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TIPS

The Dressing - September Sweaters – by Marcy Lytle

It's time to start thinking about sweater weather. Maybe you live where it's already cool enough to wear them, but here I'm still just shopping for new ones and thinking about wearing them! I love sweaters of all kinds, and actually keep a stack for all year – because I freeze in side when the air-conditioning is on. A month or so ago, I purchased several sweaters on Amazon, and a couple from Urban Outfitters, and really like them...so here they are!

Gray and Fuzzy – Gray is a neutral in my closet for winter. It can be worn with SO MANY things, and this comfortable fuzzy one might be a sweater that I live in all season. A simple front tuck is an easy way to wear it for a day at home working, or a shopping spree in town.

Pink tunic – I only like pink in small doses, but the sleeves and the length of this tunic made me order it. It's going to be so fun to style this with brown, gray, navy, denim and more.

Cross front – This criss/cross sweater allows me to wear any number of graphic tees underneath, a half tee, or a tank, depending on my mood and the rest of my outfit. A pretty necklace will elevate the look for a date night out.

Cropped and belted – This one cropped look, with a tank under and belt over, is sporty, cute, and fun. I'd wear this with the jeans or a skirt and booties. I think it's so versatile!

Orange block – What a fun long cardigan style sweater in this fall hue of orange. This sweater is a bit heavy and super cozy. It's cute over a t-shirt for a sporty look, but really elegant over a dress with a belt, for a dressy look.

Caramel waffle – I LOVE this color in the fall, and I LOVE waffle weave fabric. This sweater is light enough to wear belted, so I am! In two different styles altogether!

The ski sweater – Supposedly, these are in this fall and I'm happy about it! This is quite bulky and warm, but I was drawn to it because of the rich colors. I'll wear it for long walks, take with me on trips, and wear it and smile!

Gold crochet – The picture at the top is a gold crochet style sweater, great for this transition time, worn over a tee with a skirt, or jeans. I have a few crocheted cardigans that are really one of the best items to have. Super easy to pack, they can be dressed up or down, and they're not too hot.

What about you? Are you a fan of sweater weather?

Seven for You – The Great Gadgets

It's that season for all the aromas of pumpkin and spices in the kitchen, so we asked our panel to share with us any gadget that they really love using in the kitchen. After all, I want to know of anything I'm missing in my kitchen drawer, don't you? And since Christmas will be here before we know it, this list might be handy when thinking of gifts to give, or ones to put on our lists! Hope you enjoy our list, and find something you want. If you have your own, share in the comments at the end!

Lemon squeezer cup – I have a lemon squeezer, the kind where you place the lemon inside, and the juice falls into a separate bowl. However, I recently found this cute gadget that has the little measuring cup attached. So I can squeeze the lemon and save the unused juice, and measure it out as I need it!

I also love my food processor. I have been surprised at how many friends don't own one. I use it for making hummus, especially, which tastes so good made at home! It's great for making homemade pesto, as well.

I recently purchased a meat chopper after watching a chef on Instagram. What a game changer! It's great for breaking up ground meat/turkey while cooking. Works great!

https://www.amazon.com/OXO-Citrus-Juicer-Measuring-Strainer/dp/B01B7HSI76/ref=sr_1_16?dchild=1&keywords=lemon+squeezer&qid=1627930058&sr=8-16

https://www.amazon.com/ideas/amzn1.account.AFGMY23AF4JI2JNTTWLXIE3ZJVCQ/2UQOQY5CDAW0Q?type=explore&ref=idea_cp_vl_ov_d

My favorite kitchen gadgets are my cutting boards, salad servers, and hot plate trivets. These may seem like odd favorites, and they are. What I love about them is that I have made them my kitchen decor! Several years ago, I was redoing my kitchen and could not decide where to store my hot plate trivets. Then an idea hit me. What if I store them on the wall as decorations? I use them daily and they look modern enough to hang. Then I thought about cutting boards. So, I shopped for some that would work as decor and that I could hang. I found some that were perfect and in a great color. I also hung my salad servers that I got in Hawaii. Voila! My kitchen was redone and resourceful. - Carole

I don't bake a lot but I do have some favorite kitchen gadgets. My new one is my air fryer - I love it! It cooks things in half the time and I don't have to turn on my oven. I rarely fry in oil so this is yummy since the food tastes fried (at least to me it, does.) I also love my crook pot for the fall. It's so easy to put a whole chicken in or roast for when the cooler temps get here. – Melissa

https://www.amazon.com/COSORI-Electric-Reminder-Touchscreen-Certified/dp/B07GJBBGHG/ref=sr_1_3?dchild=1&keywords=cosori+air+fryer&qid=1627932959&sr=8-3

https://www.amazon.com/All-Clad-SD700450-Programmable-Oval-Shaped-6-5-Quart/dp/B0007SXBUQ/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=all+clad+crock+pot&qid=1627933005&sr=8-1

This little whisk is under \$10 on Amazon, but it's my fave! I make my own yogurt and I use this to blend all the ingredients, or to make sauces and gravies. It gets into the corners or rounded areas. Actually bought two! – Debbie Haynes

https://www.amazon.com/OXO-Grips-Gravy-Sauce-Whisk/dp/B0817KZWLX/ref=sr_1_14?dchild=1&keywords=whisk&qid=1627930017&sr=8-14

I only have one favorite gadget right now and it's our new Breville Smart Oven Air Fryer. It doesn't heat up my kitchen and because it's only my husband and I at the moment, it's all we use besides our cook top. It cooks and airfrys quickly and efficiently, taking up very little room in the kitchen. Really like it. – Tanya

https://www.williams-sonoma.com/search/results.html?words=breville%20smart%20oven%20air%20fryer&Kenshoo=k_CjwKCAjw9ailBhA1EiwAJ_GTSmbRayV9FyDD2xb1iXYJxvplktijcGiJ9aHJKujXhwxUzAUkP1RM5hoC-RoQAvD_BwE_k&cm_ven=NonBrandSearch&cm_cat=Google&cm_pla=NonBrand_Search_Breville_Exact&cm_ite=breville%20smart%20oven%20air%20fryer&gclid=CjwKCAjw9ailBhA1EiwAJ_GTSmbRayV9FyDD2xb1iXYJxvplktijcGiJ9aHJKujXhwxUzAUkP1RM5hoC-RoQAvD_BwE

I've had this cool gadget for years. It's used to butter corn cobs! You put butter in the square and press down on the lever to push the butter through the holes.

At this particular time my two favorite kitchen gadgets are the Pampered Chef Mix and Chop. It's the absolute best tool I've ever had to help break down my hamburger meat into bite size pieces. (I'm posting gadgets more than once if they were submitted – because they must be good!) My second favorite kitchen item is my Nostalgia My Mini Waffle maker. It's perfect when I crave a waffle, and only want a tiny one. I love that it stays on my kitchen counter and takes up very little space!

https://www.amazon.com/Chopper-Hamburger-Premium-Resistant-Smasher/dp/B08JKXDFQ9/ref=sr_1_1_sspa?dchild=1&keywords=pampered+chef+mix+and+chop&qid=1628593819&s=home-garden&sr=1-1-spons&psc=1&spLa=ZW5jcnlwdGVkUXVhbGlmaWVyPUFQN1NSMkZBNIRESFAMZW5jcnlwdGVkSWQ9QTAxMzI2ODQyNjVIM0JVNDMwM1RHJmVuY3J5cHRIZEFkSWQ9QTA2MDczMjhYT1hLSkk0VE05UjImd2lkZ2V0TmFtZT1zcF9hdGYmYWw0aW9uPWNsaWNrUmVkaXJlY3QmZG9Ob3Rmb2dDbGljaz10cnVl

https://www.amazon.com/Nostalgia-MWF5AQ-Personal-Electric-Quesadilla/dp/B07WNXSB3D/ref=sr_1_3?crd=3DIA33Z6OBVZN&dchild=1&keywords=nost

[algia+my+mini+waffle+maker&qid=1628593856&s=home-garden&sprefix=nostalgia+my+mini%2Cgarden%2C386&sr=1-3](https://www.google.com/search?q=algia+my+mini+waffle+maker&qid=1628593856&s=home-garden&sprefix=nostalgia+my+mini%2Cgarden%2C386&sr=1-3)

During my “minimalist phase” I purged my kitchen of many gadgets. However, this little measuring cup made the cut and has become a favorite tool. It is easy to see the markings from above and easy to store. Sometimes simple is better.

https://www.amazon.com/OXO-Grips-Angled-Measuring-Clear/dp/B00FYL4MPY/ref=asc_df_B00FYL4MPY/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=193129986239&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=138686333709233522&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9028263&hvta rgid=pla-335441694444&psc=1

Three Moms – Struggles with Fear – by the Cousins

Mom of Three

This is a huge topic – mom fears! I honestly try not to entertain fear. However, one fear is that when I'm not with my kids they might be hurt or end up sick, or have to go the hospital, when I'm not around. I remember after having a miscarriage, the first few years of my son's life I was really nervous to leave him anywhere. We kept him with us a lot. That was definitely hard and that fear came up again when they started school, and any time they are out from under my "protective umbrella." I have to take those thoughts captive and pray before I drop them off, just a simple prayer that realigns my thoughts. This also allows me to enjoy what I'm doing without them.

A second fear I've had was in this past year with Covid. I wasn't so much afraid of us being sick, but the realization that we are not promised tomorrow, and to not be anxious, and yet we risk things every day by driving, swimming, etc. But the idea of being sick from a virus was so much "in our face" that I felt scared, because of the unknown. This fear even affected my sleep. When my daughter dreamed about what she wants to be, the what-ifs bothered me. But yet I want her to continue to dream! I even remember struggling with this fear as a teen, worrying that I might not get married before the end of the world. Teaching my children how to dream and also teaching them to not worry or live in the future, but to live in the present, is hard. I want them to be dream, I want us all to not be afraid to live. Reality is before us, but listening to the Lord is, as well. I've seen this fear in my kids a bit, in the past year, as well. I don't want my fears to be in my kids.

A third fear that isn't so much a problem now, but when my husband lost his job or money is stretched thin, I worry about not having funds for the bigger things my kids want to do – like trips and fun. And then I think about them being grown and having missed out on these fun things because of money. This goes along with the Covid experience, that we would be so afraid to not go out and do things. I've had to get out of the fear of not having enough. Sometimes, when I get money I want to spend it, out of fear of losing it again.

I deal with these fears by talking with my husband – he's so good at being calm. I have learned to ask for help with the budget, when I need help. I've had to give my fears to my husband and to the Lord, because they both carry well when I don't! With all of the changes in our live, this has been a big deal to allow someone else to lead and carry, so that I can rest in knowing the Lord has us and provides. Just like when he provided manna daily, he provides for us the same way. I also turn on worship music to reset my mind. And the Word, especially Philippians, is my favorite. I can do all things through Christ – if I have little or a lot – I'm good! And finally, I talk to my mom and dad, and I know they pray. A few close friends help me, as well, by setting me straight or praying for me!

Mom of Two

Fear. That's a big word. There are many moments where I have been fearful. But, in general, I'm not a very fearful person. I do have concerns that keep me up sometimes or might consume my thoughts on how to tackle. Those are real, for sure. I think my concerns for my kids will change in different seasons. For example, as newborns I worried about if I was feeding them enough, are they breathing, will I break this baby, etc. But as they've grown, there have been fears that have left and new ones have come in...

My daughters are almost 3 and 5, my biggest fear is that they might not know the Lord. If there might be a possibility I would not spend eternity with them is fearful for me. I combat that by knowing and reading scripture that He is the one that transforms, and He can use me as a vessel, but God has my daughters – they're his. I'm to do the best I can do as a mom, by showing them Christ's love, reading the Word, praying with them, surrounding them with other believers. But in the end, the most security comes when I know I serve an amazing God that can touch them, even at their young age.

The second fear comes from the news, hearing of kids with illnesses like cancer, or young lives taken too soon. Every so often, I fear I might lose my kids too early. God only knows the future. Again, I go to Him and know that the Lord has a perfect and good will for each of my girls. He allows me the opportunity to be with them, but he has a good plan and story for them.

A new fear that has started to creep up is how to prepare them for the school years, as my oldest starts kindergarten soon. Do we choose private, public, or Christian-based schools, or where should she go? Teachers and cultures and friends, and all the things. We want to guide her in the right direction. Again, all fears I take to Him.

Fear is a liar, it is not from God. We might feel like we're a failure or overwhelmed, but we can give our fears to Him. That is the biggest and best way I combat fear. Talking to my husband is also helpful, and expressing how I feel, helps as well! God always give me peace in every season, and I love Him for that!

Mom of Four

One subject of fear is in the area of our physical health, making sure we are taking care of bodies. A few years back our daughter had severe stomach pains, landing in the ER several times. We finally discovered it was a gut issue from antibiotics and what we ate, even though we had always tried to eat healthy. So we have tried to all make better decisions with food choices, regarding sugar intake, and having fruits and vegetables each day, as well as getting exercise. The kids also take probiotics daily.

The second is purity, having a healthy view of sex for my children. Our culture presents an unhealthy view of sex and marriage. I want them to not see it as something bad, but as something beautiful in God's design. We have started *God's Design for Sex* books with our kids, which are age appropriate as our kids grow. Things like sex and movies, etc. are addressed. My hope is that when they hit puberty and start to encounter the challenges of dating, we can talk through each thing then as well!

Finally, I want to have wisdom on handling technology. Parental controls are present, but sometimes things just pop up in commercials or ads. I want my kids to grow in discernment and guard their eyes, honoring God in what we watch. Our oldest has a Gabb phone for just texting and calling. There's a balance between guarding and shutting it all off and training and preparing them for exposure in the world. Trying to do both!

In the Kitchen – No-Bake Snacks – by Marcy Lytle

School is back in session, hopefully cool temps are coming and it might be a busy time of the year for many of us. We want snacks, but we don't want all the trouble it takes to mix and bake, and don't want the store-bought stuff with added ingredients. So...we want easy snacks to make at home!

I love taking snacks to the movies, packing them for picnics, and just having on hand when I'm hungry in between meals!

Here are seven of my faves:

Popcorn with mix-ins:

- Popcorn
- Caramels
- Burnt peanuts
- Dark chocolate covered almonds
- Peanut brittle

Just pop the corn, salt it with pink salt, then add in the chopped mix-ins. If you're packing it, you might want to keep the mix-ins separate until time to eat, so the chocolate won't melt.

Three-Nut Mix:

- 8 oz Marcona almonds, roasted
- 8 oz roasted and salted pistachios
- 4 oz pecan pieces
- $\frac{3}{4}$ c sugar
- 1 T vanilla
- $\frac{1}{4}$ c maple syrup
- $\frac{1}{4}$ c water
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp kosher salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp black pepper

Preheat oven to 350. Combine all the ingredients in a large bowl and stir til completely coated. Spread out evenly on a parchment lined baking sheet. Bake until sugar begins to melt, about 7 minutes. Remove from oven and stir, then bake another 7 minutes. Cool the nuts and place in sealed bags or container.

Olive Hummus & Pita Chips:

- Store-bought or homemade hummus
- Kalamata olives
- Pita chips (HEB brand are the best!)
- Carrot sticks

This sounds simple, but adding Kalamata olives into your plain hummus adds SO MUCH flavor. And with the right pita chip (you can even make your own – make sure they're crunchy not hard!) This is a dip to die for.

Ham Skewers w/Dip

- Thinly sliced ham
- Cubes of cheese (we used Brie)
- Large green olives
- French's Honey Mustard dipping sauce
- Homemade dill pickles (get a farmer's market!)
- Dark chocolate and those nuts!

Fold up some ham and thread on skewer with cheese and olives. Add the dipping sauce, and the other things alongside. So yummy.

Quinoa Salad with Crackers

This was a great no-bake snack/supper (except for the quinoa) we took to a recent concert in the park. It's so good, makes a lot, and tastes even better the next day! You could totally bake the quinoa ahead of time, so the salad then can be made in a snap!

- Cooked quinoa
- Chopped celery
- Chopped red onion
- Shredded carrots
- Can of black beans, rinsed and dried on paper towels
- Dried cranberries
- Olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper for the dressing

There are no measurements, because you can just add the ingredients – as much as you need – for this delicious combo. Combine the quinoa, celery, onion, carrots and black beans...then stir in some cranberries. Toss with the dressing. Keep in fridge until time to enjoy.

Ice Cream Sandwiches

These were a hit! And so easy to just have the ingredients on hand, take them out, and let each one make their own, or you can make a variety and set out!

- Lacey Cookies (we got these from World Market)
- Four small tubs of unique ice cream flavors

You'll want to set the ice cream out a few minutes before assembling, so that you can then spread the ice cream. Then if not eaten right away, you'll want to freeze (but not too long) and then eat.

Tried and True – Table Runners – by Marcy Lytle

I have a full drawer of table runners. I'm thinking our grandmothers had full drawers of tablecloths to cover the entire table. Maybe you have both, or neither. But I thought I'd share a way to change up the dinner table often, to make that place more inviting and cozy and cute. And it all starts with a table runner. You can find these at discount stores, on line, at Target, or most anywhere that sells linens...and if you buy them off season, you can get a bargain!

Why a table runner? A runner takes a plain table and elevates it to a piece of art with the runner as the backdrop. And the fun thing is that there are table runners for every season, and it's an inexpensive way to decorate when the seasons change.

How do I keep them clean? Many can be spot-cleaned, others can be washed, and still others can be removed if need be for the dinner. When we serve buffet-style, we push the runner to the back of the table and line candles on it, but keep the food off of it. Sometimes we place a mat under our plate so food doesn't fall on the runner.

What should I place on the runner? There are lots of ideas. Remember that three grouped items often are pleasing to the eye, as well as different heights, color and texture:

- A plant on a stand, with a candle or two
- Fresh cut flowers in a unique antique vase
- Lemons or oranges or apples in a pretty wooden bowl
- A wooden cutting board with a candle and a succulent on top
- A group of three lanterns of varying heights
- A circular or rectangle shallow basket with a candle, wooden beads, and a book on top
- A long skinny bread bowl with small gourds or greenery
- A large clear vase with tall branches cut from your yard
- Seasonal or holiday décor
- Several tapers in different holders of different heights

Where will I store my runners as I collect them? Have a designated drawer or large basket or shelf where you fold and stack them. This way it's easy to see which one you want to use for which month/season. You could even drape them over hangers in a closet.

How do I choose a color or style? Stand back and look at the room where the table is located, make a note of the colors in that room. Then when you shop, look for different styles of runners, depending on your taste. Some have texture like fringe or patterns like flowers, or artwork of the season like pumpkins. Choose one that goes with your color scheme, and even take a picture of the room before you shop, to take with you.

How often should I change out the runner? Once a month, if you wish! Or at least once a season. It's fun to have a runner for fall, Christmas, the winter season after Christmas, maybe one for Valentine's and one for Easter, a pretty spring runner, one for July 4...and then start all over again when fall begins again.



HOME

Practical Parenting – Three Family Games – by Marcy Lytle

We recently gathered with our kiddos and had a fun evening with food and games. Food is a given, and games are often played on the field or in a gym with friends, but then games at home get pushed aside because there's no time – once school is back in session. However, you can still have family game time often, for special occasions or for upcoming holiday gatherings, and I'm sharing three ideas for you, for the next time "game night" is on the calendar!

Saran Wrap Roll:

You'll need a big roll (or two) of Saran Wrap and several small dollar items, plus some cash, and one pair of big gloves.

The cash prize is the big one (it can be \$10-\$50!) and you start by wrapping it in the wrap, first. Then you take each subsequent item and wrap it in the Saran Wrap several times by wrapping, twisting, changing directions, etc. You continue to add all of the items until you have this HUGE ball full of hidden prizes inside. We had about 35 tiny gifts and a cash prize of \$20. So all in all, it was about \$60 for this game, but everyone went home with several things. Some were adult items (socks, shower cap, Chapstick, etc.) and some were kid items (tiny puzzle, candy, toy, etc.)

Here were the rules: We passed the ball and each one rolled a couple of dice before unwrapping. Doubles = you got to unroll two gifts; Lucky 7 = you can trade what you unwrap for anything anyone else has; and Snake Eyes = you have to unwrap while wearing a pair of ski gloves or mittens.

Oh my gosh, this was great fun! And at the end, after all the gifts were unwrapped and the last person got the cash, we then traded if adults had kid items and vice-versa.

Memory Tray:

You'll need a large tray with about 30 tiny things you gather from your junk drawers and around the house (tiny screwdriver, earring, ticket stub, a peanut, etc. – all small). Each person (or duo, if you play in pairs), needs a pen and paper. And you'll need a list of what all you placed on the tray!

Lay out the items on the tray in no organized fashion, but so that they are all separated and set out for viewing. Gather the family and have them sit in a circle. Give them about 1-2 minutes to view the items, and then take the tray away. Give them another 1-2 minutes to write down all the items they can remember.

Give a prize for the winner...or just bragging rights!

Identify the Scent:

You'll need 10 spices from your cabinet that have quite strong aromas (we also used cocoa, vanilla and other scented spices – fall is great for this.) You'll then need to "disguise" them. We

sprinkled each in tissue paper and placed into jars. Then we labeled each one with a piece of tape on the bottom.

Pass the jars (you do it, so they can't look inside) and let each one sniff and then come up with their guess. The one who guesses the most correctly, wins!

This is a great idea for the fall/holiday season as those spices smell the best. Be sure to throw in some obscure spices they might not recognize!

Enjoy each one, let the older kids put these games together, and then see what other creative family games these inspire for next time!

I Don't Do Teens – There Will Come a Time – by Marcy Lytle

There will come a time when you won't have a Bandaid for that cut.

You'll have to lean on Him to heal your daughter.

There will come a time when you won't have an answer for that question.

You'll have to take it to Him and let him lead your son to the Answer.

There will come a time when her heartache will be your sleepless night.

You'll have to crumble before Him at his feet, and learn to rest.

There will come a time when you're no longer the hand they hold, and you'll cry.

You'll have to hold His hand and let go of theirs, and trust in Joy in that journey.

There will come a time when their rudeness will cut you to the bone.

You'll have to forgive them, and still love them, because they aren't yet grown.

There will come a time when she will do the unthinkable and it will leave a scar.

You'll have to hold her, tell her the truth, then tell her again of His great love.

There will come a time when he may walk away from all that he's learned.

You'll have to pray harder, trust more, and remain ready to welcome him home.

There will come a time when your friend's child will succeed, and yours will fail.

You'll have a choice to rejoice or envy, and trust or flounder. Make the first two.

There will come a time when she'll drive away without you in the seat beside her.

You'll have to pray that He's with her, to protect and guide her.

There will come a time when he will meet a girl, and be alone and tempted.

You'll have to pray that he's reminded and restrained and then refrains.

There will come a time when all you've done will not seem like enough.

You'll have to stand tall, surrender them all, and sit down and watch...

The Goodness of Your God to You and Yours.

An Adage A Day - On the Ball – by Carole Gilbert

It's football season! It's time to "Get on the ball." I've said this idiom many times while raising my kids, mostly literally. We always had one, two, or all three playing some sport or another. And sometimes they were playing multiple sports at once if their grades were straight A's. That was our rule. If you had straight A's, you could play whatever sport you wanted, and as many as you wanted. I have also said it many times when I was not referring to sports but to their behavior. I have even said this to myself, trying to get motivated for something I needed to do.

So, what does this idiom, "Get on the ball," mean? It is thought to have originated from the early 20th century and was first used as a baseball phrase. It referred to the pitcher's technique of handling the ball as he pitched it to the batter. He would "put a spin on it" or "throw them a curveball." He was definitely "on the ball."

Over the years, this idiom evolved and now refers to being on the ball with other "tasks at hand" or with "the thing of importance." It literally means someone or something is good at getting things finished, and when used as a verb it is addressing someone's ability to do just that. In other words, it means to get going with a job that needs to be done. When I think of myself as *on the ball*, I know I've completed a task well or I'm telling myself to get moving on performing a task.

This idiom also brings a favorite thought to my mind of my kids playing soccer when they were little. I have lots of memories of them on the ball but there's something about several four- or five-year-olds all trying to get their foot on one ball at the same time that can be quite entertaining. I always loved to watch them huddle together and chase the ball as it bounces away. I have enjoyed watching them make goals even as they look confused as to why they're doing this. I have seen them jump with excitement over their victory as they kick the ball into the wrong goal. I have seen them walk off the field in the middle of the game because they did not want to play anymore, and I've seen them sit on the sideline refusing to go into the game when it was their turn. And I have also seen their growth and maturity as they learn to play on a team. There's something about being "on the ball" that seems to be good for everyone.

We read of wrestling and boxing in the Bible along with endurance running, but I can only find one verse that refers to playing ball and it's actually about playing in God's court.

It's Isaiah 22:17-18 and it says, "Beware, the Lord is about to take firm hold of you and hurl you away, you mighty man. He will roll you up tightly like a ball and throw you into a large country. There you will die and there the chariots you were so proud of will become a disgrace to your master's house."

This verse helps us know how important it is to be on God's team. Along with this, the bottom line of being on the ball for all of us can be found in 2 Timothy 2:5.

It simply says, "An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules."

We are all God's athletes, and we all know that without God's rules we are already defeated.
"We can't win for losing."

Tiny Living – What a Trip! – by Leyanne Enterline

Oh the adventures of camping!

Not glamping. I'm talking an actual tent in the wilderness for seven days, 45 minutes away from civilization. No clean, running water, no showers or sinks, no electricity, no cell service. Just you and the woods and whatever supplies you bring along.

We have taken a few camping trips within the past few years, but nothing quite like this one or for this long. We typically go for a few days with just our family. This time we brought one of the boys' friends along for an all week fishing trip. I was basically along for the ride as the chef, maid, designated driver for drop-offs and pick-ups, photographer, doctor, prayer warrior... Basically, that's what I do every day, but this time it was just in the woods!

This amount of time in the woods definitely brought on strong emotions. And since we had a friend along, I felt that we really couldn't (or shouldn't) express or let loose like we usually do! It probably ended up better that way! Instead of screaming, "Stop hitting your brother!" It went more like, "Please stop bothering each other. I don't think that's a very good idea. We'll have a much better time if we all stop touching each other and get along." Not how I would typically react, but maybe it was a good way for me to focus on nicer parenting!

Each day brought on new adventures. One wouldn't think much could happen in the woods, but every day something new and crazy did occur! Our first day, as we were setting up, a rainstorm blew through and soaked everything! Luckily, it was a quick shower and our bedding wasn't ruined to start off the trip. I did almost start crying as I thought, "Is this how it's already beginning?" Our next day, we drove into a town to a fly shop to get the boys set up with some local gear and ask for some advice. The local guide must have thought we needed an adventure because he sent us on a wild goose chase up a mountain, down a dirt road into the forest. We gave up looking for this amazing fishing spot and headed on to a much easier route.

Again the next day, we tried one of the guide's wild goose trips and came across the long, lost hippies that the cops were searching for! Not what we expected to see at all! Apparently, this group of about 8,000 meets every year in the woods and doesn't abide by the law, and they were being hunted out. And we found them! They were super nice people. However, it was a bit terrifying to come upon the outlaws! I can't even describe what we saw! This should truly be a book. We quickly turned around and of course passed the cops on our way down! We did not want to be guilty by association! We kindly smiled and waved to the cops as they sped after who they'd been searching for!

As soon as we got back to our camp, a thunderstorm blew in, one that we were not ready for at all! Later we found out that we came during monsoon season and that it would be raining every day from there on out! That crazy storm that blew through soaked our entire tent and everything in it. With the nights getting down in the low 50s we could not sleep on wet bedding. My husband Brian went for the long drive into town to buy a new tent, sleeping bags, and tarps.

Now that we were all nice and dried out, we were off for more fishing adventures the next day! This group of boys did not want to go to the nice lakes that provide everything for their visitors.

No, we had to go trampling through the woods, down mudslides, across beaver dams to get to “the best fishing spots.” Ugh!

This kind of adventure is not what I love, but to see how much fun these boys had and the stories they got to tell made it all worth it! I mean, how many people can say they fished on a beaver dam with the beaver chasing after them swatting his tail at them? Or how many can tell about falling in a hole to get a remote fishing spot, all for the catch of a beautiful speckled trout? There are so many stories to tell that I can’t even fit them all in!

This adventure makes our life in a trailer seem so much less eventful than tent camping. The adventures we had were fun and challenging, but I do appreciate my tiny trailer that comes with a restroom, shower, kitchen, and dry warmth...

A Night to Remember – Hide n Seek – by Marcy Lytle

Do your kiddos still play this game? I'm pretty sure it's a favorite family game in the house, from the time kids can walk and play "peek a boo," to the time kids are old enough to hide well and never make a peep! And since there are lots of verses about hidden and found things in the bible, how about incorporating this fun game into learning about the Good Shepherd?

Preparation: *Set aside time to play traditional Hide n Seek for a few minutes before settling onto the sofa to talk about the fun game. Provide a snack of Goldfish with "hidden" M&Ms or raisins among the fish.*

- What things do you like to keep hidden? (answers might be a diary, toys so little siblings can't break, special jewelry, a gift we're keeping hidden until Christmas, etc.)
- What other things do we sometimes keep from others' view? (now delve deeper...maybe a messy room, a physical injury or scar, when we've disobeyed and broken something, etc.)

Colossian 3:3 says our life is hidden with God – he protects us, covers us, keeps us close, and never leaves us!

- What are the best hiding places in our house?
- Who's the best at hiding? At seeking?
- What things should never be hidden? (any sin or disobedience, our faith in God, our love for others)

Luke 11:33 says the Light of the World (Jesus) should never be hidden away, but rather be very visible so that others can see the Light and come to him!

Hebrews 4:13 says nothing can be hidden from God. He's the best seeker ever!

- Do you like to be the one hiding or the one seeking?

Did you know that there's a verse in Deuteronomy 4:29 that says if we seek the Lord with all our heart and soul, he will be found? That's pretty cool. He never stays hidden away from us, because he's always near.

We are told over and over again in the Lord to seek Him, but it's not because he's hiding away in a corner! To seek means to search for and desire. As long as we continue to look for God and desire to know him more, he gladly appears and says "Here I am!"

- How do you feel when you're seeking for the one hiding and you spot that person?

Psalm 34:14 says to turn away from evil and do good, and to seek peace and pursue it. This means if we have an argument with one another, for example, instead of hiding away and ignoring each other – we should seek forgiveness and make peace.

The game of hide and seek is so fun, especially if we find a hidden spot no one can find, or if we're quiet enough to not be found. And it's SO FUN to find someone after seeking all through the house.

Hiding and seeking is something we all do. And we can always know that God hides us next to him to keep us from evil, and when we seek Him he will always be found. That truth will hold us safe our entire lives!

Let's pray (ask kids to repeat after you)

Dear God, thank you that my life is hidden in you and I'm covered by your love all the days of my life. Thank you that your Light lives in me and I don't have to hide that light under a basket – no! Help me to always let your light shine so that those who seek you may find you. And finally, thank you for your promise that when I seek you and desire you, you are always there to be found with welcome arms wide open!

Love is Not Love: Discerning Logical Fallacies - by Jennifer Lytle

This summer, we decided our son was ready for a Passport to Purity retreat—just Dad and him. Dad and I found Dennis Rainey's *Passport to Purity* in the early years of our marriage during *A Weekend to Remember* retreat. The talk goes through everything a growing boy or girl may want to avoid discussing with their parent. Our son enjoyed the time together but was horrified by some of the scientific information.

Experts encourage "the talk" to be an ongoing conversation from an early age. During one Weekend to Remember, I purchased a pack of books about the body and human sexuality designed to grow with your child. The text for 3-year-olds was easy enough for me to read through regularly. I used the proper terms for human anatomy openly with all of my children from birth, so nothing was out of the ordinary for me. However, when the books advanced and talked straightforwardly about husbands and wives, I found I almost could not read through some parts aloud.

How can I talk to my son about how the world views love when it can be uncomfortable and difficult for me to speak with him about sanctified eros? I don't know the answer yet, but what I do know is that I must. If I fail to talk openly about what is true, he will hear, learn, and believe what the world is willing to put in front of his eyes and ears. When we teach our children Truth, they can grow in their discernment and ability to shake out logical fallacies.

Maybe it was having one boy and one girl. Perhaps it was something else entirely. I do not recall. During the early years of being Mommy, I realized one of my most important messages to teach my children included; boys and girls are different, and it is good! While I feel confident in the seeds I have sown in that area, there are other areas I'm still figuring out how to approach.

One logical fallacy our family has rubbed up against recently is the slogan, *love is love*. The cultural phrase is kind of everywhere. The fact is, it's just not factual. Despite the super cute expression and catchy merchandise the phrase appears on, I feel it is wrong to allow my children to engage with the message if they are unaware that it is untrue, at the least, and in opposition to God's design at worst.

Love is love is in direct contrast to Biblical truth. God is love (see 1 John 4:8). Accepting sin (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and Romans 1:32) and coloring it beautiful is not love (see Proverbs 27:6).

A more logical response to the crowd is that all love is not equal. The English language proves inadequate in categorizing love with more precise terms. Regularly, what is infatuation is called love. Affection, too, is labeled love. Consider Greek for accurate distinctions of the English term. Agape includes universal acceptance and empathy for others. Eros underscores physical passion. Philia refers to a deep connection between people or intimacy within the soul.Pragma denotes longevity and commitment, while philautia relates to self-love.

If I go back to the moment of innate understanding of what my children needed to distinguish, accept, and respect their different biologies, perhaps I can find what now needs to be shared again.

One of the things I started doing many years ago was reclaiming the beauty and true symbolism of the rainbow, especially for my daughter. For now, that is what I know to do, but I am prayerful about the next steps.

Have you found a beautiful way to encourage and empower your sons or daughters in discussions that touch cultural trends? I would LOVE to hear about it!

Dear Jesus, please help me navigate this field. Give me discernment and wisdom and favor with my children as I talk with them. Thank you for being present in all of this so I never walk alone. Thank you for being the teacher my children need when my words fail them. Amen.



YOU

Strengthening Your Core - A Random Thought – by Marcy Lytle

What would we do and how would we look, and when would our houses be cleaned, if we never interacted with others? Have you ever thought about this? In other words, is it interaction that prompts us to action? If we had no places to go, people to see, or friends to invite over, would we really take care of things and does it matter, or should it?

Here are my thoughts on the subject:

Would we paint our toenails if when we visit friends, we weren't worried about our ugly feet? I've been about to leave the house before and looked down and gasped! I then grab the nail polish and paint my toenails in the car; much to my husband's dismay, as the smell is strong! But I don't want my half-painted toenails to be seen by anyone!

Would we dust our furniture, if no one ever came to visit? I dust weekly, but I don't look for the places I might have missed very carefully, unless we are having guests. And wow, I've been so surprised when I've seen the sunlight hit the front door just right to reveal a huge dust rectangle under the sofa that I've missed!

Would flowers be snipped and placed in vases, were we not setting a table for family? The answer to this question is yes for me, because I enjoy those flowers myself! But it's definitely something to think about.

Would we even comb our hair or wear makeup, or even brush our teeth (yikes) if we weren't going out among others where we need to be presentable and smell good? I'm thinking the past year of Covid answered that question for a lot of us.

I think the reason I thought on this subject lately is because in talking with friends, I've heard some say that they've become "comfortable" hiding away in their homes, not attending events, and making their new routines in the safety of their confined spaces. All of that can be a great thing!

However, we were made for interaction, fellowship, fun, and friends!

Whether or not we paint our toenails is of no importance, because that's just a personal preference. But it's worth thinking about other things that we do to make our homes and ourselves presentable and attractive to those around us. I personally like having times scheduled for our family to come visit, or for us to attend an event, so that I WILL take the time to see the places that need attention and care for them!

It's hard work to maintain a yard, keep a house tidy and clean, and even to add touches of pretty around so that our places and persons are ready for interaction. I get it. It's easy and even enticing to let things go, until...we have this huge pileup of junk, dust an inch thick, and smells emerging from unknown places...while we hibernate and hide.

Maybe this is a random article on a random subject, but I just wondered about it one day when I was feeling a little down about the surge again of the virus, the call to withdraw once again from public places, and to hunker down.

I'm thinking that it's worth the work and the pretty and the cleaning just to be ready for him, for them, or just for yourself, as you pull up a chair or recline in that space and smile. All because you took time to snip, paint, swipe and rearrange to keep all things you call yours in good order...

Here's to many good times with many good friends in many good places as we head into fall...

Under Pressure – Beautiful Bread – by Debbie Haynes

The bible has so much to say about bread. I remember reading that bread comprised a good 50% of the caloric intake of the Israeli people. That's a lot of bread, but it makes sense, because it was eaten with most every meal. And there are basically three main purposes of bread, as mentioned in scripture:

Bread was necessary for sustenance (Genesis 3:19). God told Adam that growing grain to make bread would be a requirement for life. And we have a built-in hunger mechanism that reminds us that we are dependent upon God, for our food.

Bread draws us together. Abraham shared bread with three visitors, and Jewish tradition calls for breaking of bread at the start of mealtime.

Bread is a covenant relationship with God. The Israelites were instructed to keep 12 loaves of bread on the altar at all times, for the 12 tribes. Jesus broke bread at the Last Supper and said "This is the new covenant..." (Luke 22:20).

Besides the above three purposes, *bread is also connected with hospitality.* When we share meals, it shows that we care about our guests. In restaurants, it's often bread that is shared first and it's a welcoming addition to the table. Sarah used the finest flour to make bread for strangers, David honored the memory of his friend by providing bread to that friend's son.

There is also the mention of bread being given daily to God's people, as he led them through the wilderness. God made sure they never missed a meal for 40 years! And bread/manna was so important that when the daily supply ended, as the people made it to the Promised Land, God told Aaron to measure out a portion of it and place it in a jar. This was to be preserved, so that all future generations could see! Those 12 loaves of bread mentioned before were to be kept in view and replaced each week with fresh ones. I even read that the loaves weighed five pounds each – a visual reminder of God's presence. Can you imagine the aroma of baking bread, to remind them that God was there with them?

There were even grain offerings set up by God in Leviticus, where oil and incense and grain were offered to honor God. Those things were placed on an altar, and again the aroma filled the room. So necessary, to cleans the air from the smell of animal sacrifices!

Moving on to the New Testament, Jesus' death replaced all of those sacrifices, and on the night before the crucifixion, Jesus offered bread to his followers. We still celebrate the bread and the new wine, when we take communion. In fact, in I Corinthians 11:25 it reads that every time we share communion, we proclaim the great sacrifice Jesus made!

What about the account of the loaves and fishes? What extravagant love was shown by Jesus as he made sure there was "more than enough" for all who were hungry. And after this miracle, Jesus told the people that he was available to them any time, because he was The Bread of Life. Just like that manna fell for the people back in the wilderness, now Jesus was sent from heaven to be the daily bread for all eternity.

There are only a few basic ingredients needed to make bread: grain of some sort like wheat or rye (that is ground into flour), water and salt. The grain is symbolic of Jesus' death and resurrection, because the grain dies and sprouts up a new crop. The water is again symbolic of Jesus' provision for all who are thirsty – because he offers rivers of living water. And the salt? Back in II Kings 2:21, bitter water was healed with salt. Jesus offers healing to a dying world, and calls us to do the same by reminding us that we are the “salt of the earth” in Matthew 5.

When we read about bread, eat bread, share bread, and take of the bread in communion, we are reminded that He is here with us. When Jesus walked with two men on the road to Emmaus, it says he broke bread with them and their “eyes were opened.” They then knew him and their hearts burned within them.

Beautiful bread, available for all, filling up the room with the scent of something baking that is good and ready to be enjoyed for all who come...

Life in a Nutshell – That Third Option – by Jill Montz

My daughter, Dotty, is quick to tell people being the child of divorced parents has its perks. Not the least of them being every year she gets to take two vacations. One with me and one with her dad and his family.

Dotty's dad and I don't have a typical divorce agreement when it comes to Dotty. We have never had a set visitation schedule or even set rules around the holidays. We just split our time with her fairly equal throughout the year. Most weeks she spends two or three nights with one parent and then switches over to the other parent's house for the next two or three nights, then back again and so forth. This all works great since we live in the same town. Neither household goes more than a few nights away from Dotty. That is until she goes on vacation with the other parent.

While this may seem like an uncommon arrangement it is the only arrangement we all know...including Dotty. And it works for us and for her, which is the most important thing we can do as co-parents.

The week she spends with me on vacation is my favorite week of the year. We have made some of the best memories during our vacations. However, the week she spends away from me is my least favorite all year. And I know her dad, bonus mom, and siblings feel the same. I am not sure how the other side of Dotty's family copes, but as for me I fill my week with all kinds of activities to make the time go by faster.

I prepare months in advance for Dotty's vacation with her dad. I save the really big, time consuming, and often dreaded work projects for that week. If they require me to move heavy objects, sweat, and get dirty...even better. I hold off tedious paperwork that requires my full attention until then. And my staff is great. They know the drill when it comes to this week and they give me lots of grace and space and understanding as I work like a mad woman. They don't even grumble when I include them in my often less than fun ideas for work that week. They know my momma heart is hurting and they let me soothe it the way I prefer.

I even schedule as many doctor's appointments, teeth cleanings, and haircuts as possible that week. I go for early morning walks with friends and have lunch and dinner with others. I catch up on calls to friends and family I haven't heard from in a while. I catch up on Bible studies, books I wanted to read, yardwork I have been putting off, and even tend to cleaning out my garage, spare room, or storage shed that week.

I get up early and I stay out late. I want to be busy. I want to be exhausted. I pack my schedule as full as possible so my brain barely has time to think about missing my girl. I usually do pretty well for the first three days. By day four and five I am a bit antsy, and then by day six and seven I am almost unbearable to be around.

Perhaps I should also schedule an appointment with my therapist this week but I usually save it for the week after Dotty returns. My therapist knows I am not good with expressing negative emotions. She probably has at least five folders on my need to avoid feeling sad or mad. It's a battle I just don't fight well, yet.

Many people ask me what I will do when Dotty goes off to college and my response is always two options...

Option 1: I will buy a tiny home and move to whatever town she goes to college in. I can open up another one of our family stores there. I feel like every town would love to have a Pecan Shed in it.

Option 2: I will stay very busy that first year. Possibly open up another Pecan Shed store or two. Maybe even train for a half marathon or a tough mudder. By the time she graduates I might be giving Buc-ees a run for their money and training for the Boston Marathon or an Iron Man competition.

Dotty is not a fan of option number one. But I am a little concerned about my health and sanity with option number two.

Perhaps there is a third option. (I think my counselor would say there most definitely is.)

Perhaps I will learn to sit in my sadness. Perhaps I will learn to lean in to the loneliness. Perhaps I will find joy in celebrating her independence and this new phase of life for both of us. Perhaps I will find peace in stillness and rest in God's assurance that all will be well.

This year I did none of option three. But, perhaps, maybe next year I will.

At least that is my prayer.

Healthy Habits – Choose Wisely – by Marcy Lytle

I recently rolled my foot off the sidewalk and it hurt badly! I limped for a few weeks before the pain finally began to subside and I could walk normally again. I also did another crazy thing. I leaned over the console in our car to reach for something in the pocket of the other door and rolled my rib and bruised it – it was even more painful than the foot! Such silly things that happened, and they happen to all of us. But, I've found that some things can be avoided, or at least be thought out, before attempting. And doing so might keep us a bit more healthy and in less pain:

Wear shoes that fit – My shoes I had on were loose. I've also noticed that loose fitting shoes do not bode well in rain – my feet slip right out of them! If shoes are too tight, they cause problem, we know. But so do shoes that are too loose!

Think before reaching – I should have gotten out of the car and walked around instead of reaching so far. Even reaching under a cabinet and straining our backs often ends up in injuries. I've done that, too. If something is too far to reach, we can think and get up and walk to it, instead of trying to be like Gumby and stretch our limbs!

Don't walk and text – We've been told this so many times, but lately I've seen many folks text while crossing a parking lot with cars driving by! Yikes. Not only could a car hit us, but we could step in a hole or on a crack and break a bone. Not a wise decision.

Sleep comfortably – If our pillows are too lumpy or flat, why do we keep them for years and complain about our backs? If our sheets feel scratchy and annoying, we can ask others for good brand suggestions. And if we're constantly hot (or cold) at night, we can adjust the AC or the covers on our beds. I have been guilty of sleeping uncomfortably way too long before finding a remedy.

Use that lotion consistently – I have some heel cream that works wonders. But only if I use it daily. I've told others about it. But if it's not used daily, there won't be results. Same with other potions and lotions. The directions say "use daily" so it's no wonder we're not getting smoother skin, if we only remember to use it once a week!

Stop listening – If he/she talks constantly about others, criticizes you in person, or makes you feel uncomfortable when you're near them, then either tell them or stop the connection. We don't have to sit with people, head home and feel as though we've been dumped on, sat upon, or used. Life's too short to be abused.

Hit the pause button – I'm guilty of going and going all day without stopping and then being a bear (that growls) by evening. Pausing the busy button is never a bad idea, but it's one many of us forget to do, and it shows. If we can't do it on our own, we can phone a friend and ask her to remind us to pause, cry when we're sad, rest and take a nap, walk outside in the sunshine, or any number of things that refresh!

There are many things that cause us ill health, bad moods, or even just cracked skin because we don't choose wisely. I'm watching more carefully where I step and making sure I don't head

out in the rain in shoes that are too big for my feet. And next time something's in that pocket on the other side of the car, I will open my door and walk around. Sounds like a no-brainer...and it is.

Life Right Now – Worth Reading – by Hanna Bouck

Each person leads their own extraordinary life.

I used to think that to be considered one of the lucky living ‘in the extravagant’ I had to have a title. (I blame it on my teeny-bopper love of rom-coms.) Some examples would be “Hannah Bouck: singer,” “Hannah Bouck: actress,” but alas! It would never be, because...I CANNOT sing! And getting up and performing is quite frankly the thing nightmares are made of in my mind.

But, who am I to say that the life I live is mundane? Or the life of the person I walk by in the grocery is dull?

A couple of summers ago, I had taken up a job as an in-home caretaker. My position was simple. It entailed sitting with the client, sometimes staying overnight, but mostly offering companionship. My first client was an 85-year-old lady from England who was in her final battle with cancer. During one shift, when the bulk of my job was over, I enjoyed looking at her walls observing the mosaic of photos and memories of a life that was worth living. Beautiful pictures of a bright-eyed beauty queen, Bible verses coated the walls, and scrapbooks were filled with photos of her church family and love notes they’d written to their dear friend.

On my last night working in her home, she called me into her room before bed and told me, “Holler if you need anything.” (*Ironic, right?* I was there to help her in her moments of need but she still desired to be needed.) She was sitting up with a book in hand and we started discussing what she was reading. She suggested that she didn’t really like it, and that the author had “no depth in the writing.” I chimed in about a book I was reading. She smiled and said, “Now that’s the kind of book I like! A story worth reading.”

But back to people and their lives...

Plainly stated, I think we all have a story worth reading. Words that captivate and a history of WHY we have become. Of course, not all titles of books are initially captivating, so we might glance and then pass them by. Just as we may overlook beyond the covers of who we are, because the title we hold may not be what we thought it should be.

Right now, I find myself in a position of wondering what my book will be about; and to my dismay, more frequently what it is not. Reality is: I probably won’t ever have “Grammy Winning Artist” following behind my name. But you know what?

Hannah Bouck, “living a life of loving people,” *oftentimes baker of bomb brownies*, is a title worth reading in my library.



MARRIAGE

In This Together – In the End – by Bekah Holland

Sometimes, it's nice to be wrong.

No, I haven't been abducted and I'm not signaling for help with this statement. I like being right as much as the next person (unless you ask my teenage daughter...she says I have to be right all of the time). There are some things that I'll dig my feet in and scream loudly into the night until the day I die (like decaf coffee is straight from the devil, nuts do not belong in brownies or ice cream, and tacos are a whole love language, just to name a few). But there are some things in life that I get completely wrong.

For example, I pictured my husband and I being partners in the kitchen. We'd go shopping together or take turns going and we'd serve beautiful meals that the whole family would all eat at the same time, at the same table. This delusion lasted until the first time I sent my husband to the grocery store by himself and he spent the entire week's grocery budget on one meal. It was a well-played move that earned him a "not allowed to shop for groceries without more adult supervision" status. So, obviously, now I do the shopping and cooking, unless it's on his new favorite toy (grill). Sometimes, I produce a great meal that 3 out of 4 people like and the leftovers don't die slowly in the fridge. Other times I manage to cook something so terrible, the dogs won't even go near it, and we order take out....again.

I also swore we'd never be those older couples that we'd see at dinner, and look at with pity. You know, the ones where they seem to be silent, just eating, looking around. I always looked at them and wondered how they got to that place, why were they even married, and obviously, we would never be "those people." Now I look at those couples and realize, they are probably just tired, and they don't want to talk because their extroverted child never, ever, ever stops talking, even while they're sleeping (what, just us?) but they're still trying to make time for each other, even if no one is talking. Funny enough, as it turns out, our favorite date night consists of queso, cupcakes, sweatpants, our comfy couch, and a funny movie we can't watch while the kids are awake. We don't have to fill the silence. We can just be.

I also used to think that marriage, and romantic love was just so different from anything else. It should be butterflies and flowers and staring into your lover's eyes. Quality time and secrets and long, luxurious walks, hand in hand, with the future in front of you. This one, this is my favorite. I thought I knew what this kind of love was "supposed" to look like. But I love how wrong I was! Because our reality is so much better. We laugh our way through most of what life throws at us. We tease each other over silly things, we crack up over stupid movies we've seen 47 times, and giggle through flirty, fun moments that make our kids cringe, which is obviously a bonus. I love the chance to laugh through our days and nights with this person I've chosen to do life with.

Don't get me wrong, there are really bad dumpster fire days too. Days that are painful and filled with the unknown and we can't remember when we were happy. But as we fight our way through those, it makes us so much more aware of the light because we've crawled through the darkness to get there. The more time that passes, the more that I notice and appreciate the friendship part of our marriage. This isn't to say that I'm not still hot for my husband, because I totally am! And judging from the regular slaps on the rear I get from him, he thinks I'm pretty okay, too.

Now don't go clutching your pearls, ladies, because we all want to be wanted and God created this part of us, too. We can laugh together in the bedroom just like in every other part of our marriage. We can laugh when we're too tired to do the dishes or even too tired to make the kids do them. We can laugh when we've had a "terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day" and decide that ice cream for dinner is, without a doubt, the answer to our woes. Sometimes, when the *joy* of raising kids and teenagers is just so ridiculous we laugh just to keep from crying... we do both. But this is the part that makes the dark days worth getting through. This is the part of our relationship that will hold us together long after our hair greys, our bodies wrinkle and the sex is less frequent. Long after our kids have left home and it's just us and the dogs in this little world we've created, we'll always find our fun, adventure and many more moments to laugh through, because in the end, we still have each other.

"I love being married. It's so great to find that one special person you want to annoy for the rest of your life." - Rita Runder

Date Night Fun – Seize September – by Marcy Lytle

I keep hearing from everyone how 2020 was a blur because of Covid, and now 2021 is flying by because of more Covid, and here it is now the month of September! I thought of the saying “seize the day” and figured we may as well seize this month, before it disappears and the holiday season begins. Sometimes, date night on our calendar is non-existent as well, because time has gotten away from us. However, this month let’s seize the opportunity to take notice of what makes this month special, and enjoy!

September 2 is World Coconut Day! Look up a granola recipe that includes coconut and make it together. One of you chops, while the other prepares the mix. While it’s baking, do a crossword puzzle together. Then enjoy the granola atop your favorite yogurt or ice cream!

September 8 is International Literacy Day. Scout out the little neighborhood libraries in your area, and gather up at least three books each (from home) to donate. Then take a book out of the little library, and head to a park to read and enjoy an early fall picnic together. Purchase red/white checked plates and napkins and make this date so fun.

September 10 is World Suicide Prevention Day. Depression leads to suicide in so many. Think of any of your friends that might be feeling a bit down, and decide to invite them on your date night. Pick up the bill, and take them to your favorite fast food place and eat on the patio. Then play a game of mini golf, and laugh out loud when you miss a sure shot!

September 18 is World Bamboo Day! Google bamboo products and then go shopping to see if you can find something to buy made out of bamboo, for your house. Then visit a local gardening center and wander around to find a new plant or two for your yard, or porch, or inside. Finally, look up the definition of bamboozled and share stories about when that experienced happened to you!

September 27 is World Tourism Day. So take a “world” tour by choosing three destinations. Read about one at a book store. Eat or make food from the second destination. And see if you can find a movie made about the third. It could be one destination if you’d rather. For example, read about Mexico, eat queso and chips, then watch a film made in Mexico or about Mexico. How fun!

Seize the day this month and make it a celebration for two (or more) as you plan your nights out together for a good time!

After 40 Years – Grab the Moment – by Marcy Lytle

This morning, I had three errands to run and he decided to take 30 minutes and go with me. I loved it! We stopped at the P.O. to mail a few things for my daughter, then on to pick up my work, and lastly to drop off something at a friend's front porch. It was just a quick little trip that I would normally have gone on by myself, but he said, "I'll go with you," and we grabbed those moments and smiled. Grabbing little moments to be together instead of being alone adds interest to our days, and actually lifts our moods!

So here are a few ideas for grabbing the moment with him:

- Make dessert together, like strawberry shortcake. Just bake some canned biscuits (sprinkle with sugar), cut up strawberries (sprinkle with sugar), pile high and top with Cool Whip!
- Grab fast food and eat it, and people watch. Go through the Chick Fil A line and order Ice Dream (have you tried it?) with chocolate syrup, and an order of fries. Pull up where people are in full view and eat and wonder...what job each person has...by the way they look.
- Water the plants and pull weeds together. Take 30 minutes and go outside together to tend just a portion of your yard. Hug each other, pick a flower or two, smell it, and go back inside to resume your normal day.
- Sit beside him during a show (instead of in separate chairs!) and hold his hand. It's amazing how this little gesture can disappear if we let it!
- Sip an evening coffee/tea on the front porch. Make each other's drink and head out on the porch just before sunset. Feel the breezes, breathe, and don't say a word.
- Get dressed together. Actually get ready at the same time and converse, while you brush your teeth, get on your clothes, and head out. Give each other a compliment!
- Fold the laundry while listening to a song on YouTube. Sit on the sofa and get this chore done, together, while you are encouraged with a tune!
- Do you get a *Community Impact* or other newspaper/journal delivered? Sit down, let the other read and share the news and the new restaurants to try and coupons inside!
- Kids in the house? Grab a moment to catch his eye across the room while chaos is happening, then gather the whole family for a group hug and affirmation.
- Grab him by the hand whisper, "How can I pray for you today?" and listen to his heart. I bet he'll do the same for you.

If we aren't careful, weeks can go by and we're so busy going and coming, and working and sleeping, and eating and cleaning, all in our own corners and at our own pace, that we miss these small connections. It really made my day that he went with me this morning on those errands. In fact, I'm going to tell him right now!

For Better or Worse - What Do You Love? – by Kaelin Scott

One of the coolest things about being married is knowing another person inside and out, and being known in return. Sometimes they even know you better than you know yourself. And it's so wonderful having someone by your side through all your trials and triumphs and growth. Someone to help you reach your goals and follow your dreams. A life partner through thick and thin, who sticks by you despite your mistakes and failures. They know everything about you, and still they choose to love you. That really is something special.

I thought it might be fun this month to share a few things about my husband that I love, and then in the comments you can do the same. I'd love to hear what you love about your husbands, too! It's a chance to build up our spouses and spread positivity. Couldn't we all use a little bit more of that these days?

Something I really love about Britton is that he exudes confidence. He truly doesn't care what people think about him, and he never second guesses himself. And he doesn't change himself to please others. If someone doesn't like him, he moves on with his head held high. I tend to be a people pleaser to the highest degree, so I've always admired his self-confidence.

Along with that, he also has a strong moral compass. Where others waver, he never does. Britton knows what he believes and sticks to his convictions. He knows the right thing to do and does it without hesitation. God's voice is loudest in his life, and he makes sure to obey it. I love that.

My absolute favorite thing about Britton is that he can always make me laugh. That's actually what initially attracted me to him. He's the funniest person I know. Even when I want to be mad at him, he does something silly and I can't help but crack a smile. No matter where we go or what we do, we can always find something to laugh at. We make things fun together, and that makes life so much better.

Another thing I love about Britton is that he teaches our kids valuable lessons. Sometimes it's hard to discipline your children or help them learn from their mistakes, but Britton doesn't back down from that challenge. He loves them enough to teach them those hard lessons, knowing that it will mean so much to their futures. He really is a wonderful dad and leader for our family.

One of the things he teaches our kids is the value of hard work, because he has a strong work ethic. He always does his best at everything. No shortcuts, no doing things halfway. Britton always gives 110%, and the fruit of his labor speaks for itself. He is proof that hard work pays off. With God's guidance of course!

There are so many more things I love about my hubby, but now it's your turn. Leave a comment below with something you love about your man. Marriage truly is a wonderful blessing, especially when we speak life into our spouses.



ENCOURAGEMENT

Rooted in Love - Fear Not – by Kaelin Scott

Did you know the Bible tells us not to be afraid 365 times? One for each day of the year. I don't know about you, but that's definitely a reminder I could use every day.

While I'd like to tell you that simply having those words from God is enough to silence fear, it isn't quite that simple. In all honesty, it's one of those things that's easier said than done. But if it's in the Bible that many times, I know it must be important. Even if it's hard to do, it's something we must strive toward. And you know what else solidifies our need to abolish fear? It's not just a suggestion – it's actually a command. God *commands* us not to be afraid.

So how do we do that? How do we choose not to be afraid?

I wish I had a concrete answer, but I don't. In fact, the reason I decided to write about this is because I'm struggling with this right now. In a major way. But in the midst of my struggle, I have to remember that God is bigger than what I am afraid of. Fear is a lie the enemy uses to distance me from my Savior. Satan doesn't want me to be confident in God, so he whispers doubts and fears into my ears all day long. And because my flesh is weak, I believe them all too often. I allow them to consume me and rob an entire day of joy.

But the good news is this: We don't have to operate out of our flesh. We don't have to rely on our own ability to overcome fear. We can trust Jesus to be our strength. We can surrender the fight and leave it in His hands.

Holding onto fear doesn't really get us anywhere. Trust me, I would be the first to know. I'm scared to death of so many things, and I'm not very good at letting go of it. But little by little, I'm learning that surrender leads to freedom.

Yet it's not a one and done type of thing. It's a choice we have to make over and over again until it becomes our natural response, even if it's a thousand times a day. We have to shut down fear as soon as it starts, before it spirals out of control. We can't run through endless what-ifs or scary scenarios, because soon our brains won't be able to separate them from reality. We have to focus on what we know here and now, and let God worry about the rest.

I know this can be hard. For me personally, it's one of the toughest battles. But we're never alone in our struggles. Jesus faced everything we face. He knows exactly how we feel. All He wants is for us to lay it in His hands. After all, He came to give us life to the fullest. And fear isn't part of that plan.

Don't try to get on a train you don't have a ticket for. Trust God to take care of you today, and take on tomorrow when it comes.

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

Firmly Planted - Imagine—by Dina Cavazos

I read somewhere that imagination “is quite possibly a uniquely human ability.” It allows us to explore beyond our present environment, including things that aren’t even real. Imagination has birthed ideas that have changed our world for the better; it has given us beautiful poetry, entertaining movies, inspiring books, medical advances, and much more. But everything has a flip side—what about when the imagination spews ideas that are destructive or untrue? Can an idea seem good but really be off? It can all be so confusing, and dark, and tangled up.

Our uncertain world can feel like a jungle, but this jungle was once a garden of order and peace. In this metaphorical jungle we live in there are complex, devastating, catastrophic problems we, the human race, have created and must deal with sooner or later. Questions and concerns abound; answers and solutions are few, but one thing has made a real difference for me: my understanding of truth. I used to think truth was a *thing*. That got my mind spinning because there were so many truths to know. How could I know so many *things*, and how could I determine which were true? Now, obviously, some things are “true,” like there’s ink on this paper, but I’m talking about deeper truths—you know exactly what I mean.

One day Truth shined in my soul like a sunrise and I realized that *Truth isn’t a thing, but a Person*. It’s a mystery our finite minds can’t completely comprehend. How can Truth, Life, and the Way to them be a Person? Only if that Person is God; only if Jesus is really who he said he is. It’s another mystery that he can actually reside in us and is working out his will on earth, despite our many failures. In these extraordinary times that often feel hopeless, dark, and overwhelming, I take comfort and hope because I believe there is One who holds all things together, One through whom all things were made, One who was, who is, and is to come, who will make things right in his time.

The singer/songwriter John Lennon imagined an idyllic world where all was right and appropriately called it *Imagine*. He thought that if we just tried hard enough to get along...if we could just put away our differences, we/the human race could make it happen. You can find the original lyrics online, but I’m offering another version of Imagine—one rooted in reality, in Truth. I hope it gives you comfort and hope.

IMAGINE

Imagine life everlasting
Where light and love abound
Where evil cannot enter
Where Jesus wears the crown

Imagine there's no darkness
It's easy if you try
No fear or pain or trouble
And everything is right

Imagine all the people
Living life in love
Ahh,,,

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
In the Kingdom of the Son

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
Because Christ died for you

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man

Imagine all the people
Living life in peace
Ahh...

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
In the Kingdom of the Son

Simple Truths – We Rise – by Marcy Lytle

I recently ordered a tapestry blanket for my granddaughter for Christmas that is pictured here on this page, and you can read the saying “We rise by lifting others.” I love the image and she loves elephants, so I figure it’s a gift she will use and enjoy! I’ve been thinking about the phrase on it, and what it means, and how it can encourage us all.

I don’t know about you, but I’ve grown tired from lifting others. I’ve sat and listened to others and their woes and ended up exhausted after the visit. When I’ve offered a hand up, there have been times when my hand was bitten and I was sorry I extended it. And there have been other times when I felt like all I did was lift up others, but I felt unappreciated or not lifted up myself, so I burned out. Can you relate?

So although the phrase on this blanket is true, it needs to have a bit more text and explanation with it, don’t you think? Or maybe we just need to analyze a few things.

First of all, look at the picture. The elephant is huge, strong, and the biggest of all of the creatures atop him! I’m thinking he may not even feel the weight of those animals standing on top of his back. If we are the weak one, the tired one, the weary one, and we invite others to climb atop our backs, we’re going to end up with a backache. And besides that, we weren’t ever meant to carry others on our backs, but rather transfer their weight to the Strong One.

Secondly, the elephant is standing among green grass and beautiful flowers, and is even smelling one of them. In other words, he himself is being refreshed while he’s giving others a lift. That’s so important. We can’t constantly give out if we are constantly thirsty ourselves. Those we’re trying to lift, as well as ourselves, will tumble down in a heap!

Thirdly, that first animal on top is then carrying another on top of him... Because he was lifted up, he invited another to join him. And all three of those pictured seem happy. Birds are chirping nearby, the sky is blue, and smiles are evident. Any time we’re carrying the load or woes of another and everyone is frowning, it feels like the sky is falling and there’s no sound of music in the air, we need to reconsider the lift.

We are not elephants. And sometimes those that need a lift are carrying burdens way heavier than any weight we can carry.

But here’s what IS true: We do rise by lifting others, but not by lifting them in our own strength.

Lifting others sometimes means just cheering them on, instead of being jealous. That makes us rise.

Being quick to forgive elevates others in our eyes, and relieves us of heaviness. That makes us rise.

Listening with understanding and then releasing what we’ve heard to Him is good. We all rise.

There are so many ways to life up others without lugging their cares around for them. We do rise by lifting others, but only as we love them and trust in the One that loves them even more, to take care of their needs and ours.

Don't you love this picture? I sure do...

May 2, 2021

Good morning everyone! Last week we talked about bread. Well, we're going to do that again today, but in a different light. This is more of a probably more of a Bible Study than a sermon message, but I will try not to be too long.

The Bible has a lot to say about BREAD. In a message some months ago I remember saying that bread comprised a good 50% of the caloric intake of the Israeli people. People shared bread at meals.

There are three main purposes of bread mentioned in the Bible.

1. **Bread was necessary for sustenance.** Genesis 3:19
 - a. God told Adam that because of his sin, he would have to labor with sweat for bread. That meant that growing the grain to make bread would be a requirement for life.
 - i. **By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."**
 - b. And God created our built-in hunger mechanism that reminds us that we are dependent upon God, who created food.
2. **Bread draws us together in fellowship**
 - a. Abraham shared fresh bread with the three Angel visitors that came to his farm.
 - b. Abraham, himself was also served bread and then blessed by Melchizedek.
 - c. The Jewish tradition includes breaking bread at the beginning of a meal and praying "**Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth."**
3. **The third significance of bread in the Bible is covenant relationship with God.**
 - a. The grain offerings and the bread on the altar in the Old Testament. This was part of the covenant symbols between God and the Israelites. The Israelites were instructed to keep 12 loaves of bread on the altar at all times, for the 12 tribes.

- b. Jesus, when he broke bread and shared wine at the Last Supper, said, This is the new covenant in my blood which was shed for you Luke 22:20.

So in the Bible, faith, bread and relationships are all connected.

Bread and Hospitality

The Bible teaches that relationships develop when we care one for another. One way of doing that is sharing meals, since it shows we care for those we are feeding.

In nicer restaurants we are served bread first, as a way that the restaurant welcomes their guests and shows their appreciation for the patronage. Abraham told his wife Sarah to use their finest flour to make the bread for his guests, who were strangers and angels.

David honored the memory of his dearest friend, Jonathan, by providing hospitality to Jonathan's disabled son, Mephibosheth in **I Samuel 9:7, where he said that the boy would eat bread at his table continually.**

Manna and the Bread of the Presence

When God guided the Israelites through the wilderness, he gave them their daily bread in the form of manna. God was ever faithful and they never missed a meal for 40 years!

God thought the bread / manna was so important that when he ended it after they came into the Promised Land, he told Aaron to place a measure of the manna into a jar and preserve it before the Testimony, which was the tablets of stone in the Ark of the Covenant, for all future generations to see.

God even commanded that 12 loaves of bread, symbolizing the 12 tribes, be kept on the altar of Shew Bread, or the altar of Presence at all times, and be replaced each week with fresh loaves. I read that the unleavened bread loaves weighed 5 pounds each and it was a visual reminder of God's eternal presence. Just Imagine the aroma of the baking bread to remind them of God's nearness.

Grain Offerings and Sacrifices

God commanded that the priests make sacrifices and offerings for the people. These included grain offerings we read about in Leviticus, chapters 2 and 6. Oil and incense and grain were lifted up by the priests in honor to God. They prepared cakes of grain and oil and put them on the altar of sacrifice and the aroma filled the area; this was to be done specifically AFTER the animal sacrifices, to purify and cleanse the animal smells from the air!

In the New Testament

And in the New Testament, God gave his only son Jesus, and he became the sacrificial lamb. His death, the perfect sacrifice, replaced all previous sacrifices. And the night before his death, Jesus provided the bread offering for his disciples and so set the example for us to follow. We celebrate the bread and the new wine of his shed blood.

In I Corinthians 11:26 the Apostle Paul stated that every time we share communion, we proclaim the death of Jesus.

Loaves and fishes

The account of Jesus feeding thousands of people with bread and fish shows us the extravagance of his love for people, which went beyond just mere physical food. He made sure there were plenty of leftovers, to show us that He's more, much more, than enough for our needs!

After this miracle, Jesus spoke to the congregation and told them that they could eat of his body anytime, **because he is the bread of life**. Just like God sent down manna down from heaven to be bread for eating, God sent down his Son, Jesus, to be the bread of life—eternal life.

Matthew 4 tells the story of Jesus being led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted of the devil. And when Jesus had fasted, he had no bread for forty days, he was hungry. And Satan said, if you are the Son of God, then turn these stones into bread.

Imagine, Satan tempting Jesus, the bread of life, with bread. But Jesus said, man shall not live by bread alone, but every word that proceeds from the mouth of

God. Later, in John, Jesus said, I am The Bread of Life and he who comes to me shall never hunger. Jesus, Our Daily Bread.

Bread in Communion

At the Last Supper, that commemorated the Passover, Jesus gave thanks and broke the bread, and shared it and said, This is my body. The bread represented Christ's body that was nailed to the cross and broken the very next day.

And of course, the wine represented his blood, which was shed as soldiers pierced his side. And Paul felt this was so important that he admonished the Corinthians to observe the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup, or the communion as we call it today, in a worthy manner, to avoid being judged. To examine ourselves and be certain we are fully in the faith of Christ.

Taking the Communion cup and bread unites us with Christ and it signifies our belief in the work of the cross; death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and the soon return of Christ; But, likewise, sharing in the cup of blessing and the eating of the bread also unites us as one in the body of Christ, the church. Jesus told us many, many times throughout the Word to be in unity with the believers in fellowship and in sharing.

Some churches call communion by the Greek word "Eucharist" which simply means "thanksgiving." Of course, we should be, and are, so very thankful as we receive the bread and fruit of the vine.

IN Luke 6:38 Jesus said these words:

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you mete it shall be measured to you again.

The terms Jesus used in this verse related to grain. How the buyer in the market place would watch the seller of the grain pour the measure of the grain into the bag, and shake it down so he could add more, then fill it to overflowing so that the buyer was assured that he got the full, good measure of the grain.

Jesus said this is how we should give, and we will receive the same way.

Bread Symbolizes Jesus

There are only a few basic ingredients required to make bread. You can add other things, but the basic requirements are: **Grains of some sort, such as wheat or rye, ground into fine flour, water, and salt.** It's amazing that these three elements, grain, water and salt, are all used by Jesus as examples of himself, the bread of life.

The GRAIN

Jesus said a golden kernel of wheat must be buried in the ground to grow up and produce a great crop, signifying how he must die and be buried and rise again to the glory of the Father.

THE WATER

Jesus said that, all who are thirsty can come to him and drink, and they will never thirst again. And that those who come will receive rivers of living water springing up within their souls.

The SALT

In II Kings 2:21, Elisha healed the bitter water with salt. Then he went out to the spring that supplied the town with water and threw the salt into it. And he said, "This is what the LORD says: I have purified this water. It will no longer cause death or infertility." This is called the Covenant of Salt.

And likewise, Christ was poured into a putrid dying world and brought life.

Matthew 5 Jesus said that we are to be the salt of the earth. We can be poured into putridness, and men will see HIM.

Grain, water and salt makes bread. Today we are going to partake of The bread of life in communion.

Don, will you come.

That spiritual bread is still fresh and nourishing those who partake of it daily! When we take communion, we should ask the Lord to open our eyes of understanding, just like the two who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, and when Jesus broke bread with them afterwards, the Bible says that their eyes were opened and they knew him and their hearts burned within them.

Unearthly Thing - The Catastrophe of Quitting Coffee for 30 Days – by Angela Dolbear

I love coffee. Every day starts with a 3-cup minimum. So it has been, since I was in college a couple of decades ago.

I serve myself my favorite morning beverage in any one of my favorite mugs, since it brings me a little bit of joy. Mugs that I purchased at favorite places I have visited, such as Graceland, New York City, and of course, Disneyland. Then I carry my mug full of delicious warm caffeinated goodness down the hall to my home office. I am careful not to spill a drop on my hardwood floors (usually requires dodging 2 dogs, and sometimes a black cat), and then set my mug down on my desk in front of my computer, and begin my day.

That is until recently.

After taking a food sensitivities test for better health and other unmentionable reasons, I decided to eliminate coffee and the milk that goes in it for 30 days.

I can do this, right?

Day 1: I drink water instead of coffee. Cool, clear, pure water. I feel healthy, and refreshed.

Day 2: The “sleepies” hang around for a little longer than they usually do. I drink 2 glasses of water. Which does not give me the alertness I crave, and need. Pray for divine intervention.

Day 3: So tired, so I make myself a mug of organic chai tea. While it is delicious, tea is not coffee. I want coffee. I want it bad.

Am I addicted? Is coffee a drug? Hmmm. Maybe it's a good thing I have decided to purge this steaming aromatic elixir from Heaven from my flesh.

I have this heavy-headed headache. It's 3:30 PM and I am still sleepy.

Day 4: Sunday morning. Coffee goes with church. Sometimes, coffee goes to church. Not today. I tell myself that coffee is a heathen idol to be cast-off for its sumptuousness. But I am not convinced.

Day 5: Coffee, oh, coffee, where for art thou, coffee?? Denied thy rich flavor, refused thy awakening properties...be but swarn my morning beverage, and I shall no longer be a...um...uh...what is a good replacement word for “Capulet?”(Proof that my brain needs coffee.) Would William Shakespeare frowneth upon my play on lines from *Romeo and Juliet*?

Day 6: Coffee is my boyfriend who left me. Probably went overseas somewhere. Maybe to serve a tour of duty, or became a freedom fighter and join La Resistance, or something else noble and worthwhile.

Day 7: I can't go on....I just cannot...without coffee.

Why am I doing this to myself?

Because it's good to say “no” to my flesh sometimes.

Really?

Yes, really. We've been over this.

I think it's different this time.

Be strong.

I can't, and I don't wanna, so there. (I'm grateful that this on-going debate with myself is taking place in the privacy of my own skull.)

Day 8: Adopt a new puppy from the animal shelter. Yay! She is so sweet and the perfect companion for my adult Lab, Abby.

Have to get up numerous times during the night to take Sally the pup out as we work on housetraining her. Lack of sleep has me seriously eyeballing my coffeemaker.

Day I'm-not-sure-of-the-number: It's beyond temptation now. We are in survival mode. Sally is doing well, but we are still making trips outside at around 12 AM, 3 AM, and then rising at 7:45 AM. My head has that floating feeling from days of interrupted sleep.

Day 108 (feels like it, anyway): I'm starting to drop things, forget things, and even spill things. I have to stop myself from instinctually lapping up the precious caffeine-filled can of Diet Coke I knock over on my desk.

Ok, enough. "*Uncle!*" I cry out to myself.

Since my digestive health has not improved, I reason that a reasonable person such as myself has good reason to make and consume a cup of coffee...because, so very tired.

I shuffle to the kitchen, feeling a little ill-disciplined at the task I am about to perform. But I press on, because I need to jumpstart my brain, so I can get some work done.

I lift the glass carafe from the coffeemaker, as if I were grasping the Holy Grail, and prep my trusty Oster 12-cup Programmable Coffeemaker to brew some coffee (for only 2 cups...I'm not a monster). I press the red start button with an elevated sense of expectancy.

It's not long before I hear the familiar bubbling and gurgling sounds of boiling water pumping through the coffee grounds, releasing the delicious scent of fresh brewed coffee. I turn away, and go see what the dogs are up to, so I don't feel like a freak, staring at the small appliance as if it is related to a defibrillator and would give me life. Even though, I feel like it might.

Ahhhh...it warms my soul as well as my body as I sip from my mug adorned on the side with Elvis, striking a pose as he croons into a tall microphone stand. I believe he is celebrating with me. Okay, maybe not.

Have I failed in my goal to go 30 days without coffee? Yes, from an earthly stand point. But it the Big Heavenly picture of things, no.

After reflecting (and sipping...mmm), I learned some things. I listed them in bullet points here, for quick future reference, since these are areas I frequently struggle in:

- I was not trusting God to bring the healing I needed;
- I did not ask Him for the healing I needed;
- I tried to fix my problem myself (bad self-reliance, bad); and
- God is not going to help me achieve a goal that is based on not trusting Him and relying on myself.

The same Spirit Who raised Jesus from death gives life to my mortal body (please see [Romans 8, particularly verse 11](#)).

That is some great power! He is able, and has healed me physically, mentally, and physically. I need to ask, and believe Him.

God is good. I am grateful for the coffee I sip in my beautiful home office, with beautiful sweet dogs at my side (and a cat), in a beautiful home in a beautiful tree-filled Nashville neighborhood.

I am grateful for God's forgiveness, mercy and patience, and the ability to laugh at my mistakes.

And I am grateful and mindful to ask for His help in my time of need, expecting to receive His help. *Amen and amen!*

Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction, with an aim toward spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, while hopefully inspiring readers to laugh and/or cry. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, Tennessee. Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!

Moving Forward - How I Need You – by Pam Charro

*My one defense
My righteousness
Oh God, how I need you*

-- Matt Maher

I really love the above song lyrics, but I think when I posted it on my Facebook page the other day, some of my friends mistook it for a cry for help. While I can understand why they thought that, it was a simple statement of faith. I feel completely unable to conquer in any area of my life on my own strength. But that puts me in a perfect place for him to show up.

Remember in the Bible, when Hannah cried out to God in her desperation for a baby? She said, "Give me children or I'll die!" She felt such a strong need, and there was nothing she could do to bring about the outcome she felt she could not live without, except to address it with the Almighty. But when he came through for her, he really came through! Not only did she give birth to an amazing, godly person, but God also blessed her with three more sons and two daughters.

He took her big minus and turned it into an even bigger plus
because this woman *recognized her need* for him to do something.

And remember when the disciples asked Jesus why the man was born blind? Was it punishment for someone's sin? Jesus replied, "This happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." And when that man received his sight, glory for God is exactly what happened!

If I could fix my own life right now, I'm sure I would, but it's so much better that I need God to do it. I know he is up to something so much more grand than anything I could ever come up with. I can't wait to see what he is going to make out of my life, and I am honored to be a part of his glory story.



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME – In Season – by Marcy Lytle

It's September already, and I'm pretty sure it will be like most other Septembers here in Central Texas, where I live. The stores will have fall décor and pumpkin scented candles ready for purchasing, but the temperature will still scream summer. I've said it so many times. I wish each season would be what it's supposed to be! And when I wish for that too much, I become so dissatisfied that I miss days and even weeks of contentment, because I'm constantly wishing for the next season!

In the fall, I long for cooler temps so that sweaters can be pulled out and worn over my cute outfits. More often than not, that said sweater might be pulled on in the morning, but it will come off by 3pm when sweat is pouring. I see the colors changing in the northeast and look out my own window and see nothing but brown, sun-stricken leaves on our trees. And while others are preparing for hay rides with hot apple cider in hand, we're still running our AC on full blast until sometimes well into late October!

In the winter, it's finally starting to cool down here to cooler temps, and it's the time of year to prepare for the Christmas holiday. Sleigh bells are not ringing and there is no winter wonderland prior to December 25, and actually never (except the weird freak storm of 2020.) Oh, we sing the carols and wear the scarves and hats, because we want to feel the *feels* of the season, but mostly we listen to the Christmas carols and just "dream" of that white Christmas. I can't tell you how many December 25 calendar days I've sighed at the forecast of a high of 70 degrees.

In the spring, it starts warming up nicely here and things begin to bloom. However, all of the dead bugs from winter start emerging as well. Ant hills show up in the front lawn, which have to be treated constantly. The flowers show up profusely along the highways, and I'd say spring is pretty nice in Central Texas! Until...

In the summer, everything changes. Heat arrives and flower petals wilt, and color disappears. Grass becomes crunchy underneath our feet, and our electric bills soar. While summer concerts in the park and picnics are inviting, and we attend and enjoy many, we're swatting mosquitos and grabbing those cardboard fans to swipe back and forth in front of our faces after dousing our bodies with insect repellent.

Have I whined, enough? It's really not a good attitude to have, and what finally changes me (at least for a while) is hearing someone else respond to the seasons in a whole different way. We have friends that moved here from Wisconsin and they LOVE the heat. *What?* Other people we know get excited when Christmas Day is warm, so they can gather with their family in a park while others up north are scraping their windshields. And while we are swatting mosquitoes in summer, the kiddos are out catching fireflies!

It's all about perspective, isn't it? I don't know what the weather will be when this article finds its way to your eyes. I'm pretty sure it will be too hot for my liking, but I'm trying to embrace each new season as it comes with all its woes, as well as its wonders. I was happily surprised this past year with the snow that fell, and the rain that lingered, which were both so unusual for the

time of year they came. And there's this promise that there is always another season around the corner, should we not like the one we're in.

Which season is your favorite? Do you have one? I bet you're a pretty contented person if you enjoy each season, whatever it brings. But if you're like me, you have to work on your attitude to accept and embrace the heat, the cold, the wind, and the rain – possibly all in one day.

In season. That's what I want to be. I want to be found opening my blinds in the early morning light, with a huge smile at another day...whether I get to wear a sweater or not.

FRESH THYME – Most Unfortunate – by Marcy Lytle

My husband and I, my daughter and her husband and three kids, all showed up to watch our son and his wife play volleyball on a sand court. We were all prepared to watch them, while sitting on a picnic bench, when the other team they were supposed to play didn't show up. The little kids were delighted, because it meant they got to take off their shoes, step into the sand, and play with their aunt and uncle, and even their mom! I loved watching all of my kids play and have fun.

There's a time when the littles need to be invited to play with the bigs, because they need to interact, observe, learn, mimic, and be included. My goodness, those are important things for all of us to remember when we're playing this game of life. And sometimes, the only way those that aren't usually on the court get invited to step into the sand is if some unfortunate event takes place. Had the other team not showed, the kids would not have gotten the chance to play with their uncle.

There are times when we're playing in the game of going to church, for example, and it becomes so comfortable to see our same "team members" week after week, make plans for a visit, and leave the service feeling good. But when visitors, or those with needs different than ours show up, this interrupts our game plan and we're called upon to move over, make a seat available, and give of our resources.

I've been a part of the game of life where I've encountered those of the next generation and found myself aggravated at their lack of respect, or their arrogance, or others things that I think I've worked out over the years. However, until we all play on the same field, beside each other, we don't really appreciate their generation and how they work together with ours. And vice-versa.

Neighbors sit next door to us for years and we never know their names, but then maybe a crisis happens. Their house catches on fire. And suddenly, our living room becomes their haven for a few hours while they gather their wits, we offer our condolences, and we realize the beauty of who these people are...that we never got to know before. (This happened to us.)

Another team finally did show up that night, and the kids were removed from the sand, and the game for the adults began. However, those kids had a great time that night as they watched and learned how to bump and hit the ball. They were affirmed and applauded when they made a hit, and they felt so special to be included on the "big guys" playing court before the real game began.

All because the other team never showed...

Sometimes, the most unfortunate events, or even small disturbances, are just part of the grand scheme of life that calls us to note those on the sidelines that are just itching to play by us, be with us, learn from us and enjoy our company. We could have all gone home and just called it a night. But instead, the littles got to play with the bigs, mosquito bites and all, and good time and great memories were made.

FRESH THYME – The Bird Bath – by Marcy Lytle

We have bird bath that's been in our garden for years. We purchased it to add color and height and texture to our garden, and I love the way it looks nestled among the rocks we've collected beneath it, and in the little box we created for it, between the blooms. But it's pain, in my opinion. And my husband and I have this ongoing struggle with this garden addition.

He likes to keep it full of fresh water for the birds. He enjoys looking out the bedroom window to see them splashing and bathing themselves in the water. After all, it is a bird bath. But it takes time to clean that bowl (it gets so dirty from those nasty birds!) and it has to be refilled often (due to our Texas heat!). When he cleans the bowl, he does a thoroughly good job, and the tall red ceramic statue with a bowl on top looks amazing.

I, on the other hand, never have time to be "bothered" with that bowl. I'm usually watering the plants in a hurry and when I walk past the bird bath I sigh when I realize it needs to be cleaned and filled, once again. I don't like the time required to actually clean it, so I often just spray out the filthy water and add a bit more, not even to the brim, sometimes. And I don't even care if the birds get a drink, I just want to be done and go back inside.

I was looking at this photo of the bird bath and if you look closely, after reading what I wrote above, you can tell that I was the one that last tended the bird bath. It's not clean, and it's not full. I was in a hurry.

So I started thinking (as I do, when I'm out tending my garden), about how that bird bath relates to other things as well. It takes effort and time to keep other things nice and presentable and "full" as well, so that friends and neighbors feel welcome in our yard and home – and feel refreshed when they leave. We have barely even had guests over...because of the pandemic!

However, I know and appreciate the love my husband gives that bird bath. He never does a job halfway. If a job is worth doing, he will do it well. (I love it when he cleans my kitchen stove!) And I have to admit that it's fun to see birds of all kinds splash and play in the water once we go back inside the house and are no longer a threat to them.

This fall, I'm hoping that I can tend to my own bowls of water, so to speak, to keep them clean and full for those that need a drink. I have no idea if we will be able to have people over yet, but I know we will meet up with friends. And instead of offering them a dirty drink of nasty water I haven't cared to empty and refill, I hope I have clean pure living water to offer so that we are both satisfied after the visit.

Instead of complaining about the world and the virus, discussing other controversial issues or frustrations, it might be so possible and good and necessary for my visitors/friends and I to just splash and play for a while. Maybe that's what we all need at the moment. A good time to be had by all, just because we all took time to wipe out the nasty and fill it with the fresh.

What do you think?

FRESH THYME – Unfinished Stories – by Marcy Lytle

I love to read, I really do. However, there are seasons where I read a lot and then seasons when I don't. Even when I have the time to sit down and read, I often choose to do something else. Why? I don't know. But it happens.

The things I love to read are basically five. I love to read the Word, but only if I'm actually studying it for a devo or a lesson. I only find purpose in reading it if I can apply what I read. Books are a fun read for me, as a way of escape into another story way different from my own. I also adore magazines; and I subscribe to many, because magazines are my job! I especially love finding new recipes, fashion ideas or home décor inspiration. Those are my faves. I enjoy reading *The Community Impact* or the *Austin 360*, because both have coupons for restaurants, new ideas of places and things to do, which I love! And finally, I enjoy reading the articles that the women submit each month for *A Bundle of THYME*. I absolutely love the variety of voices we share.

One thing that keeps me from reading is the fact that somehow I feel like I'm "wasting my time," not being productive, while I read. I even have the same struggle when sitting still to watch a movie at home. I'd much rather go to the theater, where there are no chores around me to do. I don't know if this constant need to have "purpose" in what I'm doing stems from my childhood, or where. But I've always seen reading as a pastime, a waste of time, and something to be done only if one needs information.

However, in the past couple of years, I've come to struggle my way out of that kind of thinking. I realize now that reading doesn't have to be reading for information, reading to learn, or reading in order to "do" anything at all. It can be for pure pleasure alone.

You that are avid readers and read for hours are probably scratching your heads right now, thinking – she's crazy. I have friends that carve out time to read, and read book after book, never thinking it's a waste of time at all. And I now get it!

Here are a few things some of us may struggle with, if we're the work/work/work type of folks:

- Taking a long, hot bath to soak, not to clean
- Sipping tea and lingering by the window, without a list in hand
- Walking for pure pleasure to observe nature, not to measure steps
- Facetiming a friend, just because
- Reading a book for pure pleasure, not to take note

I'm learning, slowly but surely, that life doesn't have to be 24/7 purpose driven and list making and chore doing, but it can include lots of down time of just being and smiling at what's fun and senseless. I've sat down to read the book in the photo above about five times now and still not started it. One time I knew I only had 15 minutes to read, so I didn't want to begin. Another time, my mind was too full to be still and enter the story. And last night, it was just too noisy around me while in the car.

I've made real progress, but I've got a long ways to go, to learn and enjoy the beauty of just reading and turning page by page, unaware of the world around be, because I'm so engrossed in the world before me on the pages of the unfinished story I need to enjoy in the moment...