, if what I do matters, and all the things that swirl in a busy mind sometimes. And it always starts with observing or hearing about another's success or what she's doing or what they've done...that I haven't accomplished. It was sort of like I was looking into a mirror and staring back was definitely not something I thought would be pleasing to anyone.

*My word is the only reflection you need, He whispered.*

I thought of Psalm 23 about the tender care of the Good Shepherd. How he leads, he makes us lie down, he refreshes us by still waters (and there we can see the reflection of the Shepherd with his rod and staff to protect us). And I remembered that I am his delight, the apple of his eye, and that he would leave the 99 other sheep if I went astray, to grab me and pursue me with goodness and mercy, should I get near the edge of a cliff.

*Thank you,* was what I said aloud, as He walked with me that morning. And I no longer felt blue; there was confidence in my step, and the hope of a new season just around the corner.

The moon, the sun, and the reflection that comes from looking at the One who loves me the most...on a Friday morning walk before my day began...

## **FRESH THYME – Masks – by Marcy Lytle**

I've always thought the worst kind of suffering was illness or loss, but maybe the worst kind of suffering is living lives and wearing on our countenances the effects of bitterness and pain, and being mad at God for not rising up.

Think about the masks the kids are wearing this Halloween. Some are spooky, some are cute, and some kids will just paint their faces because masks are hot and uncomfortable. But whatever costumes the kids choose, their faces are going to be distorted, covered up, or completely unrecognizable.

It's no different with us as adults. Loss and tragedy falls on all of us during life, and we end up with gray hair and fine lines becoming deep lines because of the wear and tear of the years and the tears.

I have found that in my life when I end up with certain masks, let's call them, or paint on my face, so to speak, I too have become unrecognizable to myself and others.

Bitterness is one mask that is like the kid that uses paint to distort their lips and their eyes and to give themselves the appearance of someone else...someone scary. Bitterness is downright scary, because it eats at our flesh and our souls and causes us to frown, purse our lips and grind our teeth at night. And bitterness results when we don't forgive and let go of wounds and hurts.

Pain is present like a stuffy mask that we don't want to wear, but there it sits on our faces as if it's glued on, and we can't get it off. It can be physical pain or that deep soul kind of pain because of loss or abandonment that ultimately results in our thinking God isn't present any more, either. This mask of pain covers any joy that might want to shine through.

Disappointment might look like the masks the kids wear that are attached to the costume, that cover their entire head, with only a couple of eye holes to peer out of. Everyone and everything has hurt us, and we want to be sure it doesn't happen again so we're not exposed in any area. No way, are we reaching out only to be hurt again.

Fear might be masks that kids get the most kick out of wearing because they love to scare the others, the people at the door. And the goriest and bloodiest masks are appealing because the spooky kind of fear at Halloween is only temporary. But real fear that cripples us results in wearing these scary looks that make us wonder and wander, afraid to move and breathe.

Fake and fancy are the masks that lots of kids choose because they want to be a star, represent a celebrity, someone totally beautiful and perfect...so they love dressing up as that person for a night. And we all have someone we want to be, that face we put forward when we try to be what we think others expect us to be, and then we crash and burn when we get home from that place or that event.

So this Halloween, as we stand at the door and hand out candy, or take our kids to trunk or treat events, or help them dress up in all the fun masks and costumes, we could consider the above and think about the masks we put on daily, or the ones that are stuck to our faces.

There's nothing more freeing, I recall, than getting home from trick or treating and taking off that hot restrictive mask and breathing, or washing off all the paint and makeup, and becoming myself again. But who is that person, we wonder...now that we're all grown up and life hasn't been so pleasant to us?

It's worth nothing, praying, asking God to reveal to us, and then being willing to remove the masks so that who we are, who we were made to be, is visible once again. And if we've totally lost sight of who that person is, we can ask for help in removing the masks we wear, so that we can love and be loved again by the good, good Father who sees and knows all...and can heal the most broken of hearts.

## **FRESH THYME - Bicycle, Benches and Bridges**

I don't know why I like these three things so much but I do, and I often pause to snap photos of all three. I even have an entire wall in my bedroom of bridge photos I took on trips and had framed, for a collage. I suppose there are certain things all of our eyes are drawn too, and these things differ from person to person. It's fun to note what you pause to look at, and even have a discussion with friends about theirs.

Here are my three.

### **Bicycles**

We were on a walk recently and there was a bicycle with a basket just sitting on the sidewalk, unattended. We then saw the woman that owned it over by the creek, foraging. However, her unattended bike was so pretty just sitting there, resting, against the backdrop of summer heat, and I stopped to take a picture. I just love bicycles of all kinds, and if one has a basket well – that's even better. There's a lady in our neighborhood that rides a three-wheeled bike, and I want one of those! There's nothing more fun to spot on a weekend than a family riding bikes, or a child learning to ride one. Bicycles are amazing.

### **Bridges**

These are fascinating to me, maybe because there are so many kinds! From big bridges across highways to little country bridges, they enable us to cross over. I especially love the ones we happen upon, as we walk or travel. If they're old or wooden, they make for great photos. If they're tiny and hidden, they invite me in further to explore. And bridges built in gardens are just beautiful. We found a beautiful arched bridge on a trip to San Francisco. And covered bridges – they make me gasp! I think they are my favorite. I remember first seeing one in New Hampshire years ago, as we came around a bend. There are a creek underneath, and it looked like something from the past...

### **Benches**

Now these make sense to me, why I would want to stop and snap a picture. They are inviting. They speak of rest, contemplation and visiting. When we come across a bench on a hike, we love to sit a minute and catch our breath and observe the views. Sometimes benches are just picturesque, especially if they're curated with potted plants nearby, in front of a store on a town square. Picnic benches are some of my faves! And when we walk around a lake, I love seeing a bench on a pier for fishing or snacking or talking or chatting. We even have a bench by our bed, just for looking pretty.

My three faves all happened to start with the letter B. How fun is that? Think about what makes you pause and click, and write about, share it with your kids or friends. Have a fall get together and everyone discuss what you snap and why. What a fun idea that would be...and a great topic of conversation!