



A BUNDLE OF
THYME
For Every Season

Online Women's Magazine | thymemag.com

September 2022



TIPS

The Dressing – What to Keep – by Marcy Lytle

September is one of my favorite months because fall is near, but it's also one of my most frustrating months because it's still hot! However, hopefully we are looking at our closets to see what we might want to purchase, to revisit, to throw out, or whatever...so that we have a closet full of fall color and fun!

The photos this month are items you've been wearing this summer that you'll want to keep around for this next season...

Graphic tees that are a bit too tight – you can wear these under vests, jackets, and sweaters! This one with the airplane in the pattern is from Shein – a place where I love to order online!

Anything gray – like these drawstring pants from Walmart that I wore all summer, and this plaid yellow and gray button up. An oversized sweater would look amazing over this outfit, and summer pants can be worn on into the fall...until it gets really cold...just change out your sandals for boots!

Head scarves and white tees – Keep both of these handy. The scarves you wore on your head all summer now just slip around your neck, and a blazer over a white tee is great for the next season!

Yes, to linen in the fall! – If you have linen tops or gauzy type blouses, it's a-okay to wear them in early fall, especially if the sleeves are long. Add a head scarf in fall hues (add gray) and enjoy these flowy tops while temps are still warm.

Jumpsuits – These are a no-brainer, because they can be dressed up so many ways, especially by adding layers on top. That long vest can take this versatile piece right from summer into fall, no problem at all. This jumpsuit is from Earthbound!

Those summer sweaters and fall hued slides – If you have brown slides, keep wearing them. And if you've got lightweight sweaters, keep them on hand, too! The calendar says September and you'll want the colors of fall, even if it's still too warm for a coat! Sweater is from Versona.

Those floral totes – YES, if they're in darker colors, they can still be carried to the fall markets, on road trips, and more! This cute roomy bag with tons of pockets is from Marshalls! I've even carried it to the movies, and totes my lunch on the go!

Shirt dress – If you've got a long shirt dress, keep it and wear it open with black underneath and denim, as an open vest! Grab your purse and go, looking and feeling great!

Those wordy tees – If you've got a tee that says fall, thankful, gratitude, or any seasonal words at all...go ahead and enjoy them now...why not?

In other words, take what you have and make it work for now...while you shop and look for a few new good pieces for the next season...and create looks for fall with what you have!

Seven for You – Convenience, Yes – by Panel

We drive A LOT. Really, we drive a ridiculous amount. Our kiddos are in activities all over the greater Austin area and mostly, it's fine. Also, we ourselves have activities all over the greater Austin area. When we go from our home to one activity, it's only about 15 or 20-minutes, but multiply that by three or four times a day and it's a ton of driving we frequently do. So, one splurge that's worth it for me, especially when it's just me and the kids, and at the end of a long day, is to drive on the toll road. I like the idea of driving different routes to avoid the toll roads but it is worth it to get us all home even 10-minutes earlier by driving a toll.

Expensive hand soap is worth it to me. I experience sensitivity in my hands from time to time and I find that the type of hand soap I use has an impact. I do not mind splurging on high-end hand soap when I do the shopping.

Paying for a housekeeper is worth it to me as a busy mom of three. When I'm bogged down with housework, I am grumpy and struggle to be spiritually mature. As I write this, I'm sending an SOS to a new house cleaner and will ask for some help! Having a clean space is so worth the money of paying for help in the house. Interestingly, I also find having help in cleaning the house gives me an emotional lift and I feel more like tidying up. – Jennifer L.

When my husband passed away, I reduced everything I could. I dumped cable TV (because I never watched it, but he did). Except for Sirius XM radio. I enjoy it in the car so I continue to pay for it, although I'm really proud of myself for negotiating the price WAY down.

During my working years, I was fortunate to have a house cleaner clean my house two times a month. That brought me such joy and peace of mind. Now, in retirement I'm so blessed to be able to continue this!

Lastly, I don't indulge in many personal things, but I watch YouTube almost exclusively, which of course, is free. I, watch it to learn, laugh, entertain and pass time for myself so I splurge on the \$17.99/month no ads YouTube option. Don't judge me... - Debbie

The pandemic and my illness forced one convenience that I now can't stop using. I only use grocery pick up or delivery 99.% of the time. I can't imagine doing a week's worth of grocery shopping in the store now. My parents used to spend hours at the AF base commissary twice a month to buy food for our family of four. They hated the time wasted, the long lines, and the too "peoplely" crowds. The old adage of "time is money" is so true. I have better ways of spending my time these days. – Cathy

I love when I find an easier way to do something I don't enjoy. I am not a fan of cutting up peppers and onions. So, I often buy frozen bell peppers, sliced and ready to use. The same goes for dried or frozen onions.

Clean-up after cooking can also be unpleasant. I find that pre-cut parchment paper is good to protect baking sheets. Plus, they offer convenience. Also, if your assistant baker is very young, it is much easier for him/her to manage the pre-cut pieces rather than the whole roll.

Another convenience is the disposable crock-pot liner. I love a crock-pot meal, but clean-up can be daunting without the disposable liner. – Gina

Plant Nannies are one of my conveniences. A water-filled inverted wine or soda bottle fills the unglazed terra cotta spike. The spike is then pushed into the soil of my favorite potted plant. The plant then draws the water out as needed. It works wonderfully on my inside plants. I use it outside as well, but those plants still require supplemental water in a year of normal rainfall. But...this year everything has been out of sorts and burning up, so not even Plant Nannies were of much help. Don't purchase an off-brand, as I found they broke and crumbled after one season of use. - Shelley

I've had a garlic mincer, a fancy plate that grates the garlic and all sorts of gadgets to peel the garlic – but no more! I buy garlic already minced in a jar, and it's wonderful. Easy to get out what I need, and it stores for a LONG time in the fridge.

I often purchase from Mad Dash Mixes for convenient and quick dips, soups and pasta to have on hand in my pantry. Every single one I've tried is so tasty. These also make great gifts! And they're awesome to take when traveling, if you have a kitchen in your Airbnb.

This might sound odd, but faux succulents/plants are a convenience in my book. They save on having to water and baby plants and place them near a window, and all that jazz. I look for ones that look as real as can be, place them where I want them and smile.

We belong to a car wash monthly service – its about \$19.99 for Wash n Roll and it's SO nice to be able to wash the car as often as we like for that cost. If it's dusty, we roll in. If we just went through mud, we roll in. And it's that fixed price for the entire month! – Marcy

Using Shipt to deliver goods from Target is my current favorite convenience. I paid a yearly fee (discounted on my first year's subscription), but I can have most anything sold at Target delivered to my home in an hour! It has saved the day on a number of occasions. A few months back, my husband and I had a country band from Idaho recording in our studio. Several of the band members were big coffee drinkers and brought their own gourmet coffee grounds for brewing. So, before they arrived at the studio for day two of recording, I jumped on Target.com and ordered a small coffee maker, and cute disposable coffee cups (and lids! Oh yes...), and all arrived and were set up in the studio ready to brew fresh coffee before the band arrived. Fabulous business relations thanks to Target.

Another convenience I cherish involves house cleaning. I'm not a fan of cleaning. Honestly, I would rather be doing something (anything, really) else. Cleaning the shower is so low on the list of cleaning jobs. But then I came across the electric cordless Spin Scrubber on Amazon, and it makes cleaning the shower waaaay easier, does a much better job than just me manually, and is a little bit fun to use! Win, win, win!- Angela

One of my conveniences is very simple and maybe not much more costly. Instead of using liquid makeup remover I use the makeup remover towelettes. I used to buy special liquid soap for taking off my makeup and used the towelettes for traveling, but then I got lazy and started using them all the time.

Another convenience I have is with chicken when I'm cooking. For us or just our family, I will buy the one-pound packs of already cooked and cut rotisserie chicken. But if I'm cooking for large groups that requires a roaster pan or two full of my chicken spaghetti or another casserole, I

won't do that. I didn't realize the difference in cost until the beginning of this summer when I cooked for the staff at our local Baptist church camp. I needed about eight pounds of chicken. The already cooked and cut chicken was going to cost me about \$96.00 whereas I could cook and cut the same amount myself for about \$22.00. I chose the inconvenient way for that occasion.

My third convenience is my Instant Vortex Plus, or Instant Pot. At my age, I really wasn't ready to learn how to use a new kitchen appliance. My crock pot was still sufficient. But for the shorter amount of time it takes to have food ready, it's really great. And I've decided that anything I can use to cook a full meal and not heat up my kitchen is wonderful. – Carole

My conveniences are in the kitchen. I buy a rotisserie chicken and shred it to add to salads, soups, or pasta. I also buy cut stalks of celery, and cut cauliflower that are ready to use. (I hate all those little pieces of cauliflower that get everywhere when you cut it yourself!) – Beth

I recently started using K pods for coffee instead of brewing a whole pot. As a matter of fact, what I would do is make the one cup while I am pouring the water for the full pot! That way, I can have a cup of coffee before the pot is done. Convenience, at a cost! I also have a housekeeper that I hired to come in once a month for heavy cleaning since I work full-time now – Anita.

THREE MOMS – Pets and Chores – by The Cousins

When school starts, it's most likely chaotic in most homes...and all of the summer chores the kids had the time to do are now included with being gone all day and all the activities and homework at night. Especially, taking care of the pets! How do families manage? Here's a peek into three moms' homes and how they do it.

Mom of Four

We always had dogs growing up, little dogs. When my husband and I first married we also had a small dog. Our current dog we have, Zeke, we did have to potty train!

However, recently we had received two animals I'm not so happy about. Mojo is our miniature Aussie we got a year and a half ago, and she's been such a chore! She needs a LOT of attention and care, and our kids have fallen in love with her. But for me, I'd gladly give her to another family! I recently made it clear that if we keep Mojo that she has to act differently, and the kids must train her! She is slowly getting better and older, which helps. She has to have a walk daily, and the kids do this. However, when we all get busy, that responsibility will fall to me! I must work with my own bitter heart toward this dog!

We also rescued a little kitten born in our shed, as the mom abandoned it. We fed the kitten and took care of this kitty, although we had no time! But sometimes, life brings us gifts to teach us! The kids love it too, and thankfully it's mostly an outdoor cat. Again, the kids make efforts to take care of all the animals...

but ultimately Mom picks up the slack!

Mom of Three

Who would have thought that we would have three kids, three dogs and a turtle? It's chaos, but our home is full of love! We have Heismann, who's almost 14, named yes – after the football trophy. We rescued Luna about 5 years ago and have her, along with our dachshund. Luna is a gentle giant Great Dane. We also have a dachshund/chihuahua mix Pixxy, a puppy! And finally, we have a turtle, about 3 inches in diameter, and his name is Tank. He's super fun with personality.

Each kid wants their "own pet" but each kids has daily and weekly chores, and we have a command center. They used to split the chores with water and food, when we just had two dogs. We've also taught them how to clean up the backyard from the dog poop! They take a bag, gloves and scoopers and get the job done. We also rotated walking the dogs.

But now the turtle...and Pixxy. Our oldest "owns" the turtle, which he got when he turned 9. He had to keep his room clean and do his chores, and he did it. Tank is almost 2 years old, and our oldest feeds him every morning and evening, he and Dad clean out the tank. He takes care of his turtle – even through a freeze, power outages and more – and he's still here!

This year our daughter turned 9 and wanted another dog. Of course, at first we said no way. However, we gave her the same rules of keeping her room clean and chores – which is a

challenge with this creative child! It took longer, but she did it. And we had to keep our word. So here we are with feisty Pixxy, she likes to chew and play – and she’s so fun! She is fully Ayla’s responsibility, as Pixxy is in her room.

We are getting there...the dogs are starting to accept one another...and the house is starting to settle. I’m wondering how it’s going to go once school starts. We will take care of them as a family. We’ve had to chip in for each other when sick or gone.

Pet chores – the kids all help. Teaching the kids responsibilities of caring for life has been great. They can even start with a plant, if no pet is present. They do get tired and exhausted, and do help them. It’s a joy as parents to see them grow and learn, though, in the middle of the chaos. The command center helps as well, where they can check off what they do. It’s also where their backpacks hang, and it’s there for them to see visually.

Mom of Two

We have been married for about 11 years and have talked about getting a dog at some point, as I had dogs as I grew up and even into college! My last dog passed away from cancer, and my husband didn’t have any dogs as a child. After we married, we went into full-time work and he into dental school, we lived in a tiny apartment, and didn’t feel we had the time or commitment for a pet.

We then moved to Nebraska for his residency, then to Alaska when we started having kids. We thought maybe when the kids get older we’ll get a pet, when we have a home. Now, we do have a home and we’re settled and have started talking about pets. We live on a big farm and have thought about having an outdoor cat to keep the rodents away, and my husband has thought of having a dog to take hunting!

We’ve gone back and forth on “when’s a good time” (we’re now expecting baby #3). In all reality, just as when you’re having kids, there’s never a “perfect” time to bring on a pet. Life is always busy!

We are currently *somewhat* looking for a pet. Our oldest daughter, almost 6 years old, is terrified of dogs. We have tried to talk to different people about whether or not a puppy is the best way to start, or what to do. But we might just push out having a pet a bit more, as we even have family members that are allergic to dogs! Some breeds also don’t shed as much, so we’re looking into that...

We are not in a hurry, we enjoy being able to travel and not worry about boarding or getting someone to care for our pets. At the same time, we know pets bring joy. We are waiting for that moment to take on that responsibility, as dogs are awesome for kids and families. We hope one day to bring a sweet puppy on board!

Until then, it’s petting the friendly animals we see elsewhere...

In the Kitchen – A Week’s Worth – by Marcy Lytle

Sometimes, we all need a little help thinking of what to make on weeknights. Some want just veggies, there might be a picky kid at the table, maybe you want to create some color on the plate, or any number of particulars on any given night! We’ve got meal ideas for all of the above and more. It’s September, school’s in session, fall is near, and so enjoy and try any or all of these:

Chili with Broccoli Cornbread – Mad Dash Mixes has an amazing chili seasoning pouch, so I used that for the chili. But you could make any chili you like. The broccoli cornbread is the recipe below, which was amazing. This is great for the night when you want to feel cozy and comforted, even if the weather is still hot and humid...

- 1 8.5 oz corn muffin mix
- 1 10oz frozen broccoli thawed
- 1 cup shredded Cheddar
- 1 small chopped onion
- 2 large eggs
- ½ c butter melted

Combine first four ingredients in a large bowl and make a well in the center. Stir the eggs and butter, blending well, then add to broccoli mixture, stir til moistened. Spoon into lightly greased muffin pans.

Bake at 325 for 15-20 minutes til golden. Let stand 2-3 minutes before removing from the pan.

Enjoy with your chili!

Open Philly – I really meant to make an open-faced Philly on bread, but somehow curbside sent me frozen eggplant steaks. So...I used them for the base and piled the Philly toppings on, and it turned out delish! Mine was vegetarian, and he got the meat. The eggplant and steakums cook so fast, this is great for a night when speed is the need...

- Frozen eggplant steaks
- Steak Ums (frozen Philly meat)
- Green pepper, sliced
- White onion, sliced
- Provolone cheese

Grill the peppers and onions, then melt provolone on top.

Read the directions and cook the eggplant and steakums, then just start piling and serve!

This was SO GOOD – you can add a bit of marinara if you like – which tastes amazing.

Rio Ramen – We made this years ago, and I had forgotten about it. We had a 7-year old at our table that requested Ramen Soup, so we jazzed up ours and we were all happy.

- Ramen noodles (beef) – one pkg per person
- Ground meat
- Lettuce
- Tomato
- Cheese
- Avocado
- Salsa

Cook the noodles according to the directions and drain. The kids can just have the noodles in a bowl with the seasoning packet mixed in. For the adults, place the seasoning packets in the meat and cook til browned, and drain. This goes on top of the noodles, in a bowl. Top with the rest, and you're done! Serve with tortilla chips.

Spaghetti Revisited – I like spaghetti, but I wanted it jazzed up a bit. I had a package of Italian seasonings and had read that one can place several tablespoons of the seasoning in a skillet with olive oil, then place in the spaghetti and give the pasta so added pizzazz. It worked. This recipe was also partly for us, and partly for the kid. Delicious meal with greens on top.

- Spaghetti noodles
- Ground meat and favorite pasta sauce
- Italian seasonings (a mix of all kinds) – 5 T
- Broccoli (the kind you steam in the microwave)

Cook the meat and the spaghetti in two separate pans. Cook the broccoli. After the meat browns, remove and set aside in a bowl. Add the seasonings into the same skillet with olive oil and cook for just a minute to bring out the flavors, then toss in the drained and cooked spaghetti. Stir to coat the pasta with the seasonings. Meanwhile mix your sauce in with meat, and heat.

Assemble in bowls with spaghetti, the meat sauce, and the buttery broccoli on top.

Chicago Hot Dog – I'm not hot dog fan, really. But it's not all about me all the time, imagine that! The boys wanted hot dogs, so I like toppings – so a Chicago dog it was! Great for an easy weeknight meal for the boys...and for you.

- Franks (I like Nathan's brand)
- Tomatoes
- Pickles
- Onions
- Mustard
- Ketchup
- Hot dog buns
- Grated cheese

Cook the franks however you want to – I cooked mine in a skillet. Meanwhile, slice pickles longwise, grill the onions if you want, slice the tomatoes and prepare the buns. I sliced my frank in half lengthwise. Just tastes better that way, to me. Top the dog for those that want the pile, and make it plain for those that don't.

Chef Salad with Lillian – I recently bought Lillian's Salad Dressing and oh my goodness, it's amazing. It's the star of this show. It was a night I wanted something healthy and refreshing, while we watched a lighthearted movie on TV. With homemade croutons on top!

- Lillian's Salad Dressing
- Grain bread cut into cubes
- Salad greens and fresh spinach
- Thinly sliced turkey
- Grated cheese
- Cucumber
- Olives
- Avocado
- Nuts and dried cranberries

Using a large salad bowl, toss in the greens and spinach. Top with all of the salad toppings, except the bread. In a skillet, grill the cubes of bread in butter until browned and crispy. Pour in the dressing and toss the salad. Then sprinkle the croutons on top. The best ever...

Snack Box – If you're up to an outdoor picnic in the evening in a park, this idea is for you. We purchased these craft boxes from Michaels – this big one – and a couple of small ones. This big one is what we used for listening to music on the green, and we just placed the dividers inside, so that we had eight sections. Then we filled 'er up...

- Strawberries
- Blackberries
- Dark chocolate
- Dips
- Nuts
- Carrots
- Cucumbers
- Olives

Just slice and place each item in a space in the box (place paper towel under anything that might be juicy, and place little cups for dips). Add a picnic blanket and pita chips and tortilla chips, and you're done! Oh, and cute paper plates...

Last Month's Learning

What I've learned, experienced, observed or been amazed at this last month...enjoy!

Did you know a pack of zebras is called a dazzle? Apparently, because of the dazzle effect created by them when they're running!

Taco Deli (if you have one in your city) has delicious queso – the one with everything in it – try it!

Mix mayo with olive tapenade for a delicious sandwich spread – with ham or turkey – and Gouda bacon cheese – it's delish!

I saw a guy making French Toast by melting ice cream in a pan and dipping the bread in that, before grilling in a pan – I haven't tried it yet but I want to!

Target has cute fake plants in a white pots for five bucks – they look so pretty in little basket pots! Especially if you have a spot where no sunlight would keep a real plant alive!

Saving aside funds/cash/gift cards to use with grandkids/nieces/any kids makes life grand (no pun intended). We spent dollars on their activities this summer, but it was worth it!

If it's still hot outside this month, you can plug in a fan on the porch and blow it across your body...it's okay to do that! Just saying...because we did it.

There's an amazing arcade game console available on QVC that is awesome for the kids (and you.) It has 10-12 old games on it, sits up or can be mounted on a wall, and is GREAT fun for a playroom.

There's an AMAZING salad dressing called Lillian's that really is so tasty. We had it on a chef salad and today it's going in pasta salad. Worth ordering!

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance – it's an old John Wayne/Jimmy Stewart movie and we just saw it in the classic summer film series. It's good! Find it and see it, if you can.

I recently attended a baby shower where a bagel bar was the food idea – and it was great. Easy to set up, easy to bring and prepare, and looked amazing on the counter!

There are these amazing makeup remover cloths by Vintage Cosmetics I recently bought to take on vacation. Where have these been all my life?

Have you tried placing pampas grass in your vintage vases? You can order a bundle on Amazon, and they are so pretty for early fall décor...

Garage Sale Mysteries, if you enjoy the Hallmark Channel, are a fun watch when you want something after a busy, tedious day...

There are these stretchy bowl covers – 100 in a pack – that I got recently. They fit all sizes, and are GREAT instead of having to tear off glad wrap or foil for coverings...

Ever thought about shopping for clothes at Earthbound? Do it – they have some really cute fall tops and sweaters... Earthbound is in our malls, here.

SUGAR + Spice - Hack Jobs – by Angela Dolbear

Since I was rescued recently by the Amazon Sea Plane captain from my (imaginary) deserted island, the “DESERTED ISLAND product of the month” section is closed! But a new section, “Hack Job” will take its place starting this month, where I will describe my favorite beauty tips and tricks.

In honor of the new section, here are a few of my favorite beauty “hacks”:

- ❖ Mascara – rotate the mascara wand in the tube to pick up product, never pump it. Pumping the wand adds air and bacteria inside the tube (ewwww...).
- ❖ Nail polish – having trouble opening a bottle of nail polish? Wrap a rubber band (the thicker the better) around the wand, and twist to open. The rubber band gives your hands a good grip.
- ❖ Foundation and concealer – Apply foundation (my current fave is [Yensa Super Serum](#) foundation) first, and then concealer (current fave is [Letup Complex Culture concealer](#)). The concealer will blend better, especially in the under-eye area. Dab with your ring finger or use a slightly damp makeup sponge to blend the concealer into the skin. Magic coverage!

“Hack Job”:

Speaking of mascara, I recently tried a sample of [Kat Von D’s “Go Big or Go Home” mascara](#), and I fell in love with it. It amplified my lashes while keeping them looking natural, all day! No flaking or smearing. So, I actually purchased a full-size tube.

To keep mascara fresh, wipe off the outside of the tube with a tissue before returning the wand to the tube at the completion of application. This will keep the seal on the tube tight making your mascara last longer. Immediately toss the tissue out! Don’t try to use it again! You WILL get mascara in places you don’t want it. Trust me. I have done it. More than once (*shaking my head....*).

The beauty of blessings to you!

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



HOME

Practical Parenting – Poses and Pictures- by Marcy Lytle

We took the kiddos to the Austin Aquarium a few weeks ago, and there were lots of opportunities there for pictures! Lots of photo props. Ayla, 9 years old, wanted me to snap quite a few poses of her on one particular prop, and I acquiesced. And then she asked that I place these photos in the magazine! I laughed, and thought – what story can I write to go with these photos – and I came up with one! And once the boys saw her posing, they wanted in on the action, as well.

Photo props can be so fun at the kids' parties, at family gatherings, and at amusement places like aquariums. Haven't you been to a wedding before where there's a photo booth, or props set out on the table for using in your own photos? It's so fun to make funny faces, hold up fingers like horns on an unsuspecting friend, or stick out your tongues as the camera clicks.

It's also fun for kids to play "dress up" at all ages, stand in front of mirrors as they twirl and pretend and imagine themselves as a character in a play. Kids love experimenting with makeup, lipstick, nail polish and more.

Since it is the fall season, and Christmas will be here before we know it, why not think about these things for gifts, experiences, or just to have on hand, for the kids to enjoy as they pose and pretend and play?

Here are some great ideas for gifts or parties or any kind of family fun now, or over the holidays:

- A Polaroid camera might be a fun gift for the kids, so they can see their snapshots right away after they take them!
- Consider going through your closets; and instead of donating this season, make a huge box of dress-up clothes or clear out a drawer just for these! Include ties, scarves, shoes, bags, sweaters and more...and surprise the kids at their next party at the house...or as a fun treat anytime at all.
- A spa night might be fun for the entire family, with lotions and scents and warm cloths and more. Consider photo props like masks and hair turbans and slippers from the dollar store, and take pictures of each person as they're receiving the "treatment."
- A fun outing might be to think of five stops for the family where cool shots can be taken with props, like we did at the Aquarium. Maybe there's a cool mural in your town, a beautiful garden or a unique slide or feature in a park. Stop for dessert at a specialty ice cream store where you create your own treat, and take pictures of each one.
- Does your family enjoy sketching and coloring? Create your own masks, cut them out, add string or elastic, and then put them on and snap photos! Google some templates if you need some to print out!
- Give the kids a word like – under, over, red, car, tree, etc. – and give them the camera to take photos of each other using those words, and then let them create a collage of them all. How fun would that be?
- Finally, pose with the kids. Let them see their parents making funny faces and acting silly and laughing. It will do the entire family a lot of good!

I Don't Do Teens - Open or Closed? – by Marcy Lytle

I remember this topic when our kids were at home, and I still see this in the movies and on television...the decision on whether or not to allow teens to shut their doors when they're at home with the family, other than when they're dressing. Even in the classic movie *Sleepless in Seattle*, which we watched recently (it's almost 30 years old!), the little 9 year old son in the story has a girl in his room, they're in a chair together, and they have the door shut to the bedroom. I was taken aback by that scene, as I didn't remember it when we watched the film the first time.

Teens want privacy, especially if they have little siblings that interrupt and invade. They also want to be able to talk to their friends without others listening, and it seems natural that they would want to close their bedroom doors at times. But as parents, we know that sometimes there are reasons they want to close their doors that could pose huge problems, if we allow them to do so.

Here are some guidelines, should you be in the throes of "I need privacy!" pleas from your teens:

No closed doors with a date, in the bedroom. This is a huge parenting decision, one that needs to be an emphatic "No." Dates can stay in the family room. Many state that if teens want to "do something" they'll find a way somewhere anyway, but why should we the parents encourage that by allowing them behind closed doors, in our house?

What about closing doors to keep out the littles? That would require a locked door. And it might be best to teach all the kids to knock before entering, even if the door is open! No crossing the line without permission.

Most kids text these days, instead of actual talking, so there's no need for closed doors when chatting with friends. Listening to our kids chat out loud used to provide parents with so much information, but now it's silent talk on the phones. That's a whole other issue, but bedroom doors don't need to be shut for chatting.

Popular opinion these days is that it's a-okay and normal for teens to close and lock their bedroom doors, and until that trust is broken, we are to say yes. However, it might be worth having a conversation with our teens to ask why they want their doors closed.

If a two-story house is where you live, and you the parents are never upstairs where your teens hang out, there might be trouble. If your house is small and rooms are visible everywhere, teens know this. I recall requiring our teens to stay visible in the house with the rest of the family, and we encouraged them to stay visible when on a date, as well. In other words, there's safety in other eyes.

We all close our bedroom doors at times. At age 7, she might want her door shut to keep out the nasty boys from entering girl space. At age 9, he might want his door shut to play a game in peace, without little brother pestering him. So every reason, every day, every situation is different.

The problems occur when the door is shut always, when the teen won't let anyone in his/her space, and starts isolating from the family. If trust is broken, and things are found in the room that are not acceptable, or the teen isn't doing his/her share of contributing to the family, these are issues that need to be dealt with sooner...rather than later.

We can't protect our teens from every bad decision, especially once they start to drive and exit our home to places where we aren't with them constantly. But we can protect them in our own homes, where they exist as a part of a family unit when they're present. And house rules are fine given by the house parents. But relationship is always important, as we keep the "door" of communication open with our teens at all times.

Good luck, parents. But, know this. Under your roof, where you pay, and they live, and they play...open doors are a good idea.

An Adage a Day - In the Nick of Time – by Carole Gilbert

In the nick of time, God parted the Red Sea.
In the nick of time, the donkey spoke.
In the nick of time, the sun stood still, and the moon did not move.
In the nick of time, the handwriting appeared on the wall.
In the nick of time, God sent Jesus.
In the nick of time, Jesus turned the water to wine.
In the nick of time, Jesus fed 5000.
In the nick of time, Jesus walked on the water.
In the nick of time, Jesus restored Malthus' ear.
In the nick of time, Jesus arose for you and me.

God still does his miracles, in the nick of time.

When we decided to move 22 years ago, we knew what we wanted in a home for our family of five. We made a list with five different options we would like any combination of, and we started to pray. During the couple of months that we were looking for a house, so much happened, mostly my husband's father passed away. This put our searching on hold. Soon after we started to look again, it took about two weeks for our realtor to call. She said that she had a house for us to look at but to keep an open mind, it would need work.

As we drove toward the house in the country, we started to notice the items on our list. One, two, three, we counted off. Wow God, thank you! But He didn't stop there. As we turned onto the long more secluded road where the kids could ride their bikes - that was number four! Then as we approached the house, we could see it! The lake behind our house, number five! I still get tears every time I recall how God worked this out for us. But He wasn't done. Within two weeks, we were in contract and my work was just beginning. To make a long story shorter, I did most of the renovations myself, at least all I could do. And I sold our house in the city myself. I had so many *nicks of time* going back and forth between painting and appointments to show our home and taking care of our family. It was exhausting but such a blessing.

I worked for about four months with my family pitching in when they could. One day after I had taken the kids to school, I went to try to complete my last job on our new house. I only hoped to get it done. About one o'clock, I laid down my paintbrush, walked through the house and said, "God, it is finished. I am done, right?" I praised Him and thanked Him over and over in those next few moments.

About thirty minutes after I put down my paintbrush the phone rang. We were in contract on our old house. God helped me finish the renovations just in the nick of time!

This idiom, "in the nick of time" is very old starting in the 1500's and evolved from the word, nick, that referred to a critical moment. And then in the 1600's its meaning evolved to referring to a critical time, which began the phrase as we know it today. Put it all together and it means that something happened at just the last possible moment in time.

David puts his trust in God and knew everything he had and would endure were in God's hand, as he said in Psalm 31:15, "My times are in your hand." David also knew God had everything timed to His perfection, a perfect timetable that David, himself, could never obtain without God. Do we know God like David did? Do we let God's timing prevail or do we try to fix everything ourselves? God hasn't stopped.

On June 25, 2022, our son bought a "new to him" truck. He had a truck when he was younger and always wanted one again even though he had driven a car for a while. Trucks come in handy for so many reasons. One and a half weeks later, this same son bought a new house. It was not something they were looking for or planning but they had in the back of their minds that someday they would need a bigger home. This home had everything they wanted. And the truck is coming in handy.

These two life changing purchases were not planned. Coincidence, in the nick of time, or in the nick of God's time? This is how God works. By July 31, only three weeks later, my son was in negotiations on his old house, all just in the nick of God's time.

Photo courtesy of Carla Rogers.

Tiny Living - Through it All – by Leyanne Enterline

“Through it All” was the sappy love song my dad played in ICU while my mom was in there for many days, when we literally prayed every second for a miracle. One really finds out who one’s friends are when going through a tragic event. The amount of love and prayers, calls, texts, food, flowers... we felt it all. Thank the Lord, we got a miracle and my mom is now recovering at home after almost a month in the hospital.

Mom is truly a miracle. My dad calls her the modern day Lazarus. She literally rose from the dead on the 5th day. I won’t go into detail, but just about everything was failing in her body, she was blown up with 40 pounds of fluids, on a ventilator and connected to every machine they possibly had in the hospital. I couldn’t even count all the machines! We were not able to talk with her because she was basically in a coma so she wouldn’t pull out the breathing tube. On the 5th day they decided to take her off the vent and see how she did on her own, and only by God she turned around! She started talking and asked to eat and drink! Everything took time, but after that day we got good reports daily! Her ER nurse came in to see her and couldn’t believe she had made it through the first night.

Dad and I slept in the waiting area the first two nights and everyone was so sweet. The nurses brought us pillows and blankets, the security guard brought us extra waters. When you go through something it truly makes you more compassionate when others do. My trailer feels like a mansion compared to the hard hospital chair and floor!

We met three other families in that hospital and joined them in prayer for their loved ones and every single one of them has made a complete recovery! We prayed with them, we loved on them, we checked on each other; we became a family in that hospital. The boys and hubby were on their own for quite some time while I was up at the hospital, but with this heat they all remained inside in our tiny space and were just thankful for air-conditioning.

On the fourth night, after a long night of prayers and visiting with our friends, a lady came over and said she wanted to make sure we knew that the Holy Spirit was moving on our behalf! That lady had just lost a loved one and in the middle of her grieving her loss she listened to the Lord to tell us that?! It was so moving, and gave us all a glimmer of hope! It was that next day the miracle took place!

The song “Through it All” is significant because we all will face trials at some point. But through it all, the Lord is with us no matter what the outcome. He hears our prayers! And through it all, it teaches us to have compassion for others! Though a lot of times I want to complain about my tiny living space, going through health scares made me realize what’s truly important! Material things will all fade away, but family and friends are priceless!

Remember love grows best in tiny spaces...

A Night to Remember – Seven Days a Week – by Marcy Lytle

Rather than offer you one devo for printing and enjoying this month, I'm offering you a week's worth of nighttime ideas for mini devos with the kids...to touch every aspect of their walk with Christ. It's something you can print out and hang on the fridge, to work from weekly, if you like. An outline, if you will. I thought it might be great to have something like this instead of the usual. It's patterned after the Lord's Prayer. Hope you like it:

Sunday – The weekend's over, tomorrow is school, and it's a good time to reestablish our relationship with the Father.

"Our Father, in heaven..."

Just before lights out, let's remind ourselves that our heavenly father is the definition of GOOD. He's with us every day of the week, he provides for all of our needs, and He loves us ALL the time.

Hugs are the action tonite – so everyone gets big bear hugs that hold tight – as we say goodnite.

Monday – First day back at school and our ears have heard a lot, haven't they? Maybe kids spoke God's name in anger, or other foul language. Why do people use God's name to curse? They don't know the Father. His name is to be hallowed, or honored, so let's pray that others know the Father.

"...hallowed be thy name."

Let's all name a character of God that we love, before the lights go out.

Tuesday – Maybe at school we learn about the heavens – the moon, stars, and the sun. That's a whole galaxy up there! Maybe we learn about the earth, the trees, and the rivers – that's where we live down here. We can observe the order in the sky (morning, noon, night, seasons, dark and light) and KNOW that God is in control.

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Let's open our hands and receive the peace that God has for us, and let us pray for peace on earth.

Wednesday – What did everyone have for lunch today? Did anyone not have food to eat? Do we have food for tomorrow? God has promised us that he will provide and feed us and lead us.

"Give us this day, our daily bread."

Let's take communion together around the table. We will pass the juice and the bread and give thanks for daily provision of salvation and food and all we need to live!

Thursday – Did anyone get their feelings hurt today? What happened? Did anyone hurt someone else with their words or disobedience?

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Isn't it cool how we can confess (say out loud) when we're feeling hurt or when we've hurt someone else. That's what we just did. And God forgives us, so we then can forgive others. Let's pray for God to help us forgive those that hurt us today.

Friday – Who knows what “tempted” means? Who was the first person in the Bible to be tempted to disobey? Was anyone tempted today at school or work to do something wrong like lie, disobey, steal, or anything else that felt wrong?

“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”

Turn out all the lights and sit for a minute in complete darkness. It's easy to stumble when we try to walk in a room without light. But when we are tempted, God's light in our hearts shows us a way out – to do the right thing. Turn on the light and smile!

Saturday – Which super hero has the best powers? I bet we all pick someone different. If you could have a super power, what would it be? To be invisible or fly? God has the super powers to love, forgive, and do the impossible. What a mighty God we serve!

“For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever amen.”

Let's praise the bigness of God by singing – who has a song? (Sing a song everyone knows).



YOU

Inner Strength - The Rainbow of Forgiveness – by Michelle Wyatt

Forgiveness is a beautiful thing but forgiving someone, including ourselves, can be difficult to do. While it comes naturally to God, it is a process for us. Just the other day, I facilitated and witnessed this process with my boys. To understand the significance of this moment, it's important to know the following.

When one of my boys says I'm sorry to the other, the response is usually, "That's okay." I have told them that instead of "that's ok" the healthy response is "I forgive you," because the behavior was not okay. My boys have repeated behaviors that they continue to say they are sorry for and while we all do, I realized that their understanding of forgiveness hasn't run deep enough like God forgives us. How can they understand at such a young age without our help? Even adults (such as myself) struggle with truly forgiving someone. We had a beautiful conversation about it.

I reminded the boys that God not only wants us to forgive each other but also ourselves. Just as it says in Psalm 86:5,

“You, Lord, are forgiving and good,
abounding in love to all who call to you.”
Psalm 86:5

The steps in the process of saying "I'm sorry" that the boys and I went over (some of them I simplified the language) are:

- Humble ourselves (the key to that is humility-open our arms to God's grace)
- Be vulnerable (acknowledge imperfection and trust in God's forgiveness as we share)
- Name the act (be specific, including the words "to you" so as to claim responsibility)
- Respectful posture (facing towards the person we are speaking to)

Respectful posture is the practical step that the boys struggle with. It's not easy to admit when we've wronged someone, especially for children. My boys want to please others and God, so they act shy.

The steps in forgiving another are similar:

- Embrace God's grace, open our arms to the other person-literally or symbolically
- Acknowledge our imperfectness and trust in God's desire for us to forgive
- Respectful posture (facing towards the person who is speaking to us)
- And the bible says it best,

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other,
just as in Christ God forgave you.”
Ephesians 4:32

At the end of the boys' process of forgiving, their affect changed. They were no longer in a state of anger and resentment. They were in a state of humility and calmness.

It was beautiful, like a rainbow that appears after a storm.

Life in a Nutshell – Robot Reflections – by Jill Montz

I will be the first to admit I am not on the cutting edge when it comes to anything to do with technology. My email addresses for personal and work are both AOL. I still own VHS tapes (although my VHS player bit the dust some years ago.) I was even sad when my current car didn't come with a CD player. I gave up wearing my Smart Watch because, let's face it, I didn't appreciate something smarter than me talking to me all day long in her snooty voice claiming loudly to all around that she didn't understand my Texan slang...even though I wasn't even talking to her! I mean if the truth were told I would still use a flip phone if my teenage daughter, Dotty, wouldn't be completely mortified.

However, while on my social media break, I developed the bad habit of shopping online (dang those apps on the phone...another reason to go back to the flip phone!) While shopping, I decided I needed to up my tech game. I made several purchases for my home, especially. I bought a home security system, dusk to dawn outdoor lighting, an Echo Dot, and a robot vacuum cleaner. My neighbor even helped me out with the purchase (and installation) of an automatic thermostat and a programmable light switch for my front porch. By the end of June, I was expecting George and Jane Jetson to show up on my doorstep or at the very least Rosie to swing by to give my robot vacuum cleaner a once over.

While all of these purchases have brought me joy and satisfaction, the robot vacuum cleaner has also brought some humor and introspection into my world. To begin, just turning it on sent my cat, Rae, up into the rafters. I seriously have never seen our cat move so fast and it took a good hour for me to find her hiding spot (after I finally stopped laughing.) Even after several weeks of cohabitating, Rae is still not a fan of the little spaceship that runs around our house beeping and sweeping as it goes.

One night when I was still media free and decided to give my credit card a break, I chose to enjoy just resting in the boredom of the evening. It was too hot to do anything outside (by the way Texas weather...there are temps below 100 if you would like to revisit those someday soon) and I was tired of reading, so I sat in my chair and watched the robot vacuum cleaner do its job. Now my device is not the highest end of the makes and models when it comes to robotic vacuum cleaners, but is about middle of the road, I would say. Still I noticed several things that caught my interest...

1. It bumps into a lot of things often and repeatedly.
2. It picks up everything in its path and pulls it inside.
3. It likes to get stuck in weird places.
4. It needs to be cleaned out when it gets full or the filter gets clogged from all the cat hair (Rae seems to be shedding more these days...possibly from stress.)
5. It needs to recharge after use.

As I sat there amused, and dare I say critical, of the machine that had been entertaining my thoughts for probably longer than it should have, I realized I also suffer from these issues as well.

Bumping Along:

I too bump into things on a regular basis. Not necessarily physically like the vacuum (although my 2am trips to the bathroom have left a few bruises) but rather metaphorically speaking. I know there are issues, people, and events I just can't seem to avoid no matter how impassable they may be. I continue to run into them time and time again in hopes, I guess, my experience

will be different...but often it is not. Instead of just avoiding it all together, I find myself headed straight for what I know will be the same result...bump...bump...bump. The truth of the matter is the only thing I can change is me...or the path I take. And another truth is, in most of the situations when it comes to the impact of the bump, I am the only one who feels it. So why do I continue to bump into it all? Good question. Maybe I can consult my internal owner's manual and get some insight.

Clean Sweep:

When I noticed the vacuum cleaner picked up everything in its path, I realized how I pick up things that I don't really need to keep inside me. Things like...other people's opinions or actions, the past that finds ways to sneak into the present, my 15-year-old's attitude, the weather, the test results, the future, etc. So much of this and more I know I will "roll over" in a day, but so much of it I can just "roll past" without letting it get inside me and affect me. All of these are things beyond my control to an extent and taking them in just to worry about them serves me no purpose...and probably clogs a filter like an artery, too!

Help! I'm Stuck:

One night I heard the vacuum beeping but couldn't find it anywhere. I looked under beds, couches, and chairs. I looked behind tables and lamps and all the shoes piled up on Dotty's bedroom floor. Finally, I noticed Dotty's bathroom door was shut. When I went to open it the door was stuck. With some effort to push it open without breaking it, I noticed a rug and a stool were pushed up against the door and sink cabinets. This was all odd since I was home alone and had not been in the bathroom. But then I heard the beep. Without breaking the door down, I managed to push everything back enough to squeeze in the door opening and thus retrieve the vacuum and put everything back where it belonged. This made me wonder how often I barricade myself in isolation from friends and family. I am an introvert at heart, but also I tend to push people away when I get hurt or feel too vulnerable. It is easier for me to hide away than it is to face my feelings or difficult conversations and I can get stuck there if I let myself. I forget I don't have a noticeable "beep" to let people know I am stuck...or do I?

Dumping Allowed:

My month long social media break did my mind, heart, and soul some good. I discovered I was so inundated with information all day long as a result of my mindless scrolling through Facebook and Instagram that I often had no room left for the things I valued the most. What I realized is I need to occasionally "clean out" my schedule and feeds and subsequently "dump" some things that are just "clogging" my brain and emotional bandwidth. It's healthy and good to get rid of anything bogging me down. Plus, if the makers of social media apps had the bright ideas to make buttons like "unfollow," "snooze for 30 days," and "take a break" as options, I feel confident they fully expected us to use them. Even the "unfriend" button is my new friend! And I have yet to have anyone upset (or even realize much less care) how I have personally dumped things in my social media world.

Low Batteries:

Just like the robot vacuum, my batteries get worn down on a regular basis. I need sleep and all matters of rest to be ready to go again to face new days, challenges, and opportunities. Often I have been known to push through exhaustion to get the job done. I have let my mental and physical health suffer in an effort to get to the end of a project or season at work. Usually the result is I don't do myself or others any favors when I do this. I know my attitude is subpar in these situations but also my output is as well. And most times I end up crashing at some point in the waiting room of a sick time office when my body has just had enough and starts to shut down. Prioritizing rest is so important. As I head into the busiest time of my work seasons I

hope I remember to power down when my batteries get low. If not, I hope I know where my health insurance card is.

It's funny how so many life lessons can be learned from a tiny robot vacuum. Or maybe I am just funny in how I look at things. Either way, every time I turn on my robot vacuum it reminds me to pause and reflect. It also makes me ask the question, "Where's Rae?" I have no doubts she too has some insights on the new vacuum. Rae is not as appreciative of the tech upgrades as I am...cats are like that.

Healthy Habits – Give and Get – by Marcy Lytle

Have you ever thought about how giving can be a healthy habit? And I'm not just referring to giving money, although we know that's something that's always a blessing! For the sake of this month's suggestion, I'm referring to giving in lots of other ways that enables us to look out from our own shortcomings or situations we don't love...into the lives of others and make sure they know they're awesome and wonderful. When we are down, there's nothing better than looking around to make sure others are up.

Give a free compliment – While you're standing in line to pay at a store, look up and notice her shoes or her outfit or her hair – and tell her how pretty or how you like it. Make that person smile, as she exits the store a bit lighter on her feet because someone told her she looked sweet!

Give a prayer – If you see on FB or hear through a friend that someone is about to have surgery, or is not feeling well – take time to text and offer a verse or a prayer to encourage them. Don't expect anything back, either. Give a prayer because it's an honor and privilege to do so!

Give support – If a friend has started a new venture, or had to leave a job for some reason, or has a difficult child, then offer encouragement. It might be a plant left on the porch, a text with kind words, or a card sent in the mail. I LOVED getting cards when my parents passed...it meant so much.

Give him a surprise – Maybe he's been working hard or just doing life with you, but he could use a boost. Purchase his favorite candy bar and leave it by his sink in the morning, or sneak it in his lunch box with a sweet note. Or buy him tickets to a favorite game coming up!

Give yourself grace – This is healthy, too! Take time to sit with your feet up and read, or leave that chore undone, or cry buckets of tears for no particular reason, or shop till your feet drop, or watch that movie you like that no one else does. Grace is good for the soul, even yours.

Give a kid a smile – It's so easy and good for all of us to offer smiles, especially to those little kids in strollers that are being pushed around in stores. Sometimes, a kid's whole face lights up when an adult smiles at him/her – so do it. Notice the kids, smile, wave, and tell that mom how cute the kid is, too.

Give the elderly a hand – Open the door, grab that item on the high shelf, compliment her or ask how she's doing, stop by and visit, offer to take her for coffee or run an errand. The older get forgotten, even by their families. Noticing them can make their day.

Giving to others and expecting nothing in return, we hear that's the best and highest form of giving. But it can also be one of the healthiest things we can do this fall for ourselves, our families, and others. Giving is part of the fabric of living the best life, and when we give as if we're giving to HIM, we are never disappointed. Because he notes it, he provides right back for us, and he is pleased. And that makes any heart feel and pump better and healthier and stronger.

Life Right Now - Forever and Ever - By Jennifer Stephens

There's always that one day. When the air has that just right touch of crispness. When digging out tall boots and a cardigan creates the perfect outfit for tackling the to-do list. No longer hot and humid but not yet bitter and chilled. That one day when the atmosphere tastes cold and fresh and dry all at once. Stepping outside for an autumn stroll on that one perfect day, my nose is instantly filled with a tornado of scents – the lingering smoky aroma of last night's backyard fire pit intertwined with the musky sweetness of a newly raked leaf pile. Oh, the leaves! Rich reds and vibrant golds falling from branches as they dance through the air, creating a crunchy blanket brushing my feet with each step. It's that one day when the past and the present collide in an explosion of senses. But the next day is different – it doesn't feel the same, the leaves are lifeless, and there's an unpleasant staleness in the air. That one perfect autumn day doesn't last forever.

Then there's the pie. Pumpkin. My husband begs for it all year long. It's his favorite. But I think it tastes better during the "ber" months. Pulling the freshly baked pumpkin pie from the oven and placing it on the counter to cool stirs up the fragrance of fall as cinnamon and nutmeg float through the whole house until mouths are watering. His is smeared with Cool Whip all over the top. Mine is buried under so much whipped topping you might wonder if there's even any pie on the plate! Some people like it plain. And others drop a dollop of cream precisely in the middle. It's so scrumptious that before long every plate is bare, and the pie pan is left empty. Not even one nibbling crumb remains. That delicious pumpkin pie doesn't last forever.

It's the time of year when five-foot wide dirt paths cut through a field of tall, green stalks can only mean one thing. The corn maze. This maze isn't solved with a pencil, it's a life size trail filled with people - us -winding our way through the acres and acres of rustling corn. We turn this way and that, sometimes backtracking, and often wondering if we've already been on this path - before hitting another dead end. Surrounded by walls of corn. Eventually discovering a bridge, we climb the steps to the lookout to see the maze's design and hopefully grab a hint to help us make our escape. It takes a couple hours, but we finally make it out! It's such a satisfying autumn experience, but if we wait too late to go, the corn will be trampled and the path too muddy. That fabulous fall adventure doesn't last forever.

Perfect autumn days, freshly baked pumpkin pies, and carefully designed corn mazes DON'T last forever. Most things on earth aren't meant to last forever. Sometimes we can become discouraged by the fleeting nature of the things we enjoy. We want those things we're fond of to go on and on. But there is something that DOES last. Forever. God's love for us. No matter what we do. Or don't do.

Despite how much I want to always do the things I know I should do as a Christian, sometimes I just...don't. Tired or busy or lazy. Sometimes we, er, I, let life get in the way. When we don't spend time serving and connecting with others, life can become lifeless and stale - like the air outside on the day after the perfect autumn day. Letting our Bibles collect dust can leave us feeling empty inside, like the barren remains of the pie plate. And leaving Jesus out of our thoughts and forgetting to go to God in prayer leaves us feeling trampled on. Our path gets muddy – just like the corn maze. But guess what? Those lifeless, stale, empty feelings don't

have to last forever. Even if we let life sometimes get in our way, we are ALWAYS welcome to come to the Lord. Psalm 136 tells us,

“His love endures forever.” Forever and ever. That is a love that
is lasting. Permanent. His love for us will never end...

“He remembered us in our low estate

His love endures forever.

And freed us from our enemies

His love endures forever.

He gives food to every creature.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of heaven.

His love endures forever.”

Psalm 136:23-26

Under Pressure - The Mulberry Trees – by Debbie Haynes

There's a story in II Samuel 5 where David is anointed king and it says he was only 30 years old, and then he was king for 40 years! However, there was a problem because the land was still inhabited by a group of mountain-dwelling people that had a propensity to war. These people began to taunt King David, telling him they were stronger than he and his people.

We then read that David did take the city, renamed it Jerusalem, Zion, the City of David – and David went on to grow great, and God was with him.

As this king grew in kingdom and kingly stature, there were some giants that came to seek David and kill him. David inquired of God as to what to do, and God told David to go and that these enemies would be delivered into David's hands. Again, David smites the enemy, and again the enemy shows up to come against David.

This is where this story gets interesting. This time, when David inquired of God as to what to do, God tells him of a different plan. He tells David to come upon the enemy over against "the mulberry trees." And when David hears a sound in the tops of the trees, then he is to stir himself, God will show up, and this giant will be defeated. David obeyed; the giant was felled.

Notice God's direction this time to not attack until he heard the sounds in the tops of the trees! So, what was the sound? The sound was of a marching army – complete with horses' hooves pounding the ground. It was a sound of sure victory, in the middle of an otherwise sure slaughter by the giants, if David hadn't obeyed.

The giants heard this sound of a mighty marching army and thought surely David and his men had enlisted other armies to help them fight, and we read that the giants then fled!

I love this story, because it says to us that read it – be not afraid! God has strategies for victory that we know nothing of, a grove of "mulberry trees" so to speak, already planted for his own purposes. He can create distractions, sounds, armies at exactly the time he designates.

Maybe giants loom in our own land, possible defeat all around, and overwhelming odds are stacked against us. When we ask God for direction, he might tell us to face the giants head-on, OR he might tell us to wait until we hear the "sound."

It was after David heard the sound, then he stirred himself to move.

Dear Father, help us to hear the sound and know when to move forward in your name, knowing all enemies are defeated by your hand. We are listening, we have prayed, and yet we are surrounded, and now we wait. We wait on the sound...for the execution of your strategy to begin for a sure win.



MARRIAGE

In This Together – No Nuts, Please - by Bekah Holland

Okay , I'm about to bring up some very controversial topics, so go ahead and do some deep breathing to prepare yourself. I'll wait.

First off, feel free to disagree, but just know that I don't care. Because sometimes I just need to take a stand. That being said, mayonnaise is disgusting. There are only two exceptions to this rule, and those are my momma's potato salad and with tuna for a sandwich. That's it. Period. Now, I grew up in a house where my parents obviously had some kind of psychopathic tendencies, because they loved tomato sandwiches (which, by the way, consist of only sliced tomato, bread, and mayo.) Nope. *All the nopes.*

So while I'm ruffling feathers, let me add that there is no such thing as too much garlic, center brownies are way better than the edge pieces, and nuts do not, under any circumstances, belong in chocolate, candy or ice cream.

At this point, I'm assuming that I have managed to offend just about everyone. You're welcome. You can come at me all you want over these particular topics. I'm completely dug in and will defend my opinion (facts) to the death.

Now what, pray tell, does this have to do with marriage?

Well, nothing really, but hear me out.

While these things don't have anything to do with our actual relationship, they do require us to choose a side. Sometimes, we can just agree to disagree. Not on the mayonnaise thing, but most everything else. And sometimes disagreeing works out for everyone. Like with the brownies. While my husband is an equal opportunity brownie eater and doesn't care about center vs edge pieces, and I've made my feelings on the subject pretty clear, sharing a plate of brownies without having to eat fast enough to get all the best parts is a beautiful thing. If everything in marriage were this easy, there would be a major shift in the field of marriage counseling. But, most of the time, there is a lot more to different viewpoints that ensuring that almonds and peanuts are not included in anything I plan on putting in my face hole. The best way to manage finances, buying versus renting, anything related to parenting, whose job it is to put a new bag in after your partner takes out the garbage (because I'd rather throw myself down a flight of stairs than take out the trash) and a whole slew of other things that will come up over and over. And once our marriage isn't all shiny and new anymore, those differences of opinions can end up snowballing into resentment if we let them. Because anyone who has been married for more than 5 minutes knows that before we're really all 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 long days a year, we have no idea that someone's chewing could make us homicidal or that there is, in fact, a wrong way to load the dishwasher. How do we manage someone else's chewing? No idea, but now that my son is the world's loudest chewer, I am on a mission to find a way. I'll let you know.

Until then, we all have to make some concessions. Like if my husband washes the dishes, I've learned to accept this bit of love in action and not rage and organize the plates and bowls before turning on the dishwasher. And when I feel chatty in the morning and my husband is looking at me like I have two heads because I can't stop talking about the weird dream I had, before he's had enough coffee to work his way through my particular brand of crazy, he's stopped walking

away and slamming a door (that's not true, I think he normally closed it semi quietly) and instead has perfected his *I'm totally listening face* and tries to nod in the right places. Don't get me wrong. There are times when we have had much more intense and important disagreements. There were times that we yelled and screamed and said things that we never should have said. And sometimes, we just have to take turns on being right or picking the least terrible path forward.

Learning to deal with the more mundane issues has helped us to work through the tougher ones. Because we're learning to assume the best, to listen to hear and not to respond, and to be open to trying something that might not line up with what we want. *Unless it's mayo*. And instead of demanding our own way, we try to not only hear what the other is saying, but also recognize the things that are left unsaid, right under the surface. It's all give and take. Sometimes I'm great at it and he's cranky. And sometimes he's right on the money and I have to figure out how to stop twitching and (not so) gracefully concede he was right. But through the hard choices like parenting and finances, as well as the easy ones like who gets to pick takeout for family night, we keep trying, and sometimes failing, and trying again to find some humor, grace and common ground. Not only is this important for us, but it's also even more important for our kids to watch how we choose to deal with issues big and small. We haven't always been a good example of that. But we keep waking up, getting up and trying again. And if nothing else, our kids will see what it looks like to not give up on your people, how to love big, and finding ways to laugh through the struggles.

So, don't stop trying. Don't ever stop laughing. And never ever forget to ask about nuts in chocolate chip cookies before channeling your inner Martha Stewart.

"We both said 'I do' and we haven't agreed on a single thing since."

So I Married an Axe Murderer

Date Night Fun – Go to the Games – by Marcy Lytle

Fall is near, football is happening, kids are playing games (even just in the parks), and stadiums are filling up. So...why not incorporate this season into your date night time together? We are hoping to attend a high school game in the new stadium near our home, even though we know no one on the team – it's the high school stadium where our kids went years ago! Games are great for fun food, people watching, cheering and clapping, and holding hands and laughing...so go!

High school football – Find one that interests you. One time we went to a six-man game in a small town, so do that if you want! Sometimes, the best foods are at the games! Plan a Friday night game together or even invite another couple, and go.

Little kids on the field – If you have littles in your life find out the schedules for their games and try to attend one game, or two. Often, these games are on Saturday mornings, so make it a breakfast date and then show up to cheer them on. Afterwards, take a walk at the park where they played.

A sport you'd never watch – Is there an event you've never attended or watched? We once went to a Roller Derby event and loved it. Sat by a guy that told us all about the rules. Or stay at home for date night and watch a sporting event, with all the fun food, together. You pick one game, he picks the next. Of course there's football, but pick something new!

Cricket in the park – We often take walks in the park and see teams playing cricket. That's not a sport we are familiar with but we enjoy watching. There are even some Bollywood films about cricket, worth watching. Or maybe there's another sport going on in your park – soccer, for example. Pack a picnic and sit on the sidelines and learn, and chat about the game.

A splurge at a stadium – We have Austin FC in our town, the Texas Longhorns, and more. Tickets aren't cheap, but going to one of the games is so fun once in a while, so save up and go! Get into the fan noise, the snacks you can buy at the stands, and yell until you can't talk. Dress up in team colors, if you enjoy that sort of thing. Make it a date night to remember...

What games are your favorites to watch? Have you thought of calling it a date night, by dressing up, snuggling close, enjoying good food and chatting about the plays, the scores, the miscalls, and those around you? We have attended ultimate Frisbee games the past two summers and loved it...it was a regular date night. Who knew we'd enjoy such a thing?

After 40 Years – It's An Honor – by Marcy Lytle

Maybe it's this way with every married couple, where one is stronger than the other in some area. For example, my husband makes the bed precisely and succinctly, he cleans the kitchen til it's in pristine shape, he can fix anything that's broken, and so much more! He's way better than I am at so many things. So I let him do those things...and try to make sure and thank him.

One particular area where I admire him and wish I was like him is in the area of his faith. He's so settled, never gets ruffled or worried, and truly rests in his relationship with his Father like no other person I know. For that, I'm truly grateful and glean from him so much. In fact, I often lean on him for strength so much that I wonder if I'll topple him over!

I was thinking about this lately because I've been sad because of my father's passing and some other losses we've experienced in the last year, and my husband has been my rock. He has often assured me that all is well.

But who assures him? I'm so used to him being up and smiling and strong and secure, that I don't often remember to encourage him!

I know he gets tired from work, as his job is super tedious and time consuming. I know he's sleepy and needs a nap when we're going so much. I know he must grow weary and not say anything, for fear of being a burden to me. Or, maybe he doesn't. But instead of always sitting over here waiting for him to pour into me, I can step up and pour into him. It should be my honor to do so!

I'm not a server like he is, so it doesn't come natural to me. So, in my thinking I've come up with some ways I can honor him by strengthening his walk, holding his hand, and making him smile:

- I can pray for him. Seems like a no-brainer, but he's always doing so well I forget to!
- I can make sure his delights are mine. I don't care for coffee, but when he wants one, I can sit and chat and let him linger as he sips instead of hurrying on...
- I can leave encouraging notes on his desks of affection, verses, or just a smiley face.
- I can text him to say how proud and thankful I am for him.
- I can do one of his chores when I see he's tired and busy, like take out the trash.
- I can thank him more often for the way he holds my hand during a movie.
- I can admire a job well done of any kind that he does, small or big.
- I can pray for him again. Encircling him in prayer for health, strength and faith.

I know not everyone has a spouse full of faith. Maybe you're the one always pulling up the family with your strong walk with God. And you're the one who needs a hand up. I'm praying for you right now and giving thanks for anyone in a family that stands strong in faith for the others. It's hard sometimes, to always be the rock and the foundation and the security for those around us who are floundering all the time. Sometimes, the strong ones need a boost and lots of love coming their way, too, even if they don't ask, say they don't need it, and seem to soar all the time. They do need it, and it's an honor and a privilege to bless and be blessed.

If your husband carries you most of the time, make your own list of ways to honor him. If you're the one that carries him, then I pray that he notices or that you can find solace and strength in the One who carries us all and feel his arms under yours every single minute of every single day. He delights in those he loves, and that includes you.

For Better or Worse - Build Him Up – by Kaelin Scott

Something I admire about my husband is his humility. He chooses to glorify God instead of himself, and I love that. When people find out he works for one of the most famous people in Texas, their first question is usually, “How did you land that job?” Britton could talk about his qualifications or his education or his experience, but he doesn’t. He always says the same thing. “It was a God thing.”

Truly, it was God’s divine intervention that led us here. It was absolutely His plan, regardless of Britton’s achievements or preparedness. But Britton doesn’t have to say that. He could easily go on about how awesome he is and puff himself up to make people admire him or be jealous of him. Still, he doesn’t do that. He gives credit where credit is due and chooses to glorify God.

I was going to write this article about humility in marriage, but I realized something else I needed to address instead. Since my husband doesn’t like to brag on himself, it gives me plenty of chances to do it for him. But here’s the problem...I often don’t.

It’s not that I’m not proud of him or grateful for him or any of that. I guess I’m just a scaredy pants when it comes to talking up my husband. I could list all of his positive attributes here on pen and paper (or you know, keyboard), but when it comes to face-to-face interactions, I fall pretty flat. And I don’t think I’m the only one.

Actually, most women these days are so quick to bash their husbands to their friends. To complain and tear them down. It runs rampant in the online mom groups I’ve joined over the years. In fact, some pretty terrible things have been said about ladies’ husbands online for all to see. For some reason, women tend to use each other to verbally desecrate their husbands. It’s pretty sad.

I can’t speak for men, but to me, it seems like guys aren’t doing this nearly as much when they get together as women are. They talk about fishing or sports or whatever it is they’re into. Correct me if I’m wrong on this, but in general, men don’t seem to be sitting around tearing their wives apart with their words.

So why do women do it? Why aren’t we out there building our husbands up and making them look good? Why do we want to make them look bad? I don’t know the answer to that, and I’m not assuming everyone does this all the time. I’m just pointing out a trend I’ve seen among women in general.

Narrowing it down to just me again...I know I’ve wasted opportunities to say good things about Britton when he wasn’t around, or even when he was. Maybe I wasn’t bashing him or complaining about him (although I’m sure I’ve done that a time or two, sorry babe). But so many times, when I could brag about my hubby and verbally build him up, I fall short. I don’t say anything. Or I say the wrong thing. (It’s a running joke in our house that I have foot in mouth syndrome and I’m very socially awkward.)

I think a lot of this has to do with confidence. I’m not the most confident person. Bragging doesn’t come naturally to me, either. But encouragement does, so maybe I should look at it as public encouragement. I need to publicly encourage my husband, whether he’s there to hear it or not. It’s my job as his partner and his best friend to speak positive and uplifting things about him. There are enough negative voices in the world around us. He doesn’t need mine to be another.

Maybe we can challenge ourselves over the next month to only speak positively about our husbands. No, I don't mean we can't express frustration or hurt or any of that. But we can do that to his face, and only to him. Outside of our homes, let's be our husbands' champions. Their cheerleaders. Their number one fans. Let's use every opportunity to build them up, and then let's watch what happens. Who knows, it might strengthen our marriage and bring us closer together. At the very least, there will be less negativity floating around. At the very most, God will be glorified by our speech. Sounds like a worthwhile cause, right?



ENCOURAGEMENT

Rooted in Love - Light of the World – by Kaelin Scott

Times have been kind of crazy for the past few years. Actually, things in this world are always pretty crazy, aren't they? It seems like we get past one major event and another soon follows. There really is no "normal" when it comes to life.

I think a lot of people today get caught up in certain things that are happening, so much so that they forget what really matters. And I don't think a lot of the things we get so worked up about really matter that much in the grand scheme of things.

When we get so wrapped up in current events and the news, we lose sight of what's really important. I'm not saying those things aren't important, but they aren't the end-all be-all. Sure, current events and local news impact us, but the health of our souls is what really matters. In the end, Jesus is the only thing that really and truly matters.

So when the world seems like it's falling apart...again...what do we do? How do we keep our eyes on Jesus?

We need to have a heart of prayer. We need to spread kindness instead of anger. We need to really listen and understand others, but we also need to be bold enough to stand up for what's right. We need to have discernment. We need to be rooted in the truth of God's Word. We need to defend those who can't defend themselves. We need to speak the name of Jesus every chance we get.

We can't let fear be our motivator. If we're acting out of fear, then we can't possibly act out of love. Fear and love cannot coexist, because perfect love casts out fear. Being afraid of what the world thinks means we can't truly love others. The devil knows this, and that's why he tries to make us afraid. But it doesn't matter what the world thinks. It matters how we represent our Savior, whether it matches with what's popular or acceptable in society or not.

When things get crazy that's when the world needs Jesus the most. And that means we need to put on the full armor of God. We need to be ready to defend our faith. And we need to speak the truth in love. If we're too afraid to speak up, then the truth will never be heard. So many people are in desperate need of love and grace, and all they need is someone to show them the way.

The world needs us, sisters in Christ. It needs to hear the truth, and it needs to feel God's love. We can't let it fall to someone else. Each one of us must be bold in our faith, and we must stand together. The more voices telling the truth, the more people will hear and understand.

We can't hide our light; we have to let it shine. Together. Now more than ever. The darkness is closing in, but it won't have the last say. The light will win. The question is, how many people can we love and serve until the trumpet sounds?

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden...
In the same way, let your light shine before others."
Matthew 5:14, 16

Firmly Planted – The Adventurous Path – by Dina Cavazos

Sometimes life just plods along like an old horse, weary of carrying people on its back, the only excitement being a (hopefully) tasty morsel at the end of it. Sometimes it feels like there is no real purpose to the plodding, day after day. Some lucky horses have more adventurous lives; but a horse probably doesn't even think about it, it simply experiences, moment to moment, drudgery, hunger, pleasure, excitement, or whatever else the day brings.

Thankfully, I, being human, am able to think beyond today. I have a spiritual dimension that longs to connect with its source, who is God. Since childhood, the questions "Who am I?," "Why am I here?" and "What am I supposed to do?" have tugged and pulled and stirred. These questions have caused me to seek in places high and low. These questions dangled themselves in front of my lostness, and led me into the pathless forest of life, looking for a way through. I was looking for meaning, truth, adventure—there had to be *something* worth living for. I didn't know it at the time, but I wasn't lost in the dark all alone.

Feeling lost is lonely: the lack of direction, the lack of connection, carrying the dead weight of troubles and unanswered questions, just like an old tired horse. But something kept me going, and, fortunately, unlike a horse, my searching spirit was met by its Source, pursuing and waiting for me to come home. I finally did. I finally found the path home through the forest. When I realized that the path is a Person who called himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and not a path of my own making, everything changed.

It wasn't easy; at first I was assailed by doubts. Could I believe the incredulous gospel story? Could it be true? In my lostness, I was inclined to believe far-out notions that sounded like sci-fi. Why shouldn't I believe this story that was rooted in history and had endured for thousands of years? I decided to make a choice. It was tenuous at first, but my conviction grew stronger as I exercised faith. Over the years, there were ups and downs and I meandered away from the Path a few times, but I always came back, and I can say my feet are now "firmly planted" in Him.

Now I know who I am, why I'm here, and what I'm supposed to do. I am not merely plodding through life for a tasty morsel at the end. He provides a well of living water to drink from each day, and he himself is the bread of life. In the story where Jesus turns water into wine, Mary, his mother said something very wise and very pointed: "Whatever he says, do it." That's the way I want to live my life. There is nothing more satisfying, rewarding, or adventurous. In part 2, I'll share one of my adventures with God you won't want to miss!

Moving Forward – Remember – by Pam Charro

Part of my time with God this morning was about remembering what I was delivered from when I came to know Christ. As the years go by, it's so easy to forget that I haven't always been right with God. This particular devotional today was short, but powerful enough to bring tears to my eyes.

I realize that not everyone has experienced a horrible past such as mine, and not everyone had a strong awareness at a young age of how dark the world could be before they accepted Jesus as their Savior. I had a nightmare childhood, and by the time I was in my early 20s, I was angry, insecure, abusive to others, and self-destructive. After years of therapy and anti-depressants, I knew I needed something; but the more things I tried in order to find fulfillment, the more I began to suspect that maybe there was no answer. The bubble I lived in that suggested that hope was "out there somewhere" was becoming precariously thin and on the verge of popping.

I was running out of ideas by the time I was 23. I had moved from Montana to Massachusetts to try and know my dad and make it as a singer, and, so far, trying to have a relationship with my dad had turned out disastrous. I had tried drugs, multiple boyfriends, every weight loss diet known to woman, voice lessons, and had auditioned for bands. The solution which I had believed most of my life would finally prove my value - becoming a famous singer who was loved by all - was becoming less and less likely. And if becoming famous and thin wasn't the answer...what was left? I couldn't find love or significance anywhere, and I was beginning to lose all hope.

But God knew exactly when to reveal himself to me, right at the time I would have run out of places to turn. Right at the time when becoming a Christian was the last thing that appealed to me. He let me try the world just long enough to learn that it didn't work, and not a minute longer, and then he showed me everything I needed to know. It was THE turning point that he and I had waited for my entire life. How blessed I was to not have to spend more than 24 years in my search! My life, while still far from easy, has never been empty since. And, regardless of how many mistakes I've made, he has always been there for me.

I am so thankful for my story. It has incredible meaning for me, and I love remembering where I was and how it felt to be lost, and then found. I hope you also will have the opportunity to share your story with someone today. There will always be such power in our remembering...and in our sharing.

Simple Truths - Different is So Good- by Marcy Lytle

I remember when my kids were small they wanted us to have friends that had children the same ages as our kids. Well, what a wish that was, because it was almost impossible to find another set of parents our age with a boy and a girl, the same ages as our kids. And besides that, who knew if our kids would have similar interests?

Now that I'm much older, I realize that having friends with similar interests is so nice, but having friends that are different is so good, as well! So good!

I have a friend that early on when I met her, she showed up to a meeting with a bowling bag as a purse! I knew right away we'd be friends, because this lady was an individual and thought outside the box. And we are still friends, even though she now lives far away.

I have a friend who loves cats, as much as she loves her kids. I don't care for cats, but I love that she does! And it's fun to hear her tales of the cats and their love for her, as well.

I have a friend that likes only happy-ending movies and she won't go see any films at all, unless they end well! This means we rarely see movies together, but she's a best friend because I love HER!

I have multiple friends that go to different churches than I do, worship in different ways, and focus on things maybe I'm not so focused on. This makes for good conversation, and all of these friends are prayer warriors, so I'll take more!

I have a friend that shops in places I'd never enter. We just have different interests in clothes and even home décor. But she's delightful in every way, and has a huge personality. She's so fun!

I have a friend that's way younger than I am, but she and I connect on in so many ways. I love hearing about her life, and she's always interested and asks about mine. That's so cool, and so is she.

I have another friend that's a young mom, and I'm not, but we connected right away when she moved here. We could talk and talk, and we had this mother/daughter love then...and now...though she too has moved away.

My point in recounting all of those friends is that none of them is exactly like me, and for that I'm grateful. I've noticed that when I'm just like someone else, sometimes competition can creep in, because we like the same things. And I'm not interested anymore in my life in competing. It also requires me to be tolerant of differences, even embrace them, and to notice others and welcome and take interest in how they ARE different from me. It's much more fun!

Of course, we do have lots of things in common, which is nice. But those differences, rather than being a point of contention or avoidance, are actually points I've come to love.

Maybe this school year, this new season, in new places where we find ourselves, we can look for new friends of any kind, color, economic status, or whatever...and be open to enjoying all people. It widens our horizon, extends our arms, and creates a welcome at our doors.

And our friend list grows longer...and longer...and our kids see it's not the same that's so important, it's just the friend that is...

Unearthly Thing - The School of Suffering – by Angela Dolbear

I squeeze out the last creamy blob from the tube of Aquaphor Healing lotion. As I rub it on the long, thin line of light pink raised skin that stretches from an inch above my belly button, all the way down to my pubic bone, I think about suffering.

I don't mind the hysterectomy scar so much. I'm not one to wear bikinis. Never have been. My husband Tim is the only other person to see the scar. Whenever he sees it, I can see in his face that he is praising God that there was no cancer, and that the tumor didn't explode and kill me. All healed-up well. And I join him in praising God.

Can suffering be a good thing? A terrible emergency now leads us to moments of praise and gratitude.

Is suffering like a school that teaches us a deeper sense of gratitude, and praise to a God with faithful, unfailing love?

I have loads of medical adventures, some serious, and each one has a testimony of about God—how He spoke words of comfort and encouragement to me. I will forever testify to His goodness.

Would I have such a strong testimony if I had not been made to become a connoisseur of emergency rooms and hospital food? Would my conviction and authenticity of God's goodness be so strong?

I wouldn't pause to say no. I have drawn closer to my Lord because He has drawn closer to me, especially in my times of need.

The school of suffering has taught me many valuable lessons. Here are a few:

- Deeper prayer – the need to pray more, and my desire to pray has increased, too.
- Awareness that God is always with me – sometimes it's just His presence, but most often His words that He speaks to me in my spirit are with me. I have a yearning to hear His voice and His words; it almost feels like an insatiable addiction.
- Psalm 119:67 puts suffering into action (I LOVE THIS!) – “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now Your word do I keep [hearing, receiving, loving, and obeying it].” - Psalm 119:67 Amplified Bible, Classic Edition (AMPC)

Pain and suffering are imperative aspects of life. They are used by God to communicate with us, and change us, and even stir us to action. One of my favorite quotes from C.S. Lewis describes this concept:

“We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”
C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

Hindsight is 50/50, I say. We can either become bitter after suffering or become stronger. I will gladly and unflinchingly tell anyone about the goodness of God after experiencing His goodness firsthand. His existence and ever-present help are now my confident convictions. And His voice is music to my soul, which I long to hear.

God is 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, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN. Listen to their music on [Sound Cloud](#)! Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - Beware – by Marcy Lytle

There are times I wish I'd noticed the "Beware" signs before I stepped forward, and there are still times now when I wish there were beware signs that we all see and notice and heed...before doing the deed. Beware signs are pinned to fences so that we know there are vicious dogs behind the posts, but there are so many places in every walk of life when a Beware sign would have been so nice...but no one pinned one up.

So here are the Beware signs I'd pin up if given the chance:

1. Beware of your children saying they're too fat or dressing to please their peers. They're getting their kudos from the wrong places, so observe where those places are and steer them away.
2. Beware of teachings that leave out Jesus and the work He did on the cross, and our need for a Savior, in favor of stating we are all inherently good. In other words, beware of those "worship" centers that contradict the Word.
3. Beware of scams in your emails, on your phone, and at your door. Don't click, don't answer, and don't open. Ever.
4. Beware of placing your trust in theology instead of Jesus. Theology is a good outline, but Jesus is the body of life...when the outline shifts.
5. Beware of what you say in front of little ears that aren't mature enough to process what you're saying...like judgment, gossip, fear and other loads they're not meant to carry. You'll break them.
6. Beware thinking that plants will thrive and live when they aren't watered daily and often, and placed in good soil, and tended to...much like your children. Learn from your garden.
7. Beware of the fact that friendships change and bitterness will try to settle in like a bird's nest on your head, blocking your vision of all that's good in life. Give thanks instead of growing bitter.
8. Beware that change can occur overnight, in literally seconds, and if your foundation is sand, you might wash away and need a lifeboat. But if that foundation is the Rock, you'll fall, but you the One under you will catch you.
9. Beware of eating poorly and thinking it will never adversely affect your health. It will. It will.
10. Beware of watching social media and chasing after what others have, instead of reveling in what you possess.
11. Beware of looking for a sign in order to feel God's approval. He's already approved of you. Go and enjoy life.
12. Beware of walking too close to the edge of uneven sidewalks in heels or sad shoes, because trips and falls will occur. Look where you're walking.
13. Beware of hoping and pining for friends when you, yourself, are not friendly. Be a friend.
14. Beware of giving with a motive to get, which leaves you totally dissatisfied every time. Give and expect nothing in return except the smile that comes from sharing what you've received.

15. Beware of the brevity of life, yet the longevity of love, and offer it freely to all you meet, in every place you greet...

What "beware" signs would you write and paint and hang on your fence for all to see?

FRESH THYME - Forgetful, We Are – by Marcy Lytle

We were sitting in worship and the girl leading us mentioned how that we are a *forgetful people*. That stuck with me all day, because I am a *forgetful girl*. What I mean is that when problems arise, or fears lurk, I see the present panic and forget the past provision!

Of course, we know the people of God that wandered around for 40 years constantly forgot his care and provision, his deliverance, and everything he did time and time again! He killed an army of pursuers, by drowning them in the sea that he had just parted for his people to cross to safety. And then later, his people were thirsty and hungry, and they forgot about that mighty act from his hand...and they grumbled.

So yes, I think a forgetful people, we all are.

In Deuteronomy it says, "...do not **forget** the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."

So perhaps one way we can become people that remember is by sharing our stories with the next generation. We've been doing that lately, with our kids. By speaking of His faithfulness, we hear it again and it encourages us, and they hear it for the first time and it sustains them!

There are so many examples in the Word about folks that experienced great exploits with God only to find them under a shade tree whining in the heat of the day...when times get tough.

When we are blessed (I really don't like the way we use that word) with things and health and family, etc. we revel in his goodness...but I'm not sure we take note of it. If we then come to a hurdle in this race we call life, we have this choice to remember those benefits we reveled in...or forget them and fear that the hurdle will be our demise.

Psalms 103 tells to not forget his benefits.

Here's what forgetting his promises produces:

- Ungratefulness
- Fear
- Selfishness
- Attitude
- Folly

We become ungrateful like toddlers that stomp their feet demanding a new toy, when there's a closet at home they haven't even touched. We raise a fist in fear and wonder why God would dare leave us alone, when in reality he is with us always...we've just forgotten that promise. Selfishness reigns because we pick up the lie again that it's up to us to make it through this next dark place...when the Light goes before us. Attitude raises its ugly head when we forget the Maker of the sunrise and the sunset, in favor of fearing the light of what each day might bring. And finally, folly takes place because we then act out of our forgetfulness. If we had remembered, we would have laid it all down and acted in wisdom, resting in His peace.

I'm writing about this because I am one that tends to forget in favor of picking up the glasses called fear and seeing through them darkly, wishing and wondering where God is. I'm so thankful for his patient endurance with his people...of which I am one. And I'm so grateful indeed for his daily reminders written in our hearts, our minds, in the sky and beneath our feet...that we are loved and cared for ALWAYS.

Even when a hurdle is right there on the path we're running. And even if we miss this one and we stumble and fall, no worries at all. We remind ourselves that His arms are always open, His hand always available, and He will lift us to run again...this time remembering His strong arm.

I recall today that I've seen his goodness in the land of the living...so why shouldn't I continue to see it today...in the heat of the moment?

Fresh Thyme – Hairtitude - by Marcy Lytle

I realize that over the decades, the way I've worn my hair has coincided with my attitude at the time. I'm not saying everyone is like this, because I have no idea, but it occurred to me that I styled my hair certain ways that sort of paired with the season of my life. Isn't that interesting? I'm calling it *hairtitude*, and here's how it played out for me.

As a teen, I wore my hair long and wavy, coloring it in the summer with "Sun In" (even though it looked orange instead of blonde) and I kept with the trends. Because after all, what teen doesn't want to "fit in" with her peers? I certainly did!

After I was married a while, my hair got shorter and shorter and more of a severe cut. It made me look sophisticated and tough, and I was all about asserting myself as a woman. I didn't like being pregnant (because my husband didn't have to get fat) and I was bitter against men in so many areas, so my hair cut exhibited sass! And class!

I had colored my hair darker, but then decided to go back to my natural color – a cool blond – as my kids matured and grew. Everyone in my family was blonde but me, so I wanted to match them. And my hair was wavier and softer, but still short. I was maturing, becoming less judgmental toward others, wanting to appear more loving rather than stiff and hard-nosed. Thus, my hair spoke "volumes" with its tousles and curls.

This current decade I'm going gray, and allowing my hair to grow out some. I remember noticing older women in ads and on the big screen and realizing that I want to portray an older woman that's kind, gentle and loving always...no matter whom I'm near or with. And longer hair speaks that, for me.

So by now, maybe you're reading and thinking about your own hair. I'm just saying I've noticed this for me...and me alone. But I think even the clothes we wear, the way we carry ourselves, and how we style our homes reflects the different phases we go through as women over the years.

I would never wear now some of the outfits I wore in the 80's! And my kitchen was a bright lime green and yellow in our first house – can you believe it?

Who knew hair could carry with it such attitude...thus the name of this story...*hairtitude*. But for me, it certainly did. Think about some of the actresses you've watched on the big screen and look at their hair changes with their characters. It's for sure a thing to create softness or hardness, fitting in or standing out, or even speaking and crying for attention.

It's interesting to think about what we wear or show on the outside and how it reflects all the inside frustrations...isn't it? *Hairtitude*. I'm pretty sure I've had some other "tudes" with the way I've presented myself to others over the years. And I hope that I'm always working on improving all of the attitudes that don't reflect Him.

At the present, I'm using texture sea spray for soft waves, hair serum for improved growth, and a great shampoo and conditioner for health and volume...because my hair is aging. Oh the joy

of aging. And these products might work a few wonders to improve the look of my hair, but the expressions on my face underneath the hair – well, I'm still working on those.

FRESH THYME - The Now List – by Marcy Lytle

It's September. I think about this every single fall...what to purchase now so that Christmas spending isn't stressful. There are so many last-minute items we buy near the holidays that add up, even though they are small things! So here's my list of things I like to purchase now, so that when the holidays arrive, I'm just enjoying the music and the candles and the family...at least, that's the plan.

Batteries – These are a killer, aren't they? If you have lots of kids' toys on your list, batteries can be an expense all to themselves! Look for them on sale and stock up now on all sizes – place in a bucket – and have them ready to go on Christmas morning.

Paper plates and napkins – the pretty ones – Marshalls and TJ Maxx and other discount stores often have pretty seasonal plates and napkins. Purchase several sets, and quit washing all those other plates. Make it simple and pretty for yourself and everyone else.

Easy dips and mixes – Mad Dash Mixes are amazing. I mentioned them over on Seven for You as a convenience, and I'm writing about them here again, as a necessity! They really taste so good, and they're great to have on hand for those gatherings you're asked to attend, to bring something tasty, or for your own family get-togethers. Keep a stash in your pantry.

Nuts – These can get pricey! I hear Costco has the best nuts, but I also love to buy from the farmer's markets. I keep them in clear boxes in the fridge – at least four different kinds. Have them on hand for all the baking you'll do, or trail mix, or to just continue to stay healthy during the holidays.

Wrapping paper, tape, sacks – You know, these are outrageous if you have to purchase a lot. Last year, I wrapped everything in newspaper because we take the paper, and I thought why not – it saved me a bundle and looked cute! So think now if you have something already on hand to use and start saving it, like even scraps of material are great or buy red and green bandannas for small gifts – they're only a dollar each (cheaper than a bag!). If you do buy, consider ordering it all now on line, so you have what you need when it's time to wrap things up!

Stocking gifts – I've waited on these before and then they add up quickly to lots of expense right before Christmas. I know some have done away with stockings, but we haven't! I've now started buying them way before Christmas, a few each week, so they don't budge the budget. I look for something in EVERY store I enter – from Target to vintage to discount – all of them. I look for a variety of things from jewelry to soap to cute gadgets to small toys and more. I keep them hanging in bags in my closet until time to stuff the stockings.

Candles – Doesn't everyone like the holiday scents burning at Christmas? Candles are so expensive! I often buy them from the shelves of Ross and Marshalls, looking for brands I know smell good and burn long. Paddy Wax is a fave. I look for sales. Sometimes Bath and Body has a great sale. And markets are great places – so look now for your local city's list of holiday markets coming up this month and in October, and look for the scents you love and get them now.

I'm sure I could keep writing more and more things to buy early, but that's enough for now. You probably have your own list. I'd love to know what else you buy early. I love to have the month of December open for outings and romantic fires (if it's cool enough outside!) and sipping hot cider, instead of worrying about the dollars and cents.

Stock up now, and smile later...