

March 2025



The Dressing – Is it March Already? – by Marcy Lytle

March is here, how can it be? Wasn't Christmas just a few weeks ago? Here where I live, we've had all four seasons in the course of a couple of months, so it stands to reason that I'm confused! However, here it is...March. The season where spring is supposed to begin, but are we ready? It's still cold, and then hot, and then what?

In case you're wearing all sorts of clothing like I am, here are some styles to consider in this third month of the year:

Maybe Something Green? - I love this jewelry by Rivanna and I have a code (THYMEFREE) you can use to save! It will look great with denim, neutrals, navy, brown, yellow, all the hues of the new season that is coming. It's made from palm tree nuts and so affordable and gorgeous.

How About New Frames? Do you call them glasses or frames? Either name you use, these fun geometric frames are great for spring and I found them on Amazon. And...

A Peplum Top? This cute top is from The Loft, with a very small peplum ruffle at the waist and in a black and white fabric that you can dress up from day to night!

Sparkle and Shine? I found this dressy top at The Loft as well, and maybe sparkly threads are for holidays. But I think they're pretty for spring, paired with gold or hues of blue, and a scarf, too. The Loft runs so many good sales, all year long!

Black & White for Sure! – Isn't this a pretty blouse? It can be paired with your corduroys from winter. Add a straw bag and some slides, and you're good to go for a day out shopping or lunch with a friend. Also, from The Loft.

Elevated Casual? This cozy sweater works for cold March winds, and again the Rivanna jewelry is on my wrist! Such fun pieces for all year! The cords are from Old Navy and I'm warm on a blustery morning.

Florals, Anyone? I have a couple of floral sweaters in my closet in spring hues, so I'm pulling them out for March. I just found them on vacation and grabbed them because they're cute! You don't need many accessories because the flowers speak volumes!

Seven for You - Exercise? - The Panel

That word either evokes an "Oh yes, let's do it!" Or maybe it's the thought, "Oh no, I need to, but I don't want to." Or maybe we're somewhere in between those two. I'd say my reaction to exercise is different every day, but yet I make myself do it when I don't want to...most of the time. I thought it would be fun to hear from our panel on what exercise looks like for them, how they make it happen...or how they struggle...and what they wear! And...please read to the very end because we had a surprise contribution from the husband of one our panel member. So fun!

I like to do yoga. I used to do more strenuous exercises but as I got older, I switched to yoga and moves that were less strenuous. I still walk and lift weights, but yoga is my go-to. The mornings I exercise during *Family Feud*. This helps to keep me on schedule and from getting bored. In the past year, I've started doing chair yoga, mostly because I see it all the time on Facebook. I exercise at least four to five times a week and on the days I don't have time I use a quick routine of stretches, called Cosmic Dance, at the beginning of my day. This helps me to get my body moving, and at 63 years young, I need all the help I can get!

I used to dress for my exercise routines but as I've gotten older, I don't sweat, so I just wear what I have on. One exercise I know that's missing from my daily routine is going up and down steps. Every time I have a chance I go up or down wherever I am, and I can tell that my body needs more. I have a stool that I have used to help with this, and I guess I need to get back on it! - Carole

I was never athletic. Growing up, I was the person sitting in the stands, visiting with friends and watching the game, instead of actually playing the game. Even as an adult, I generally enjoyed office jobs and "sit down" crafts. I did *occasionally* participate in taking walks, water aerobic classes, exercising at home, and using a treadmill or stationary bike. Unfortunately, my problem was with being consistent. I was a busy, working mom with low blood sugar and low energy. Plus, I didn't enjoy exercising. So, I moved it to the bottom of the list. I took for granted the healthiness of youth.

Fast forward to the present. As a senior adult, I am sure that consistent exercise would have helped me to be healthier as I aged. I also know that appropriate exercise will increase our quality of life at any age. So, my advice to everyone, young or older is this: Let's all try to find an activity that keeps our bodies moving. - Gina

I joined Crunch Fitness and am using my Silver Sneakers membership for free access! I (try to) go to an AOA (Active Older Adult) class twice a week. What to wear is a challenge! I have some yoga pants that do the trick. I also try to go for 3-4 mile walks with my friends. - Anita

I try to exercise at least five days a week either by walking or doing a YouTube dance workout on rainy or cold days. There are lots of trails in our neighborhood for walking and my husband and I often pick different ones, so as not to get bored. I also have started one particular exercise because of grandkids! I cross my arms on my chest and stand up from a sitting position several times to strengthen my thighs (this helps getting up from the floor!) and sometimes, while watching television, I've been known to do leg lifts or scoot across the living room twisting my torso (yes, I look silly.)

Another thing I love to do is exercise to worship music. I try to pick at least five songs to listen to if I have 20 minutes or so, and I move and raise my hands, and even waltz, depending on the beat!

Some days, I'm motivated and other days not so much, but I always feel better when I move my body. And one thing that's helped me do it consistently is I just wear whatever I have on - no "exercise" clothes - no specific time - I just get up go! If I have to change clothes and go at a certain time a day, that stresses me! And who needs more stress? - Marcy

In 2008 I walked into a free yoga class at the community center around the corner from my house. I've been going three days a week ever since. I have been through seasons of wrestling with its New Age and yet very old practices. Each time I come away with peace in continuing. Because it is at a community center, and not a yoga studio, there are no crystals, no chanting, etc. I use any questionable moments to pray and tell the Lord how grateful I am to have the opportunity to be there, moving and stretching my body, and taking care of what he has given me. I wear yoga pants and big oversized T-shirts. This class has been a lifeline for me through the years. I've made friendships with people I might not typically come in contact with. After Saturday class several of us stay and have coffee together and share our lives. Not all are believers. I see it as an opportunity to share my faith and the impact that Jesus has in my daily life. I hope to continue practicing yoga as long as possible. One of the beauties that it offers is the adaptability to aging and changing bodies. – Shelley

I take a swim exercise class for seniors four times a week. I absolutely love it, and I even shower and dress at the pool's facility. Then about once a month, a bunch of us go out for breakfast together and splurge! Some days I also walk my grand dog, depending on how my cranky knee feels. I lost 27 pounds last year, but, sadly losing has slowed down since Thanksgiving. – Debbie

Texas. Florida. California. Michigan. Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. Exercise. What do they all have in common? Bike riding and Me.

I met my wife, Gloria, in California. We were both retired widowers. We dated; we married. We decided to travel. With limited finances and a travel trailer we decided to "hit the road." And for the last seven years we have been doing such. Being Workampers, where we worked part time for our RV site and utilities, throughout the aforementioned states, afforded us down time. I acquired my first bicycle somewhere in Texas.

I soon learned that the low impact sport of bike riding was for me. I am a loner of sort. I do not ride competitively. I ride for the "sport" and the benefits to my body. One law of Physics is "that a body at rest wants to stay at rest." This body, my 75-year old body, has to be forced to move. The first several minutes of riding has my body screaming, NO! I have to ride through it and keep on going. I first could only ride about a ½ mile. I am up to 10-12 miles per day, and love it! When the weather is appropriate, above 45 degrees and not raining, I am on my bike.

For the last two summers, (yes, we are still in the RV), we have been at a wonderful campground in Michigan. Connected to the campground is a Rail-to-Trails bike path that is 12 miles in length, ½ paved and ½ unpaved. A small town on each end, us in the middle, and our church along the way. Yes, a storybook setting that I adore. I look forward to my daily ride. My wife looks forward to my being out of her hair for a couple of hours. I enjoy nature, I enjoy the wildlife along the way, I enjoy the freedom of the trail.

I compete with no one. I ride a consistent 10-11 mph. I don't pass other riders, they pass me. I feel great when I am done riding each day because I have my own personal accomplishment. If I want to be competitive with myself, I have an App on my phone called *Strava*, which will give me my personal times on all legs of my bike rides.

This winter we are not in Florida, which was our go-to for 5 winters. We are in Michigan. As I look out our rented condo's windows, I see several feet of snow, the wind is blowing, supposed to get down to Zero tonight. The bike is in the basement, the only exercise I get now is walking to the Library and my week-end part time job.

I am waiting for spring!!!

All of the above that submitted their answers know the value of moving their bodies. It doesn't require a membership anywhere, but that helps if you like to go and be with others. It doesn't require a cute outfit, but if you like your specific pants or tops or shoes, then wear them! And it doesn't require you doing what everyone else is doing, but rather finding your groove on how to move...and doing it consistently. Be encouraged to start somewhere with movement, find the something that you enjoy, and make it happen somehow regularly, if you can! It can involve a pool, a trail, a kitchen floor, a machine, a sidewalk...or whatever surface you find yourself drawn to, to move.

Cousin Moms - Travel Hacks - by Charissa and Kamrin

Charissa

In regards to travel and organizing, we have done a lot! Travel "hacks" do change as the kids get older. Here are a few of my faves:

It depends on whether you're traveling in the car or plane:

For every day organization, we have a black organizer in the back of the car full of diapers, wipes, sanitizers, books and small activities to go. This helps if I forget my diaper bag or the kids need something, as I can easily grab from this box.

For longer car rides, we have small organizers that hang on the back of the seat where it holds the water bottles, snacks, their tablet can hang there, and the pockets can be filled with what they need. They get excited packing it and grabbing what they need on their own.

We include their tablets. And headphones are a must, as this allows you and your husband to have quiet time instead of listening to three different movies at the same time! Melissa & Doug have great paint books with water, so no mess involved. Crayola has books that use colorless markers that only emerge color on the pages, nowhere else! Books are great for those that can read, while in the car. And for a very long trip, like eight or more hours, we purchase Dollar Tree treats to open each hour. One might be a bag of chips, the second hour might be a coloring book, and so on. Each gift is unwrapped on the hour. Healthy snacks are a must, as well as a surprise candy. Beef Jerky is great for protein, and cashews or nuts are great as well. And we keep their water bottles full.

At an Airbnb, most of the time they provide a Pack n Play so you don't have to pack your own! Sometimes the sheets are not the best or not there, so I bring my own, which are easy to pack.

On a plane, each kids has their own backpack with all of their activities, as well as an empty water bottle for each person – to save water and use at the airport water fillers. You also can gate check your stroller and car seat, which is great, so that you can use the stroller in the airport.

Most of the time, the flight attendants give the kids a pin, and the pilot sometimes invites the kids to explore their area. Ask the flight attendants about this!

Kamrin

Traveling now is different with older kids. I don't feel like I don't have any good moms hacks to keep them occupied, because they pack their own bag – one backpack – like cards, games, their headphones, audio book, etc. But my tips are for budgeting, because we are a family of vie, and for streamlining, and unpacking. I like to say work smarter, not harder.

Utilize lists. I know lots of moms pack for the kids and their spouse, which is fine. But if you don't have time to pack for everyone, and you want to teach the kids to pack, it's good to have lists for the kids. I have used a packing list for the kids since they were small. When they were little I drew pictures and how many of each thing! At the age of five, they were packing their own bags! This gives Mom a break. I just double checked, and then it works! They still ask for the list when we pack, and now my daughter has it. She just

wants to know the number of days and if there's anything "fancy" on the dinner. We recently went on a cheer competition weekend, and the girls stayed with the team in their own hotel rooms without parents. When we had to check out, I was nervous that my daughter would leave stuff – but she had all of her stuff packed. Part of that was because she knew what she had packed! Lists are everything!

- Take a dirty clothes bag. We take this and stuff it, and we come straight home with all the dirty clothes in one bag. We dump in the wash and dry it. Also, we make sure our washer and dryer is empty when we leave so it's ready to wash when we get home. One big bag is super helpful, and it gets packed in one big suitcase as we head home.
- Your cooler is your best friend...on a road trip. With a family of five, it's expensive to travel. I would love to eat out, but it's not possible. To save money somewhere, we rent a place with a kitchen or at least a fridge/microwave so that we can eat there. We did fly to Colorado one time, but we ate lunch in our cabin or packed sandwiches in the car. Waters can go in the cooler to save money too, so you're not buying drinks. We pack breakfast items too, because all those meals add up. We then put our money towards other things.
- A portable charger is a must. It goes with me everywhere, with family or when I'm alone, or even traveling with sports teams. So many places or cashless, or tickets are digital, or itinerary is on your phone, I'm so glad when I have this charger. I even charged some friends' phones at competition because their phones died! Phones are used for so many things so a portable charging block is a must. Some good ones are on Amazon, or you can get one from your phone carrier.
- Create tradition. Not sure if this is hack but one of our favorites is stop at QT for a drink and a snack. We do this every time. We also create playlists of our favorite music for family time in the car singing. We create a family playlist – and we play it in turns – we have fun singing and laughing. We also play old school games, like the license plate game or create stories while we drive. Making the kids a part of vacation and the planning!

In The Kitchen – Meatless and Marvelous – by Marcy Lytle

We don't always have meatless meals, but we do often. And I don't think we miss out on any flavor at all. In fact, meatless meals happen to be my favorite. And my husband doesn't mind it either. So with that in mind, below are a few great meals we've had lately. (We did add crumbled bacon on one!)

Polenta Bowl

This is easy, quick, and oh so tasty! We enjoyed it for a nice lunch

- One tube of store bought polenta
- 1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
- Mexican spices
- Salsa
- Avocado
- Fresh tomatoes
- Grated cheese
- Cilantro

Place polenta in heated saucepan and add a little milk to be able to mash and heat until creamy.

Place black beans in another pan and season with Mexican spices, and add ¼ cup water, and heat.

Spread the polenta in shallow bowls then top with beans and other toppings. ENJOY.

Cauliflower Wrap/Pizza

I loved this flavor combo for lunch. It was absolutely delicious.

- 12oz small cauliflower florets
- 1 T olive oil
- Salt
- BBQ chickpea nuts (I found a trail mix bag with these)
- 2 ripe avocados
- 2 T lemon juice
- 4 flatbreads or two Naan
- 2 T roasted salted pepitas
- Green salsa
- BBQ Sauce

On large rimmed baking sheet toss cauliflower with oil and ¼ t salt, roast in 425 degree oven for 25 minutes.

Mash avocados with lemon juice and a pinch of salt. Spread over flatbread. Drizzle with BBQ Sauce. Top with roasted cauliflower, chickpeas and pepitas. Drizzle with salsa.

Spaghetti with Chickpeas

Have you tried meatless spaghetti? This is a winner!

- 1 lb cherry tomatoes
- 2 t granulated garlic
- Sea salt and black pepper
- 12 oz spaghetti (I used fresh from a market)
- 1 15oz can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup chopped fresh basil

Preheat oven to 350, line baking sheet with parchment. Bring pot of salted water to a boil. Cut tomatoes in half and place in a bowl. Sprinkle them with garlic and S&P. Spread on baking sheet in a single layer and roast til they start to shrivel, about 30-35 minutes. Remove from oven and set aside.

During last 10 minutes of the roasting, add the pasta to your boiling water and cook according to directions. Drain the pasta, keeping back about a cup if needed for later. Transfer pasta to a bowl, add the chickpeas, the tomatoes, the basil and reserved water if needed to moisten, and mix well. Season to taste and serve hot.

We enjoyed this with a side of green beans and toasted EBB bread.

Loaded Fries

We've ordered these out and loved them, so why not make them in?

- Frozen Fries (3/4 bag)
- Cooked bacon
- Tomatoes
- Avocados, diced
- Black beans
- Grated cheese
- Cilantro
- Salsa

Cook the fries in the oven until golden and just crispy, according to package directions. Meanwhile, drain and rinse the beans, dice the avocados and chop tomatoes, cook bacon and crumble...

These are best served in paper boats, just layer the salted fries on the bottom then top with everything, drizzling w/ salsa last.

Smoky Black Eyed Pea Hummus

A great dip to share with friends for an appetizer or take to a new mom, or enjoy yourself!

- 2 garlic cloves
- 2 15.5oz black eyed peas, drained and rinsed
- 8 T olive oil
- 3 T tahini
- 2 T fresh lemon juice
- 1 1/4 t smoked paprika
- ¾ t kosher salt
- ½ t black pepper
- Lemon zest
- Pita chips

Process garlic cloves in food processor til finely chopped, add black eyed peas, 6 T of the oil, tahini, lemon juice, 1 t smoked paprika, salt and pepper. Process til smooth.

Spoon into bowl. Top with remaining olive oil and $\frac{1}{4}$ t paprika. Top with lemon zest. Serve with chips.

To make a meal around this, we add pita chips, cucumbers and carrots, nuts, olive and dark chocolate!

Bookstore - Unraveled, Time to Forgive - by Carole Gilbert

I wrote my first poem at about four years old. I still remember it, probably because it was only two lines long. But I was extremely proud of it! I put it to music and sang it over and over all day long. My momma and grandmother happily supported and encouraged me. After having my own kids, and them repeating the same phrases, songs, or just my name over and over, I imagine my momma and grandmother were just being nice. But it started a lifetime of writing. Although, I never thought I'd be writing this story, *Unraveled, Time to Forgive, A True Ending to Murder.*

The story is about my momma and brother being murdered when I was a little girl. After this, as I grew up, my grandmother told me one day I needed to write our story. I tried to write it a few times, but the words wouldn't come. Years later, after my grandmother passed, the words started to flow. It came as one sticky note here and another note there. Then when my kids were grown, I felt led to put it all together, for them. I believe God guided my hand and filled my heart with what He wanted me to tell. But that's another book. Then a few years later the truth behind their murders came out. After 50 years being unsolved, *Unraveled, Time to Forgive, A True Ending to Murder* gives the surprising end.

The book tells about my life of tragedy and secrets that I thought I had dealt with many years ago after their murders. But when the truth came out, I realized I still had many feelings and emotions unattended to. The main one being unforgiveness. And when this happened, I turned to God and His Word. I didn't know how to deal with it. God is so faithful! He led me to verses that helped me see why these feelings were still in my heart and He showed me how to change them. He also showed me more about His forgiveness. We all believe we understand how to forgive. We teach our children, "Tell them you're sorry." But forgiveness is so much more, and it is needed to make the perfect ending.

This book is not for everybody. You have to enjoy reading true crime and about crimes that were unsolved. It is the second book I wrote surrounding these events, but it is the one that tells the whole story. And it's a crazy story with a crazy ending, but it's my story. And we all have one. I hope yours is only about good and happiness, but I also know if yours is not, and you know Jesus, it will have a happy ever after ending. Like mine.

Also included in the book are verses and examples from God's word for encouragement. The ones that encouraged me.

And there is one main verse from it on forgiveness.

Luke 6:37,

"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven."

Tried and True - Last Month's Learnin' - by Marcy Lytle

Every month, there's learnin' to be had, if we just listen, observe and marvel at the world around us. So here's my list of what I learned just last month...

If your soup turns out a bit too spicy, you can add honey and some citrus to tone it down!

If you need to store bathroom or other small room rugs that you change out, purchase a plastic trash can, roll up the rugs and insert. It works! And little dish tubs work for folded tablecloths.

If you wonder, who uses tablecloths anymore, I do! They're great for laying out on the floor for picnic suppers at home, watching a show!

If you like to change out your purses like I do, just keep a few main things you switch, and it will make the activity easy. Mostly, just a large and small wallet and a zip bag will do!

If you need plates with sides, for enjoying nachos for dinner with friends, use deep dish aluminum pie plates for each person! You can order these from Amazon!

If you're traveling with kids in tow, this amazing pouch/book with lots of activities is a hit. Found on Amazon.

If it's raining and you, the adult, need an activity to do – try this felt succulent kit – it's fun to do and fun to enjoy wherever you place it when you're done!

If you need something at Old Navy, just wait and follow them and sign up for emails... and it will be half off!

If you want a fun activity to play with the family with little kids, grab animal flashcards at The Dollar Tree and let them draw one at a time, and play charades by either acting out the animal or describing it!

If you're hosting a party, bandannas make great napkins, and they're cheap to buy!

If you have a small mirror or can find one, it makes a great base for a little trio in your bathroom.

If you like Hallmark and need a "different" but really good movie to watch one night, check out Falling Together – it has a great message too!

If you are young, you might not know what "notions" are in regards to sewing. My daughter didn't. So all the little things you need for sewing, like needles and thread, etc. are called notions!

If you need a new (old) cookbook, The Cook is in the Parlor is one I found that's a super fun read, and I've tried the banana bread – with sour cream – it's amazing!

If you need some new pens for your desk, Michaels always has the cutest pens that are fat and pudge with a cute topper – check them out for gifts or for yourself!

If you need a series to watch on television, we are enjoying Matlock – the new version with Kathy Bates. We're hooked!



Practical Parenting - Rainy Day - by Marcy Lytle

It's that time of year when spring rains start to fall, and you might find yourselves indoors with nutty kids and feel as though you're losing your mind because they can't get outdoors and get out that energy! They're not interested in their Christmas toys, they're crying that they're bored, and you don't want them on their tablets or phones or watching TV...so head to the Dollar Store for a rainy day stash you can keep on hand!

Balloons – Blow up about 10 balloons and let the kids loose in the garage or play room or open space to toss them and jump up and down for a bit, just to get some movement going. Join in with them. String some twine across the room and let them play balloon volleyball!

Colorforms – Yes, Dollar Tree has these and they will keep the younger kids occupied! There is a scene on each side of the insert and lots of little stickers to move about and pretend play. The dog and cat scene is the cutest!

New books – There are always some little books to pick up to have on hand. The older kids can read to the younger ones, which would be a great connection activity for them all.

Puzzle or Coloring books – There are Sudoku and crossword puzzle books for those interested, there are coloring books for markers or crayons, so have a group of all three and let the kids pick one for an hour of quiet time.

Play Dough Sets – These are \$5 but they're super cute and include some sort of manipulative and a few tubs of Play Dough. Again, this is a great one for the older kids to play with the younger ones, as they help them with the forming of the dough.

Plastic sea creatures – Pick out a bag of little plastic sea creatures in the toy section and fill a bathroom sink partway with water. Let the kids pour in the creatures and play. Have an older kid supervise with a towel in hand. Or place a plastic tub on a towel in the kitchen and give rules about splashing.

Silly faces books – These are sticker books with several pages of faces that need eyes, mouths, hats and accessories. They're super fun, and funny! The kids will surely enjoy some laughter while playing. Just tear out a face for each kid, divide up the stickers and let them create!

Flash Cards – There are all sorts of flash cards, from ABC's to sounds animals make, and even just animal cards. The kids could draw an animal and then play charades by acting them out! A great way to spend an afternoon of fun. I also saw a card deck that's a memory game.

While you're in the store, grab some red and white paper popcorn bags and pop a huge bowl of popcorn. Go ahead and allow one hour of TV time if you wish (you pick the show so no arguing ensues) and let them make their own popcorn bags with scoops you picked up from the store, as well. They can grab their water bottles and a blanket (you can get tiny pillows or blankets as a surprise at the store, too!) and watch the show "at the movies" and have a blast.

I Don't Do Teenagers - Peer Pressure - by Marcy Lytle

I remember telling my kids that they needed to be a thermostat, not a thermometer. And then we talked about what that looks like. A thermostat sets the temperature for the home – so we showed them how you set the number and the AC or heat comes on, setting the perfect atmosphere for the house. However, a thermometer just reads the temperature. We reminded them how when they're sick and you take their temperature, it *reads* the number but it doesn't *set* the number.

It's not a bad thing to remind your teens of this often with the illustration over and over again, until they leave the house, and that visual will stick with them forever. This is so helpful when your teens (and pre-teens) are dealing with peer pressure:

Foul Language – It's tempting to join in with the cursing and the rude comments and the dirty words, especially in a locker room setting or when with a group of others that let the words and the attitudes fly. And it's hard, but our kids can walk away if that's the atmosphere in the room, they can talk nicely and change the atmosphere – which is even better. That's being a thermostat. Encourage them to rise above the filthy talk and speak kindly and nicely with words that are good and helpful and kind and considerate.

Vandalism – Kids are kids and might just decide on a whim to scratch on a wall or in a bathroom, or paint or destroy someone else's property. It happens even at school, when teachers aren't looking. It occurs if our kids are with another group at another place, and adults aren't near. We can talk to our teens about property and doing unto others as we'd like others to do to us. Even discuss how they would feel if their sibling scribbled all over their room with a marker. Vandalism is stealing someone else's beauty. But being a thermostat means setting the tone for honoring the space of others. Always.

Gossip – She said this, and he did this, and they must have meant this, and they are just awful, you know the rest. Kids hear a rumor or spread a rumor or believe a rumor. Friendships are utterly ruined and when the rumor gets back to the person rumored about...well your teen might just be implicated if they joined in. Have a conversation about gossip and how to stop it from the beginning. Why is it enticing to listen to others say something bad about someone? And even if it is true, it's not to be shared if it's degrading to that person. Again, have a conversation about how your teen would feel if it got around the school that they said or did something that was completely private or embarrassing. Not good. They can be the thermostat and be the kids that rejoice in the good of others and affirm and give a high five when others succeed, and pray alone when that friend fails and others talk...

Must-Have – She's got new sneakers, your daughter has to wear her old ones because money is tight. His friend got that new bat, or tickets to a game, but your family just can't splurge right now. There are always going to be things our teens see that they "must have" because everyone else has it. Even we adults deal with this pressure. And marketing doesn't help the matter. Practice the art with your family of giving thanks for all the blessings you have, and see if the must-have mentality doesn't wane just a bit. And then if there's something they really want, talk about it, save and pray together...and wait. Be the thermostat by exhibiting patience while waiting.

Those are just four common areas of peer pressure, but what about when our teens give in and cave and join in the riot to destroy others, themselves and their own self-esteem? They may feel awful and ashamed, or not care and like being part of "the crowd."

Home needs to be a safe place always, where our kids can run in from school and cry if they need to, confess if they know they failed, or rejoice if they actually remained cool among the pressure. And if their "temperature" is rising and causing pain to them and others, we can still hold them, pray with them, and encourage them as they rest and recover from the heat.

In Each Room – The Closet Boutique – by Marcy Lytle

Maybe you have a huge closet with a center island and stepstools and bags on display and lush rugs...how fun! Or maybe you've seen those pictures and wondered how you could design your own smaller version of a walk-in closet into a "boutique" style retreat for a fun place to pick out your outfits each morning. I looked at what I would need/want to make it happen for my closet that I share with my husband. It was hard work, and I was pooped at the end, but here are the steps to make it happen...

I knew I wanted these things: a mirror, shoes off the floor, pretty drawer spaces, a nice stepstool, no more mismatched plastic bins, and all our clothes really organized by type and color...and finally...some pretty lighting for ambience.

First step was to clean out the junk. Everything came out and we donated about six huge garbage bags of clothes and shoes. How had we stuffed so much in that one little closet? Mostly, it was my stuff that went. Clothes I held on to because I thought I'd wear them, shoes I hoped wouldn't hurt, items I felt guilty getting rid of...you name it. But this time, so much went and it felt so good.

Then I shopped, on Amazon, at Marshalls, PopShelf and I even had a favorite organizer I found from Five Below! I opted for lots of rattan pieces as a central theme. Here's what I purchased:

- Three sets of rattan baskets for shelves from Amazon
- Two rattan sconces (battery operated with remote) for wall from Amazon
- Four plastic boxes with lettering for folded t-shirts from Five Below
- One vegetable rattan bin for slides and sandals from Marshalls
- A rattan mirror and wastebasket from PopShelf
- Two drawer units from Amazon
- My husband hung slat board on one whole wall, and I purchased hooks and baskets and shelves from Amazon.

A few things I changed on our closet rods: I didn't want my jeans/pants hanging any longer because they took up so much room. I had purchased pant hangers (several times) but still...they took up too much room. So in the drawer units, I placed all my pants folded in half, then in thirds, and filed like folders. Next, I organized our clothes by color, and my husband's shirts by sleeve length. His pants still hang on pant hangers for now. (He has a lot less pants than I do!)

Shoes were placed on hooks on the wall and a few displayed on acrylic shelves, with the slides and sandals lined up in the rattan bin, placed under the large mirror, with a wastebasket beside. I kept a jewelry organizer above the mirror for hanging headbands!

All the rattan baskets aren't full yet, but a couple have half-tees (Do you have a stash of these? They're great!), slip shorts and half-slips for spring/summer. One has a few shoes on display above the closet, and one large one has a few out of season blouses I'll pull out later.

The drawer units also have some of my husband's work shirts and all of his shorts, again nicely folded and stashed like folders.

One rule I'm trying to abide by as we move forward, is when I purchase something, i.e. like new sandals for summer, then that many old ones come out...so that we maintain a nice flow and a good amount...without becoming stuffed again.

Finally, the lighting. I didn't want corded lamps since there are no plugs in the closet, and I wanted ones with a remote so I could turn on as needed, and these rattan lamps were my fave. Pretty easy to hang, too! And the drawer units weren't difficult to put together, either.

Does it look like the pictures of boutique closets I've seen? Not really, but I love it. It looks cozy, inviting, and pretty to me. My husband even commented one night as he got ready for bed, "It's looking very boutiquish!"

(We donated most things to Salvation Army, and sat our old plastic drawers on the curb. A young couple stopped and got them, and told us they were in their first apartment and the drawers would be great!)

Homesteading – The Transition – by Leyanne Enterline

And we're in our new home! FINALLY! And sort of...

The builders are not quite done, but we are moving over! Seems like it took forever and went really quickly all at the same time!

Our transition is an easy move because we literally don't have much and it's 10 steps away from the trailer, but also a hard move because we didn't "pack" anything. We just walked it over for days and days! Kind of weird, right?

I was a little overwhelmed at *all the space* and not knowing how to organize it everything, but also super excited for *all the space*! Brian watched as the kids and I placed things in the strangest places and asked jokingly, "Have we not lived in a house before?" We literally did not know where to put things!

Asher had his stuff in every room and thought it was all his space, Eli was very organized and set his closet up quickly and was way done before all of us. I wandered around and rearranged the kitchen and my closet a million times trying to figure out the best places for items. Like do spices go out on the counter? Or in a drawer? Or in the pantry? Arghhh! Idk! Do my shoes go on the floor in my closet? Or up high? Or in a bin in the garage? I don't have a dresser yet, so should some of my clothes go in the drawers in the bathroom? I'm a mess! I feel like it's my first time living in a house at age 43!

I also feel like a first time homeowner with working appliances. I almost made a HUGE mistake just tonight! I was using the dishwasher for the first time and (PTL) my hubby decided to ask what kind of soap I put in it. I pulled it out and showed him and it was dish soap. Oops! Luckily, the dishwasher had not spewed out the liquid yet and Brian was able to get all that soap out of there before there was a huge bubbly mess. Unfortunately, I had made this mistake before at an Airbnb and soap suds were all of over the place! I think that's why Brian decided to check and make sure I didn't do that again. And well, what do you know...

I told him, "What a blessing!"
He said, "How is this a blessing?"
I replied, "That you thought to ask me about the soap and we were able to get it out before a mess occurred!"

We just have to look at the bright side, right?

So, we're working out the kinks, all in our own ways figuring out how to live the American way in a normal-sized house. At times, I feel like a caveman coming into society and just not knowing how to exist! We are all excited for the change, though.

Now I need a new sign off at the end of my stories. I still love that "love grows best in tiny spaces" but not sure that fits this article now! Any suggestions? Maybe a bible verse? My favorite is...

"But seek ye FIRST the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you."

Mathew 6:33

Rooted in Love - Inspired by a Diary - by Kaelin Scott

It should come as no surprise to you that I love to read. Books are my relaxation, one of the ways I find rest. Admittedly, I don't get to read as much as I'd like, but that comes with the territory in the season of life I'm in. Anyway, I usually read fiction, but every now and then I sneak in a non-fiction book.

I've always wanted to read Anne Frank's diary, so I finally purchased a copy off Thriftbooks. It took me several weeks to get through it, but wow, it was so thought-provoking. I honestly didn't know what to expect going into it, but it was so interesting. I felt right off the bat the power of Anne's description and the beauty of her spirit. For such a young woman, she certainly was wise and mature.

What stood out to me most was her ability to see beauty in the world, even during her darkest hours. The words in her diary are so elegant and heartfelt. I had to stop reading and just soak it all in several times.

To think about how this girl was forced to hide away for over two years, constantly afraid for her life, and yet she still had such a positive outlook – it's astounding to me! What courage and fortitude she must have had to be in such a precarious situation yet still devote time and effort into improving her own character. Her astute observations and eloquence are so inspiring.

In many ways, it's also convicting. Here I am, with so much to be thankful for, and yet I often find myself grumbling. I get so caught up in minor inconveniences or things that irritate me that I forget how much beauty is all around me.

One of my goals this year has been to stop and just be thankful more often. Not just when I'm having a great day or doing something fun, but in the midst of everyday moments that can easily be taken for granted. Reading Anne's diary has only further cemented my desire to do just that. To look around and smile and say to myself, "It's good to be alive."

Because it really is. Each day is a gift. Another chance to embrace all the blessings I have so graciously been given. To look at the blue sky and revel in its vastness. To feel the wind on my cheeks and wonder how far it travels. To watch my children grow and mature, to see their character truly develop. To hug my husband and hold his hand. To taste and see and hear and feel the beauty of life – these are the greatest blessings!

God's workmanship is so evident in creation. It's so beautiful and glorious. The world truly is amazing. How can I not find something to smile about every day? If Anne Frank could do so in the midst of great hardship, then I think I can manage it too. Being grateful is something anyone can do. All it takes is the ability to stop and smell the roses once in a while.

A Night to Remember – An Entire Evening – by Marcy Lytle

When is the last time your family played charades? What if you played charades and learned more about God's character and amazing power, as you did? And you enjoyed all of this after having a family nacho bar? It would certainly be a night to remember!

Preparation: For serving the nachos, deep dish pie tins work great for keeping the chips on the plate! Then just prepare your bar with a tray of chips, meat/beans and all the toppings. The kids can help set up the table. Use bandannas for napkins if you wish! Type or write these words on index cards to be used for charades: Dog, Elephant, Lion, Monkey, Snake...Sun, Stars, Trees, Wind, Rain...Love, Joy, Anger, Surprise, Happy...Cross, Bible, Family, Heaven, Church...and any other words you'd like to include for the lesson.

Since March is the month that houses spring break, why not pick one night during that week for an entire evening of family time for fun and growth and growing closer together in Him?

It might be fun to spread a huge tablecloth on the floor, invite everyone to fill their pie tins and create their nacho pile, and sit down and eat dinner together. Just chat about the day, ask questions and answer, share things you're thankful for, and laugh together as you eat.

Clean up and sit around the living area, ready for charades! Be sure to let the kids guess and take turns so that everyone gets a chance to act out, even the littles. As young as 2 years old can be whispered what to do, and they'll do it!

Shuffle the cards within each category (animals, creation, emotions, things) and let the fun begin. Each one draws a card and says whether it's an animal, part of creation, an emotion, or a thing...and then they act it out without words. The family guesses, and takes turns acting out each word. But before you move on to the next word group, stop and talk four times:

Animals – God made all of the animals. Who remembers the story of Noah and the Ark? Can you tell us about it? God made sure to take care of the animals, and Noah and his family, as they obeyed. The storm did not overtake them!

Creation – Who created the earth and all that is in it? God! The sun rises every day and the moon appears at night, showing God's faithfulness in the sky. Seasons are set up with wind and rain, but they all work together to make trees grow. God is in control of our earth, and he is in control and takes care of our lives, too.

Emotions – Did you know that God cares about our emotions? He loves us always, and when we feel joy he wants us to rejoice, when we are angry we can take our frustration to Him, he surprises us with gifts every day, and we can always find happiness in knowing His great love.

Things – What does the cross remind us of? Jesus' death and resurrection and forgiveness of sin. This brings us great joy! Why do we need to read the Bible? It's God's love letter to us all. He sets us in families and communities to grow and learn and be loved, and we have this hope of heaven where we will all go someday and live forever!

Pray together as a family and end the evening with some family dancing to tunes of your choice!



Inner Strength - Priceless - by Michelle Wyatt

I reminisced with a friend today the details of my pregnancies and the birth of my sons. The conversation seemed to come out of nowhere.

Later, as I sit in the dark of my living room on the couch with my youngest asleep next to me, I realize that the desire to be a mom continues to be as strong now as when I was pregnant.

I can't protect or watch over them all the time though, which is why praying over them is essential. I say what we call *grateful prayers* every night before the boys go to sleep. At the closing of the prayers is when I ask God to watch over all of us and to let the boys know I am with them always.

As he lays with the pillow against my leg, I place my hand on my son's chest. It's as if he needs just as much comfort and reassurance as he did when he was an infant. You know what, though? That sense of *touch/connection* I'll admit is maybe more for me. He is asleep, after all. Regardless, that mother child connection is priceless. I don't even want to go to sleep yet. It brings me peace to watch him sleep.

Considering how things were earlier tonight, I needed this moment of touch and prayers, for it gave me strength to work through the next parenting challenge. What happened earlier tonight? Well...

Matthew has really been into making sugar cookies with just sugar and baking soda according to the YouTube video he's been following. I could tell he wanted it to go just like the video. He's still learning the hard lesson that sometimes things don't work out like you want and you've got to keep working to get it right. I'm so proud of him. He is working through it. And so am I...

This all reminds me that being a mom is all worth it. If I can do it, so can you!

A Hopeful Heart - The Healing Power of Kindness - by Christina Oberon

In a world often marked by uncertainty and tragedy, kindness remains a quiet force of healing. We've seen it in the wake of devastating events, such as the recent wildfires in my home state of California - neighbors helping neighbors, strangers opening their homes, and communities rallying to support those who have lost everything. These small but profound acts of compassion remind us that even in the face of destruction, hope can be rebuilt through human connection.

Kindness isn't just a feel-good concept; it has tangible effects on both the giver and the receiver. Studies show that acts of kindness release oxytocin, often called the "love hormone," which promotes emotional well-being and reduces stress. In fact, research suggests that being kind can even help lower blood pressure and increase lifespan. *Fun fact*: Scientists have found that witnessing an act of kindness can inspire a similar response in others, proving that kindness is literally contagious!

The wildfires that have ravaged California in recent months have left thousands displaced, their homes reduced to ash. But amid the loss, stories of kindness have emerged like embers of light. Volunteers have rushed to shelters with blankets and food, firefighters have risked their lives to save not just people but animals left behind, and social media has been flooded with offers of housing and support. These small gestures, though they may seem insignificant against the scale of destruction, make an immeasurable impact.

One powerful example is a viral video showing a group of strangers forming a human chain to help an elderly couple evacuate their home before it was engulfed in flames. These were not first responders or trained rescuers, just ordinary people moved by compassion, risking their own safety to ensure that two lives were saved. This selflessness is a testament to the innate goodness in humanity, a reminder that even in dark moments, light still exists.

Kindness is also deeply rooted in faith, particularly in the Bible, where it is described as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Scripture repeatedly calls us to practice kindness: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Jesus himself exemplified kindness throughout his life, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and welcoming the outcasts. His actions remind us that kindness isn't just about grand gestures. It's about seeing people, valuing them, and responding with love.

Imagine if, in our everyday lives, we treated kindness as a necessity rather than an afterthought. A smile to a stressed cashier, an encouraging word to a struggling friend, or simply holding the door open for someone. These actions, though small, have the power to shift someone's day, and perhaps even their life.

Although tragedy is unavoidable in life, I try to remember that there is always goodness in kindness. It costs nothing but is worth everything. It doesn't require wealth or influence, only the willingness to extend a hand, offer a kind word, or stand in solidarity with those who need it most. The healing power of kindness is real, so I'll choose it, again and again, because it remains the simplest, most powerful way to start making the world whole again.

Healthy Habits – Stress Busters – by Marcy Lytle

We talk here about all sorts of ways to be healthy, and we all know the big things like exercise, eating right, growing spiritually, getting rest, etc. But what about little things that cause stress that we're not even aware of? Lately, I've noticed these, and over the years I've tried to let them go. Maybe you'll be inspired to let go of these "other" stress busters that are causing you angst:

Haircuts – Going to the salon stresses me out, because I have fine thin hair, and every time I come home and recut it or style it, because it just wasn't right! So I cut my own hair now, with no shame, and I'm happy.

Performance – Showing up at events you don't feel comfortable going to can be a stressor for sure. For me, it's funerals, for one. And ladies events, for another. Both stress me out, and I used to feel so guilty for not being there because everyone else is going, or it's the "right thing do." Sometimes, the right thing is to stay home.

Fast Food – Maybe you feel guilty every time you go through a drive-thru and grab that unhealthy choice on the menu. Of course, we know we can't dine in the drive thru as a rule, but once in a while? Indulge, pull over under a tree, and enjoy that frozen coke from McDonald's while you read a book...

Thoughts – Intrusive thoughts come out of left field and sometimes knock us for a loop, and we feel awful for thinking that bad thing, or doubting God AGAIN, or thinking more highly (or lowly) of ourselves than we should. Intrusive thoughts are just that. An intrusion. But they're not a resident. So go on, be okay, and don't give it another thought.

Laundry – I know this is a stressor for moms of littles, but even I with no children at home, stress about it! This one can be solved, I'm sure of it. We can ask for help, set as schedule for laundry and stick to it, or ignore the piles and read that book, without guilt, on a day when laundry calls but we just can't answer.

Grocery and Meal Planning – I honestly enjoy both of these but not the time it takes. I've found a rhythm to using curbside that I love and I enjoy choosing meals and recipes, BUT some days it takes way too long! And some weeks I don't feel like doing either? It's those days I choose from my Mad Dash Mixes, or Meal Simple choices at the store, or use our gift cards and eat out. Why not? It's okay!

Life Right Now - Seasons Change - by Jennifer Stephens

It usually begins in February. Towards the end of the month. That first glimpse.

Living in the part of the country that experiences the best and worst of all four seasons we always notice when it happens. We wait for it. We want for it. At first, it's gradual, then it happens in an instant.

Winter is spent curled on the couch tucked into warm blankets, avoiding the bitter cold and inconvenient darkness that's fallen too soon. Longingly watching out the window as the sun goes down earlier and earlier each evening. February leisurely falls into March, then suddenly we find ourselves puttering around the house hours later than the day before, while the sun still shines low in the sky. Eventually we tie our shoelaces, grab a jacket, and venture out on a crispy winter's walk, welcoming this seasonal surprise.

And it's on that sunlit sidewalk stroll, surrounded by so much brown, we catch a flash of...is that yellow? Hidden between leaves and tucked next to the side of a tree, there's a brilliant pop of color crawling out of the snowy remains. It's that first flower whispering to us that spring is near. Emerging just when we need them the most.

For some of us, the winter doldrums can get us down. Maybe a little or maybe a lot. Oh, how we long for the days spent soaking up the summer sun. Splashing. Laughing. But it's cold. And dark. And we're stuck inside in an endless loop of nothingness. With so much brown. All around it's brown. Leaves. Branches. Mud where there used to be snow. So we wait. Until rising from the earth we're greeted by a bright Easter egg colored smile. Then another. And another. A visual reminder of God's unwavering presence and steadfast promises. Flowers multiply beneath our feet, reminding us that winter's gloom is temporary and His blessings are plentiful. As we navigate the dark, chilly seasons of life we can rest in knowing that just as spring will always follow winter, His light will always follow the darkness. Winter may feel eternal, especially when we're surrounded by colossal piles of snow, but at His command, it all melts.

It ALL melts.
The sunshine lingers.
And then it's spring.

"He sends the snow like white wool; he scatters frost upon the ground like ashes. He hurls the hail like stones. Who can stand against his freezing cold? Then, at his command, it all melts. He sends his winds, and the ice thaws." Psalm 147: 16-18



Date Night Fun – The Late Night – by Marcy Lytle

This month is a little different. Sometimes, there just isn't time for date night, especially if you're raising kids with no sitters nearby, or you're both working, or money is tight, or any number of reasons. So during those busy seasons, it's nice to have some time alone at bedtime, or in bed, before you turn off the lights, to connect and regroup and have fun. Here are some ideas for you!

Trivia Cards – Take out 10 trivia cards from a deck (you can purchase or find from your old trivia games!) Ask each other a question, and if you get it right you get to go again. First one to finish all the questions from the 10 cards wins. Don't be alarmed if this game makes one of you sleepy, too sleepy to finish!

Scroll and Share – You're gonna scroll anyway, so why not find five things to share with each other? Maybe a funny reel, or a song, or an email...something to laugh at, ponder, or enjoy together.

Watch something that makes you laugh – If you have a television in your room, turn to something comical that will make you both laugh before you snooze. It releases tension, settles the soul and makes you smile as you drift off. If you don't have a TV in your room, then share a memory of a funny saying, joke, or experience.

Read the scripture – Maybe grab a devotional book, or shop for a book of the psalms you'd love to read, or listen to the Bible read aloud...for 15 minutes...and then pray together. This is such a connection and an act of love to Him and each other. Take turns, reading out loud to each other.

Give Thanks – Each of you pick three things from your day that you are thankful for, and share them, then give thanks together to Him for them...no petitions allowed. This activity is SO GOOD, as it makes us both stop and think about the good in every day, even if it seemed like a bad one.

Those are five things TO DO. And here are five things to NOT DO:

Don't criticize each other or bring up frustrations about what he/she didn't do or hasn't done.

Don't talk about the issues with the kids and the worries of the day. If you must unload, close your eyes together and give it all to him, then pick an activity from the above list.

Don't go to bed separately. If you can, retire at the same time so there's time for connection. Or at least take time for connection before the first one hits the pillow.

Don't go to bed dirty. Take a shower. Freshen up. As if you were first married...always.

Don't worry about tomorrow or today or the future or yesterday. Easy to say, hard to do. But practice casting your cares on Him, until it's a common thing and you sleep in peace.

After 40 Years – Fail – by Marcy Lytle

Have you ever purposed to be agreeable, non-contentious, kind and courteous, patient and loving to him...only to fail miserably? I have, many times. And it's mostly when I'm tired. Just don't cross me or talk to me when I'm tired (or hungry)...or maybe it's that I'm just cranky.

Here's the scene:

We went to the movies one night with my movie bag on my shoulder. The movie bag is either my large purse or a tote where we take in our bottled waters, and perhaps a bag of M&M's to go with the popcorn that we sometimes purchase....or sometimes take from home. I also carry in my phone because I have the movie app where our tickets are stored. So, already, if I'm tired, I'm aggravated that I'm carrying all the goods...and he's sauntering alongside with not a care in the world.

I show the guy at the entry my code, he swipes and we enter. We order our snacks and again my phone comes out with the code so we can get our movie club discount. We decide to go to the bathroom before the movie starts, so I hang up my tote, my sweater, and put away my phone, while he strolls into the men's room and exits, hands free.

You can see that I'm already aggravated that I'm carrying all the stuff. Years ago, I really tried to get him to carry a man purse, but he left it in a portable potty somewhere, and it just wasn't his thing. And I only wanted him to carry it because I resented being the carrier of the bag...all the time.

Back to the movie...

We watched the movie and at the end, we were gathering our trash from the snacks, and I handed him all of mine, so he could it carry out with his. He just commented a simple non-confronting phrase about so much trash or something like that...and I retorted with,

"I carried in the big bag with all our snacks. You can carry out the trash!"

Now, that's not a fail, necessarily. But maybe it is, for me. I can be quite rude with my comments, condescending at times, and only notice what I'm doing and fail to be grateful for all that he does. Like he remembers where we park in the parking lot, and I have no clue. If I forget a napkin or a straw, he hops up and exits the theater and gets it for me, no questions asked. He carries and holds the large bucket of popcorn in his lap all throughout the movie, so I can just sit and enjoy the show. He goes to see any movie I pick out, literally, any time I want to go. Should I keep going?

My point is that when we're tired, we sometimes only see what we're doing and fail to remember or recognize all that he does. And then those sarcastic words slip out that are just snappy and not nice. And for me, that's my struggle...my mouth...when I'm tired or thinking those thoughts that are focused only on me.

I suppose it's the same with HIM...when I fail to be grateful for all that He does do...but only focus on all that I see him not do with my little eyes with my horizontal view across my day. He's up there with the view of expanse and the care of a Father, and I have a much better day when I realize and recognize.

My husband forgives me every time, easily. And I try again next time to keep my mouth shut and be grateful for the cute tote I get to carry to the movies, and the movie app where I get to pick from a plethora of stories to enjoy next to the love of my life...while he holds the goods in his lap and shares.

After 30 Years - Then...and Now - Marcy Lytle

I was recently at a staff meeting for one of the jobs where I work, a nonprofit Christian organization. Our boss made a comment that I've been thinking about since he spoke it. He said, "The best thing you can bring to this table is your personal walk with the Lord." Wow. It's true. If our walk with the Lord is up to par, our production of work will follow suit.

As I thought more about that statement, I realized how much it applies to marriage, as well. The best thing we can bring to a marriage is our personal walk with the Lord. It makes things so much better and more peaceful if we start out after the "I do," being complete and whole in our identity in Christ. But this is rarely the case. I know that it was not the case for me.

However, after being married for over three decades now, I'm realizing that the best thing I can do to enhance and strengthen my marriage is to strengthen my walk with God...in any year of being together.

So what have I learned? Well, I'm still learning, but here's what I've realized as I've gone from being married without kids for eight years...to having a home raising kids...to being alone with my spouse once again.

Then...I counted on my husband to meet my needs for validation, affirmation, identity & romance.

Now...I know my husband was never created to meet those needs and only God can.

Then...I was afraid if I didn't instruct my husband on how to please me, he'd never know what I wanted.

Now...I know that when I instruct too often and too loud, my husband is unable to hear any instruction from Him – which is so much better than anything I could ever ask for!

Then...I wanted to make all things equal in doing chores, caring for kids, paying bills, etc.

Now...I realize that in giving...I receive...more than I can even stand.

Then...I thought my husband should pray with me, and read the Bible with me, on a daily basis.

Now...I know that my relationship with God has to be personal, because that's what sustains me. Anything else is icing on the cake.

Then....I had a picture of a perfect marriage and I was going to make mine fit into that frame!

Now...I realize He has the perfect picture and if I trust Him and ask Him...he will make us fit into His frame.

Then...Intimacy with my husband made me feel wanted, worthy, and beautiful.

Now...Intimacy with God fulfills all my expectations, and intimacy with my husband is overflow.

Then...Winning an argument at all costs, at all hours, was the most important thing.

Now...Silence is golden, sleep is a healer, and love is the most important thing.

Are you just starting out in your marriage? Have you been married a decade, or several? At whatever point you are along the path of marriage, please stop and consider the fact that the best thing you can bring to the table – at any stage – is your personal walk with God. There's an old book entitled *Your Marriage Needs Three Love Affairs*. Catchy title, isn't it? But it's so true. Unless you are in love with HIM and that is the first love affair in your life, you'll constantly be unhappy with the performance of your spouse. However, if HE satisfies every longing and need, your marriage is free to be the experience it was intended to be – a picture of Christ and His love for the body. And that is a picture in a frame that all will see when they enter your house...and they will marvel at the artistry...and want to know the Artist.

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. (Proverbs 31: 10-12)

For Better or Worse - All Fun and Games - by Kaelin Scott

I think a common misconception young people have about marriage is that it's supposed to be fun. Don't get me wrong, it can be really fun if you do it right! But that's not the real reason we get married, is it?

Dating is fun, so of course marriage seems like an extension of that. And it is in so many ways! But it's also so much *more*.

It's not just about having fun together and getting those butterflies and kissing goodnight. It's about kissing goodnight after a long, hard day where you didn't know if you'd make it through, but you found your way together. It's about growing together and realizing that you didn't have all the answers yet when you first said "I do." It's working hard together day in and day out, caring for each other physically and spiritually.

If you go into marriage just focused on having fun, you'll probably be really disappointed. I think that's why divorce rate is so high in our day and age. People don't look at the big picture when they say their vows. They just know that they're happy in that moment and that they've found someone who makes them feel good. But they fail to realize that good feelings don't last. Staying in love with someone is actually hard work when real life sets in. And that's when a lot of people give up – when it stops being so fun.

But guess what else they don't realize – that bad feelings don't last either. When you get into a slump or when conflict arises, it's only temporary. It can be worked through, if you have the right mindset and level of commitment. It might sound daunting, and it can be. But it's worth it when you get through the other side and see the sunshine again.

There are a lot of days in marriage that wouldn't be described as fun, but there are also a lot of days that are. And there are also so many other great ways to describe it. It's freeing and empowering and comforting. It's challenging and refreshing and secure. It's sturdy and pure and true.

Loving the same person for the rest of your life *can* be a lot of fun, but that isn't all there is to it. It's such a unique and beautiful relationship that is so much more. It's complex and sometimes confusing, but the struggles only make it that much more rewarding. Because as you grow individually, you also grow together, and together you become something you could never be on your own. And that's something really fun to think about.



Under Pressure – A Paradox – by Debbie Haynes

God responded to a certain man in the bible when he pleaded three times for God to remove his affliction. God told Paul that God's grace was all that was needed, and that His power worked best in weakness.

Later, in the same chapter, this same Paul says that he takes pleasure in his infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, and in distresses for Christ's sake... "for when I am weak, then I am strong (because it's then that Christ shows his perfect strength..."

He guit protesting his situation and began actually boasting of it!

Moses was called to a huge task and stated he was not equipped. Gideon was chosen to be a mighty man, and he said, "Who me, Lord? You must have the wrong guy."

This is a hard lesson. We demand our spiritual "rights" and our "right-now" deliverance. But oh, how much easier it is to fall back into the arms of grace. The grace that is sufficient to meet every one of our needs. Maybe His plan includes taking situations where our own strength is grossly lacking, to demonstrate the greatness of His power. A paradox.

God's promises, his power and his providence to heal and remove "darts" all remain the same forever...EVEN IF, in the middle of our weaknesses, we are forced to stretch our faith to lay hold of grace.

One thing I read mentioned that when we, like Paul, stop resisting and complaining ...we make room to receive countless unexpected blessings! We read more that God chooses the foolish things in the world to shame the wise, and the weak things to shame the strong. In Isaiah we are promised that he gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

So what can we pray when pain and suffering hurts so badly that it causes us to scream out for relief?

Father, we are fragile, but we want you to reveal your power through us...and we ask you to help us remain in your presence. To always trust in you and have patience. For it's there that we will gain strength. We ask you to carry us with the renewed reminder of how perfectly your strength works in our weakness.

And just like the psalmist David was inspired to write, may we all acknowledge that our heart and flesh may fail, but God Is the strength of our hearts forever!

A Day in the Life - Those Tears - by Bekah Holland

I've realized recently that this life, your reason for being here and the things you have done and will do, will likely crush you. Your calling and purpose will shatter you into a million pieces that you can't figure out how to fit back together. And if you've ever attempted to restore a broken vase or bowl back to its original glory, you know that is basically an impossible task. It never fits exactly right. There may be a few missing tiny pieces or shards of glass that stubbornly refuse to fit. But you know what? Maybe it was never meant to go back to what it was before. And maybe we aren't either.

As women, we tend to carry the weight of not only our little portion of the world on our shoulders, but we often carry the weight of others as well. Our partners, our kids, our friends, our family. We tend to be the safe space. The soft place to land. And usually the battering ram after someone has a bad day because, well, we're the ones they can trust to still love them even at their worst. We are the warriors, unwavering in our belief in our people, shielding them from the worst of the world outside, carrying their hurts, wearing their scars, mending broken hearts and whispering words of truth and hope, even when our voices shake.

We are the strong ones. Or at least that's what others see. But eventually, the battles of each day start to wind down. The night comes in and finally allows us to put our armor aside, to let our guard down. The moon starts to rise and sometimes the mix of darkness with the dim light and silence...we can finally set the weight down and that release, for me a lot of times, results in crying. I know many people see that kind of breakdown as weakness. But it's not. I believe that with every fiber of my soul. I cry over the battles I've fought and the pain I've endured that no one ever sees. I cry because I've spent so much time and energy holding everyone else's lives together that I've either forgotten how or don't have the strength to heal myself. I can only describe this feeling of trying so hard to keep it all from falling apart, hiding our own hurt, is like screaming for help, but no sound comes out, and no one can hear your cries.

I'll tell you one thing that I know. If you are one of the strong ones, I hope you know the value in the tears you shed because they're sacred. They are the evidence of all you've faced, all the fires you've walked through, and the darkness you've braved. But just as the night eventually ends, the sun shines bright again, bringing with it a new morning. Because of the night, you rise up a little lighter, a little stronger, your spirit ready to face what the new day has in store. So when you find yourself waiting for those quiet, few moments of solitude to lose yourself in a flood of tears, remember this one thing...this isn't your breaking. This is your healing. This is your beautiful restoration. This, dear ones, is your strength. It's your gift. Because His mercies are new every morning.

"A strong woman knows she has strength enough for the journey, but a woman of strength knows that it is in the journey where she becomes strong." Unknown

An Adage a Day - A Story to Build On - by Carole Gilbert

I love springtime. The warmth that comes after a hard cold winter. It always makes me want to get outside and do things. I've gotten a little older now, but back in my heyday, I loved to paint, and I mean paint the house. I also enjoyed gardening, refinishing furniture, cutting firewood, and I even tried my hand at some woodworking. I have several pieces of furniture that I made using some of God's most beautiful wood. I admit I'm not the best, but I'm pleased with my efforts.

One piece that I love is a bench I made. I used three wrought iron chairs put together with a beautiful, refinished piece of wood for the seat. It was not easy because all the pieces had to be put together to fit just right to make it work. The three chairs had to be positioned so that the wood would sit at a level and attach to each one. It turned out so pretty and functional. I definitely "hit the nail on the head," figuratively and literally.

This idiom "hit the nail on the head" is used to express when we do something correctly, whether it's in our actions or something we've said. It started over 600 years ago from carpentry work and the action of hitting a nail in just the correct place and way.

When I was a little girl my daddy, who did carpentry work, and my brother would go out to the shop, as we called it, and work on stuff. They would repair, or build something, and I always wanted to help. But unfortunately, I was much younger than my brother and I'm sure I was in the way, so Daddy would nicely send me into the house to help my Momma. I think this might be why I love doing this kind of work because I was never allowed to. And funnier than that, I did carpentry work after my place of employment blew away in a tornado in 1979. My work and the pieces I've made aren't perfect, but I know Daddy would've been very impressed.

Someone else who was a carpenter because his daddy was, is Jesus. I'm sure He always hit the nail on the head to make all His work fit together just right, so much more than mine or my daddy's or any other man's. I'm also sure that goes for everything Jesus did and does. And this includes what He does for you and me. Following Jesus is the one thing I know I've done that hit the nail on the head. He's the greatest. He's the one that puts everything together just as it needs to be with perfect precision.

This makes me think of another idiom, "If you build it, they will come." It began from a good movie, *Field of Dreams*. If you haven't seen it, I encourage you to. The man in the movie builds something because he feels led to, but he doesn't know why. It all becomes clear at the end. That's what God is doing with us and through us.

It's like the verse, Psalm 127:1,

Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

And this simply tells us that if we follow the greatest carpenter that our work, our labor, or whatever we do and build, will always hit the nail on the head.

Unearthly Thing - 56 Important Things I Learned by the Age of 56 - by Angela Dolbear

March is my birthday month, and I am turning 56 this year. The picture with this article was taken on my sixth or seventh birthday, with a cute cake in shape of a doll's dress – fifty years ago!

So many years of life equals so much wisdom, so I should share it, right? Hmmm, maybe. But I believe hindsight is 50/50 (not 20/20) because I don't always learn all the lessons that I should. And I'm just kidding about the 56 things...I'll share my Top 10. Okay, maybe just my Top 5 pieces of sage wisdom because I know time is valuable.

Also, since the number 5 has many symbolic meanings in the Bible, including divine grace, redemption, and the covenant between God and humanity, We'll stick to 5 things I've learned during my time on this earth.

5. Listen to Your Gut

If you see or sense any red flags about people, places, and/or things, stop and listen. I remember many times when I ignored what my brain or the Holy Spirit showed me, but I listened to my whiny, needy emotions instead. I could have saved myself so much trouble and pain.

4. Don't Listen to Your Emotions

As I mentioned above, it's important not to let emotions rule you. Emotions are the unconsecrated and deprived aspects of humanity. They are unclear and unreliable when it comes to decision-making. Think about how often your feelings change in a matter of just a few minutes. So untrustworthy, so why let feelings guide you?

3. God is your supply for EVERYTHING.

Everything I could possibly need, whether physical, emotional, or mental. I still struggle with this. I am prone to think I am self-sufficient, which is a lie. Being an independent author means my resources fluctuate. When finances get low, in the back of my mind is a voice saying, "I can do it...I'll just get a job." Which is another lie. I see that I need to combat these lies with the truth. So, I am memorizing Deuteronomy 8:18 (New American Standard Bible):

"But you are to remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, in order to confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day."

Every day, I spend the first 30 minutes of the day in quiet time with God. I start with gratitude for all He has done, is doing, and will do for me based on His promises. Then, I ask for help with whatever I need. I try to still my mind to hear what He speaks to me because He always does. He's good like that.

2. Trust God 100% with everything, for everything, all the time

I know it's a learning process, but if I could tell my younger self anything, it would be to memorize a few promises of God found in His word and quote them out loud whenever I feel fear or anxiety. As many times as is needed.

When I waver in my faith, my favorite go-to verse is written on a post-it note on my monitor: John 14:1, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and trust also in Me [Jesus]." I have it memorized now, but I still keep the little faded yellow, slightly wrinkled taped (because the stickiness is gone) to the lower left-hand corner of my computer screen. It's probably one of my most valued items in my office.

"Relying on God has to begin all over again every day as if nothing had yet been done," C.S. Lewis wrote in his *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*. It's a good habit to get into. God has provided many verses in His Word to remind us to trust Him. He's good like that.

#1 Get saved.

Not popular, I know. But my eternal salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ is the number one essential in my life. I asked Jesus into my heart when I was 22 years old, and I wish it had been sooner, but I am eternally (literally) grateful it happened. I have been through so many emotional, mental, and physical trials in my 56 years that I would be just a pile of dust without my Father God helping and healing me.

No matter how you feel about the church or Christians, pursue a relationship with God Himself, the Creator. Try to lay aside all the unkind, judgmental things human beings say and do, sadly, in the name of the Church.

God is wonderful. His goodness is beyond my comprehension, even after 34 years of being one of His believers. I'm always learning more about the depths of God's goodness and faithfulness. It's so worth it. Get to know Him yourself. If there is anything you are struggling with right now, you can ask Him for help. Right now. What have you got to lose?

Romans 10:9-10 (New American Standard Bible) says, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

You might be thinking, "How do I get saved?" It's easy. Pray this prayer:

"Lord Jesus,

"I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins and rose from the grave to give me life. I know You are the only way to God. So now I want to quit disobeying You and start living for You. Please forgive me, change my life, and show me how to know You. In Jesus' name. Amen."

If you prayed that prayer, let me know in the comment section or send a private message to me (angela@angeladolbear.com) so I can pray for you. Find a Bible-teaching church close to you and start going. I hope you find a loving new family of God there to help you in your new life of faith in God.

I hope my top 5 nuggets of wisdom have helped you. I try to remain a student in life, open to learning new things all the time, so maybe there will be new things next year...if Jesus doesn't return by then. Until then, blessings to you!

Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her latest release, The Mid-Century Breakfast Club, is the fourth book in The Garden Tales series and will be released in the Summer of 2025. Her novels are available on Amazon in paperback, Kindle, and audiobook formats. Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, and writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN—listen to her new album STORMS on your favorite music streaming service. Please drop by and sign up for news, read new stories, and hear new original music at http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm. Blessings to you!

Firmly Planted - Do Birds Pray?- by Dina Cavazos

Watching the birds in my backyard is one of favorite things to do. This poem was inspired by observing their behavior, which impressed be as being similar to humans in some ways. What do you think? What can we learn from them? Who do you think the "stranger" is at the end of the poem and why does their behavior change? Things to think about...

BIRDS OF PRAY

Birds are feeding, fretting, fluttering, muttering; What do they say, and do they pray? They gather in groups, birds of a feather, conferring; What do they say, and do they pray?

Birds chirping loud, not soft as a prayer; Not sharing, or caring, not daring To defer, to perch wing to wing.

But, can they, do they pray?
For on occasion, no often-times-Fretting, fluttering, muttering all cease;
A stranger comes into their midst.
Communal seed shared, bringing peace.

Moving Forward - It Will Pass - by Pamela Charro

"Problems are just opportunities for miracles to occur. Don't have a problem right now? I'm so sorry! But I'm sure you will again soon." -- Graham Cook (paraphrased).

Doesn't life sometimes just seem to be one problem after another? I'm often astounding at how many different ways my peace feels under attack - and, a lot of the time, in multiple ways at once. I find myself wondering if it will ever get any easier. I'm tempted to compare my situation to others who are my age. They sure seem to have it easier than I do! I just start to believe I'm finally getting the hang of it, then life throws me a curveball in the form of a financial crisis, chronic physical pain, boundary issues in my relationships, or fear of being let go from my job.

Why must it always be so difficult?

I imagine myself flying through the universe in a spaceship, meteors narrowly missing me for the rest of my life.

I so easily forget that each challenge in my life was strategically placed or allowed to make me stronger and, ultimately, more victorious. I also forget that none of those challenges stayed longer than was necessary to accomplish the good they would bring. The people who made my life difficult were suddenly gone. The money suddenly came in. The pain was healed. And, in many cases, God was just waiting for me to bring all of it to him so that he could show me that he was listening and looking out for me. So that he could remind me of my dependence on his extravagant love and provision. And to remind me of his perspective of all of it

Then the struggle is gone! Sure, it will soon be replaced by another, but I need to remember how he showed up for me. Because he will again. And he will make me more beautiful in the process, and become more real to me and, hopefully, those around me.

I'm pretty sure I will never *enjoy* having problems, but it does help to remember that they will not last. The beauty he brings out of them will, though. It will all be so worth it.



FRESH TIME – But You Can – by Marcy Lytle

You can't tell a family that lost their home in a fire how you lost your car in wreck...

But you can sit with them while they cry and mourn the loss, and give an ear to listen.

You can't tell a family that feels swept downstream by a round of bad news to just have faith.

But you can ride in the stream beside them, hold their hand, and help them breathe.

You can't tell a daughter whose mom is losing her mind to dementia to be thankful anyway.

But you can nod your head as she tells how it hurts, and squeeze her hand tightly as you pray.

You can't tell a young teen that broke his leg and will miss the season, to just suck it up.

But you can let him sit in quiet, while you sit nearby, not say a word but be there for him.

You can't tell a dad that's lost his job and is fearful about bills to not worry about a thing.

But you can tell him you'll pray, that you'll hold your hands up, while his hang weak...

You can't tell a couple who just lost a child that all things work together for good.

But you can tell them you love them, you're there for them, and take them a meal.

You can't tell a child whose mom just died of cancer to be comforted, he'll see her one day.

But you can hold him close, pray to the Father that He holds him closer, and cry with him.

You can't tell a friend who's been praying for years for their children, to just keep holding on.

But you can tell them that you're praying too, and take them to dinner and have some fun.

You can't tell a friend whose husband left her for another, that she's better off without him.

But you can check on that friend, send love notes, and remind her how beautiful she is.

You can't tell a mom with a child with limited abilities that she'll be stronger from the fight.

But you can offer to clean her house, meet her for a walk, or help her with dinner.

You see, it's not really what we tell folks that they already know...things work out...God hears them...good is coming...they've heard it all. And while truth from His Word heals and offers hope, it's His Word and their reading and His work in them that does these things. It's not our platitudes and the way we figure out things so that we can *make* them feel better.

It's really in the silent doing and caring and praying and checking...and being a friend that listens and cares...and trusts in His plan when they can't.

And then being there with them to rejoice after the pain subsides...

FRESH THYME - Jars and Markets - by Marcy Lytle

I love farmers markets. And especially now that March is here and the weather is improving and the farmers are coming to share with all of us that shop, I go! I have several favorite things I purchase at the markets. I also love specific food items that come in jars. So why not share with you both of these things? The best of the best at the markets, and the tastiest of the tasty in jars, this season as we approach spring...

<u>Salsa</u> – There's a particular brand called Beba's Fresh Salsa that we go back to time and time again, because it tastes so good. I think it may be in stores now, as well. But if you buy salsa, buy it at the markets. These folks know how to make it, they often have samples to taste, and varying heat options from mild to spicy. And sometimes they have homemade tortilla chips to sell alongside!

<u>Pickles</u> – Jarred pickles. Is there anything better? But sometimes they're not crunchy, and that's not good. Market pickles most always are crunchy, and you can ask the one who made them all about their pickles. Sometimes there's extra dill flavor, and sometimes there are all sorts of choices of pickles. So, support your local grower, and eat their pickles. Coat them and fry them. Chop them up in your tuna. And return to buy some more.

<u>Honey</u> – We purchase all of our honey locally. It is sold in our grocery store, as well. It's Round Rock Honey. But the reason my husband loves it is because it's local, and supposedly local honey where you live has properties that help with your local allergies. You can even visit the beehive and honey making process sometimes if you ask your honey stand keeper. Jarred honey is good in coffee, so my husband says. And he knows...

<u>Pasta Sauce</u> – If you can find a vendor that markets their own pasta sauce, try it. There's nothing quite like it, and it's a far cry better than the versions on the grocery store shelves. We recently tried a Mediterranean fennel option. Those same stands sometimes have homemade pasta and there's nothing comparable. I don't ever want to grab pasta sauce in the store again, after tasting what's in the jar at the market.

<u>Jelly</u> – What's your favorite jelly flavor? Ours is mustang grape. And we're a sucker for buying too much jelly that we then can't eat. But homemade jelly, with biscuits and bacon – well there's a supper idea for you one night, alongside other snacks – while you watch a show. These jelly makers know their business and their flavors are rich, and the jellies are made with love, often by those that have been making jelly for years. Try some.

Queso – Yep, if you don't make your own, you can often find some at a market. You'll need to take your cooler, because it's sold fresh and it has to be refrigerated. It's great to have on hand for your next evening with the kids, and it will be a hit. Homemade queso in a jar from the farmer's market. Chef Flaco's is a local favorite here, but find yours, there.

<u>Dried herbs</u> – The flavor mixes that some of these crafters put together are out of this world. And they're serious about their flavors. City Gardens and Goods, and Kustom Spices, are two of our faves with their Texas TeaseTaco seasoning, and rosemary basil salt. My goodness. You'll want to cook for days, with a set of farmers market seasonings on hand.

It's that time of year for market shopping. Purchase a nice big cloth bag with pockets (Marshalls often has them this time of year) and keep it in the car, place ice packs in your cooler, take a hat and some sunscreen and hit the markets at least once a month in your area. And while you're

there,	, pick up	o some	fresh pe	cans too	not in	a jar…bı	ut in a bag	. And they'	ll be the	best you've	Э
had.											

FRESH THYME – The Lighter Things – by Marcy Lytle

It was while we were away on a weekend, I was slipping my tiny heart stud earrings into a zipper bag with other jewelry and saw these little studs sink to the bottom and get lost under all the other heavy jewelry. Most of the time, the way I hear Him speak to me is through every day occurrences, and I heard something and observed something that stuck with me as the earrings disappeared.

I had packed the big earrings and necklaces in the same pouch with the tiny studs, and it was hard to dig down and find the little earrings, once we got to our place. I literally had to empty out the bag and find them, because they were either stuck on one of the heavier pieces or in the pit of oblivion beneath all the big accessories.

This made me think about the heaviness I'd been carrying about different cares of life, like we all do – those weighty things like the future of our lives, health, family, and all the huge things that concern us. We place those in our bags and tote them around as if they're our burdens to bear, when clearly they're too heavy.

This made me also think about all the little things that happen daily while the heavy things hang like dark clouds. Little answers to prayers, finding that parking space up close, discovering those keys we thought we'd lost, pulling up for a refreshing frozen coke at McDonald's, a good night's sleep, the sun peeking out and warming up the day...you know...the million wonderful "lighter" things that surround us from morning til night. They often go unnoticed and we sometimes forget to be thankful.

So here's the thing. When all of those lighter and little things that are awesome that happen on a daily basis get thrown into our bag where all the heavy things of life reside, they slip to the bottom and get covered up...they disappear. We walk outside and don't see the sun peeking from behind the clouds, we miss the beauty of a clean car that's been washed by the recent rain, or we totally discard that pain we had yesterday that's gone today. Those are the little accessories that we dump down in the back with the heavy things we wear around our neck.

When I couldn't find the little heart earrings I'd dropped in the same bag with the heavy accessories, I thought of how often I try to carry both in my heart and mind as well. It doesn't work.

In actuality, all those lighter and little things are really the star actors in our daily drama, aren't they? There's so many of them that we call small, when they're actually so huge, in the way we are cared for and provided for and blessed. My, gosh. Salvation alone, from the heart of Jesus, is the best gift of all that we forget to even note for months or years at a time; we just take it for granted. Legs that walk, mouths that speak, ears that hear...those are huge! And little treats in the drive-thru, a call or text from a friend, a celebration of another birthday...the list is LONG of these little daily things that fall into our laps unannounced but ring loud and clear that we are loved and we are His.

Those weighty things like death and dying, heartache and loss, are awful. I dread them all and actually fear them. And my bag is full of those on any given morning as I awake and think about all the "what-ifs" of these heavy things that might happen, or are happening, in my life and in the lives of my friends.

We will always have the heavy and the light things as long as we walk this earth, and we will always have MANY more of the daily blessings than we have of the weighty cares...if we were to count them. And yet, we count the weights.

I once saw something a friend posted that said this:

"I asked God for flowers and he gave me rain.

When you understand this life starts to make sense."

I'm not sure my earrings in the pouch story makes sense, but it does to me. I don't want to toss in the little daily blessings that I often miss in among the heavy thoughts I carry alongside them. Those lighter things will get lost and smushed (that's not a word, but I like it). I want to be sure to notice and keep those small innumerable blessings that I can't count in the forefront of my mind so that they instead cover up the heavy…because I can't carry those anyway. But he can.

And rain does fall in heavy amounts at times, sometimes for days, and causes all kinds of trouble. But flowers don't bloom without the downpours.

Next time you go on a trip, notice how you pack your earrings and necklaces and see what falls to the bottom and what gets tangled up and what hides the other items. Then stop and give thanks for a dozen little and lighter things you missed while you were thinking about the heaviness of the load.