



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

2020



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

January 2020



TIPS

## **The Dressing – Cozy and Warm** – by Marcy Lytle

I'm all about cozy, aren't you? Snuggly blankets, warm and soft sweaters, cozy shoes with a little fur tucked inside, and a warm cup of hot tea...all by the flickering fire. We absolutely love fires in the fireplace, because they're not that often here where I live. So when the temps fall below 50 we're on it! What about you? Are you looking for cozy this season? I forgot to mention cozy sleepwear!

Here are seven little cozy additions you might want to add to your wardrobe this month of the cold weather season:

**Those pj's:** After Christmas, you can snag some real deals on cozy sleepwear, especially at Target. I love this plaid set! And if you buy some, you can wear them now, and then again next winter when Christmas comes 'round again!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-family-pajama-plaid-pajama-set-blue/-/A-54516528?preselect=54445685#lnk=sametab>

**Snow booties:** We rarely have snow here, but I'm really loving this pair of fur-lined booties/shoes to wear in the house on cold mornings or to sit outside sipping tea, if it's not too chilly. Aren't they cool? There are several colors and styles to choose from, from Amazon.

[https://www.amazon.com/SITALE-Waterproof-Outdoor-Slippers-Sneakers/dp/B074L3WDQ5?ref=fscpl\\_pl\\_dp\\_2](https://www.amazon.com/SITALE-Waterproof-Outdoor-Slippers-Sneakers/dp/B074L3WDQ5?ref=fscpl_pl_dp_2)

**Sweater weather:** This pullover sweater by New Day is so cute and I really like this color, but there are others to choose from as well! It's got that asymmetrical hemline and being oversized, it's sure to be comfortable!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-casual-fit-crewneck-pullover-sweater-a-new-day/-/A-54470665?preselect=54410054#lnk=sametab>

**Cozy blanket** – This blanket is a little pricey, but we're hoping it will be on sale in January. It landed on a top cozy blanket list, and it's from Crate and Barrel. Don't you LOVE the stripes! It would look amazing over the back of your sofa!

<https://www.crateandbarrel.com/carreno-multicolored-throw/s148435?SID=1025X1552619X6677f68b8c51139f0cba970082676072&si=2617611&aff=cj&cjevent=074b96cf16a811ea81c402530a240610>

**A Sherpa Coat** – Okay, I have one of these, and they're not easy to clean. However, they are amazingly soft and cozy, and this price point at Target is awesome. So snagging one, even just to wear this season, might be a fun buy!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-long-sleeve-button-front-sherpa-pea-coat-wild-fable-tan/-/A-77418271?preselect=77374955#lnk=sametab>

**Comfy pants** – Jogger pants with pockets in black, are the best. You can dress them up and wear them shopping, or just sit on your sofa and read all day. This pair got great reviews. I love the look!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-beautifully-soft-fleece-lounge-jogger-pants-stars-above-black/-/A-77361656?preselect=54580383#ink=sametab>

**Around the neck** – Cozy and gray just go together like peanut butter and chocolate. I love this plaid scarf from Target, and it's got a few strands of light blue, so can be worn on into the early spring. It's not too thick or bulky so that it's uncomfortable, but it looks just right!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-39-s-plaid-oblong-scarves-a-new-day-8482-gray-one-size/-/A-54566459>

Maybe you received some cozy pieces for Christmas under the tree...or maybe not. Maybe you got a gift card! Go out this month and buy one piece for yourself that speaks your name and calls you to the fire to sit, or out in the cold to shop for sales...all while comfy and warm!

## Seven for You – Words – by Marcy Lytle

This month we asked for book recommendations or lyrics or any words that our panel of women read that were encouraging to them, so that we could then share with YOU. Reading is a pastime and a privilege that many of us don't have, if we're raising kids, working, serving, and all of those things that women do. However, it's sometimes like a breath of fresh air if we can sit down and read a tiny bit each day, to escape, heal or be escorted to inspiration and hope...

During my cancer battle of this past year, a lot of people sent me scriptures and encouraging songs. One song stood out to me especially and gave me HOPE because it seemed to encapsulate the message of so many scriptures AND the battle I was fighting. That song is "Something Good" by Levi Smith (Gateway Worship). One of my favorite parts of the song says "When I'm broken and down to nothing, I know that you are always up to something good". Whatever the reasons for walking this road, I trust God to bring something good out of the bad. I am already seeing it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDRfVmtMotI>

In answer to this month's panel question, I'm really not a reader. What I like to do and read is research so I guess you could say I spend a lot of time "googling." I do enjoy reading the columns at *A Bundle of Thyme*. I also enjoy Bible studies and my husband and I just finished leading a group at our church through the book, *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby. Several people in our church have done this study on their own. So whether alone or in a group this is a heart opening book to read!

<https://www.amazon.com/Experiencing-God-Knowing-Revised-Expanded/dp/0805447539>

*The Giver of the Stars* was my book of the month choice in November and I really loved the story. It's about the women that started libraries by riding horseback through the woods, to deliver books to families so that they could read and learn, and be exposed to new ideas and inspiration. However, those rides and visits were hard to complete, when many others were afraid that books were causing young minds to be open too wide, and that these "libraries" should be stopped. The story focuses on two women who form an unlikely friendship, as they face their hard lives together. It's a great read!

[https://www.amazon.com/Giver-Stars-Novel/dp/B07QQ3J91J/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?keywords=giver+of+stars&qid=1576499520&s=books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Giver-Stars-Novel/dp/B07QQ3J91J/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=giver+of+stars&qid=1576499520&s=books&sr=1-1)

Have you read Ann Voskamp's *One Thousand Gifts*? It's not a new book, but it's a stirring message – one of giving thanks in all things. The author is a farmer's wife with seven children, and she has experienced her share of hard things in life. You can also get the study guide to go with it. She writes with a poetic voice and says so many heart-piercing things, you'll definitely need to read it over and over again, as I'm hoping to do. I want an attitude of thanksgiving to be my bridge to joy, but it takes practice...a thousand times over.

[https://www.amazon.com/One-Thousand-Gifts-Fully-Right/dp/B004KTJWH4/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=ZOSJWB2NQ0EG&keywords=one+thousand+gifts&qid=1576499541&s=audible&sprefix=one+thous%2Caudible%2C200&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/One-Thousand-Gifts-Fully-Right/dp/B004KTJWH4/ref=sr_1_1?crid=ZOSJWB2NQ0EG&keywords=one+thousand+gifts&qid=1576499541&s=audible&sprefix=one+thous%2Caudible%2C200&sr=1-1)

THIS song: *This Girl* by Lauren Daigle "There's a God shaped hole inside of every persons heart; and if you sense that there is something empty inside of you- the reason that you continue to look for life all throughout this world and yet something can't seem to satisfy the hole in your heart...it's because your heart is longing for its maker, Jesus Christ." ~Timothy Ateek

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56uSOVEV0mY>

I don't mean to sound cliché but I have been really listening to the song "Mary Did You Know?" The words to that song just speak to me and I don't think I ever really listened and let the words of that song sink in. The words to me are powerful.

[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=mary+did+you+know+pentatonix+](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=mary+did+you+know+pentatonix+)

I have started really liking the magazine *Real Simple*. Not sure why, but I have enjoyed reading it the past couple of months. This magazine says it shares "good to know information" and inspiring ideas.

<https://www.realsimple.com/>

The book *Woman* has been a very impactful book for me this year. The author uses the "knowledge is power" approach to help the reader understand how we are so intricately designed and sheds light on the danger of chemical components in mainstream health and beauty products. It's fascinating, empowering and informative!

<https://www.amazon.com/Woman-Designed-God-Amanda-Hess/dp/1937498484>

These lyrics have been an anthem for me this year!!! In every thing life brings - Raise a Hallelujah!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2XtRuPfaAU>

*I raise a hallelujah, in the presence of my enemies  
I raise a hallelujah, louder than the unbelief  
I raise a hallelujah, my weapon is a melody  
I raise a hallelujah, heaven comes to fight for me*

*I'm gonna sing, in the middle of the storm  
Louder and louder, you're gonna hear my praises roar  
Up from the ashes, hope will arise  
Death is defeated, the King is alive!*



## Selah's Style – Cute Camden

Camden Bayer is a little girl from Kentucky that loves to play with her daddy's tools during home fixer-upper projects and is Daddy's little spotter during in-home workouts. Camden is currently taking "princess lessons" from her favorite Disney character, Sofia the First. She's sharing some of her fashion finds with us this month!

Camden has the same enthusiasm for Moana and mint LifeSavers as her mom does for tiny babes in plaid flannel!

<https://m.kohls.com/product/prd-3831444/toddler-girl-jumping-beans-henley-babydoll-top.jsp?prdPV=22&userPFM=toddler%20girls%20plaid%20&diestoreid=725&selectShip=true>

As a redhead, I'm partial to Olive Green but this jacket is just as multi-functional as it is cute! The inner lining is a light fall zip up jacket at then combined with the green outer layer, it's the perfect coat for all weather types!

[https://www.walmart.com/ip/Wonder-Nation-Toddler-Girl-3-in-1-Systems-Jacket-Coat/482328580?variantFieldId=actual\\_color](https://www.walmart.com/ip/Wonder-Nation-Toddler-Girl-3-in-1-Systems-Jacket-Coat/482328580?variantFieldId=actual_color)

Handmade by Reginna Osborn

Cute matching cousin ear-warming headbands delicately made by "Gigi", my mom, come in real handy when visiting family in Chicago this time of year! Their love for Minnie Mouse runs deep!

[https://m2.hm.com/m/en\\_us/search-result.html?q=Pink+toddler+sweatshirt](https://m2.hm.com/m/en_us/search-result.html?q=Pink+toddler+sweatshirt)

<https://m.kohls.com/product/prd-3745250/toddler-girl-jumping-beans-print-leggings.jsp?prdPV=7&userPFM=toddler%20girls%20leopard&diestoreid=725&selectShip=true>

Call me basic but I love pairing oversized sweatshirts with leggings, especially pink unicorn sweatshirts with leopard leggings! It's my favorite cozy weather wear!

<https://www.vonmaur.com/Product.aspx?ID=1504871&pos=3&pg=1>

There's only one way to get daddy's fancy uniform but it sure pairs well with Camden's warm, fuzzy vest! She makes dressing up so fun!

Camden is the newest 4-year old around town this very month! Her parents, Brian and Erin, have their work cut out for them with this sassy girl but that's also what makes her so fun! The Bayers live in Lexington, Kentucky where Erin works as a kindergarten classroom aid, making

this season of motherhood very enlightening. Brian is a licensed electrician as well as a specialist in the Army National Guard.

## **In the Kitchen – The Potato Bar – by Marcy Lytle**

At the end of December, we had a potato bar with our extended family. We decided on this food option last Christmas and we liked it so much, we did it again! It's a great setup, as everything is served buffet-style, it's kid-friendly because each person gets to choose their own toppings, and it's a food spread that can be planned ahead of time, with each guest bringing something for the bar!

We thought it would be fun to share how to put the potato bar together, what items are tasty to serve, and inspire you to try it with your family this January, while the temps are cold outside, but it's warm and cozy inside!

### **The potatoes:**

Use your slow cooker to make the potatoes, and include a few sweet potatoes for those that might want them.

Prick each potato with a fork, rub with butter, and sprinkle with salt. Place each one in aluminum foil and place in the slow cooker for 8-10 hours. If you want the skin a bit crispy, remove after baking, unwrap and place in a 350 degree oven for 10 minutes.

### **Here are some awesome toppings:**

- Chili (mix), pulled pork, or rotisserie chicken, or taco meat, pepperoni
- Broccoli
- All the usuals:
- Red onion
- Jalapenos
- Chopped tomatoes
- Bacon
- Cheese: goat, cheddar, mozzarella, pepper jack
- Sour cream, BBQ sauce, marinara, mojo
- Avocado
- Black beans
- Salsa
- Grilled corn
- Roasted red peppers
- Butter
- Fresh basil, cilantro, or chives
- Seasoning salt, cumin

You could even print out a sheet and have it on an easel or in a frame, so guests can see who to put different flavor profiles together for a tasty potato! They can cut their potato in half and try two! We've included one below!

Finally, the set up. Our décor was Christmas, and since we had the event after Christmas, I was able to get fun black/white checkered trays and decorations on sale! You can choose your own theme for your own taste!

Always add height, texture, color and lights to your table!

Height can be added with tiered trays or vases with greenery (just cut some branches off your own bushes or trees!)

Texture comes with layering the table with clothes or runners, and providing cloth napkins or even garland.

Color is provided by your food! But you can also add pretty plates and napkins that coordinate, as well perhaps pretty colorful nametags for your food!

Lights are always a welcome addition in the form of candles or twinkly lights. Or use the backdrop of your own fireplace.

Just pick a theme/color and go from there. You could do black and white with just a few pops of color, you could choose all natural type décor including pinecones and twigs and branches and pieces of wood. Maybe you like gray! Make that your backdrop and add pops of gold and white for contrast. Just have fun and do it!

Finally, our family did have so much fun trying new potatoes. My niece's husband cut a potato into fourths and topped each one with one of the choices in the frame – so fun! Me – I opted for just picking and choosing from all the toppings.

A potato bar is easy because you assign each person/family something to bring, and then just set it all out and enjoy! The host usually provides the potatoes, and the guests all the rest.

## TRIED AND TRUE – Memory Tricks – by Marcy Lytle

Isn't it fun to have little tricks that you learned as a kid that serve you well as an adult? My best trick is the way to remember how to spell separate, a commonly misspelled word for sure. Here's what I was told that I've never forgotten: There was nothing in the house "sep a rat – e!" (except a rat – eeekkk!)

Since it's a new year and all that jazz, I thought it would be fun to share lots of ways and tricks to remember all sorts of things, in case you have a little time on your hands by the fire and want to take these and set them in your memory, as well!

- Have trouble remembering how to do percentages when shopping? Stores often provide charts but if they don't, just remember 30% is about 1/3. So if an item is \$30 then 1/3 off would be \$10! 40% sale? The easiest way is to multiply the cost by 4, for example if that same item \$30 is 40% off then  $3 \times 4 = 12$ , so it's \$12 off! OR....take 10% and multiply that by 4. 10% of \$30 (just move the decimal over one space) is \$3.  $3 \times 4 = 12$ ! 20% is 1/5 so 1/5 of \$30 is \$6. It helps to refresh your memory on math facts when shopping sales!
- Can't recall where you parked at the mall or in the shopping center parking lot? Use the notes on your phone to write where you are, what row, middle or end, etc. I try to make a mental note of where I am before entering, but sometimes it's helpful to note it, so you can forget it while you shop! And most often, I park on the same row each time so I'm always at the same entrance.
- Just met a new person and then you walk away and forget her name? Two things I've heard from friends that work are to say her name back when she introduces herself, then say it again as you walk away. And then...again use your notes and jot it down – along with a description of who she is. The more of your senses that you use, the more likely you're to remember!
- I recently read a trick for remembering to add that extra "s" when you spell dessert. It's not desert! That's a wasteland. Dessert has a double "s" and you can remember that because desserts are **So Sweet!** Isn't that a cool trick? And stationery with an e can be remembered by the fact that "e" is for envelope! The other kind is stationary, and the "a" can be for anchored! Pretty cool!
- Losing your purse or laying it down somewhere in a store and realizing it after you walk away? Never go shopping without a crossbody bag. Keep it by the door to switch your purse items into, when you're shopping. This way your purse is on your body at all times, no chance of you leaving it in the cart or on a shelf!
- This next trick is genius, for helping us all out with pints, quarts and gallons! Look at this figure! 2 cups in a pint, 2 pints in a quart, and 4 quarts in a gallon!



- One memory trick for several items, like things you need to get at the store, should you not have your phone for notes, is to make up a song! For example, if you need milk, blueberries, and sugar, you could sing, “Twinkle twinkle blueberry, with some milk and sugar be...” or something similar. It’s a great tool that teachers use as well, with students! Have you heard the presidents’ song?
- One of my pet peeves is emails that are not responded to, or texts! I know that it happens often because we read our phone while we’re out or busy, and we forget then to respond when we have the time! Two helpful hints (besides paying for an app to remind you!): Set a time right before bed (or another down time) to respond to texts. That way it’s a routine you keep. The other hint is to say “Siri remind me to text at 8pm” or some other time that fits your schedule. Your alarm will go off and you will read your text and respond (and apologize for being late!)
- Going on a weekend getaway or trip soon? How in the world do you remember all of the things you need? For toiletries, pack them as you use them, the day before. When you’re getting ready, pack all of the items you use, and the same goes for nighttime. Then the next day when you’re getting ready to leave, you work from your packed bag and everything should be there! Write out a list of outfits for each day, including accessories. And finally, make a checklist that you keep by the bed, because you’re going to recall something right before you fall asleep! Or check out this site for comprehensive list! <https://www.smartertravel.com/the-ultimate-packing-list/>
- Finally, what about birthdays and special occasions? Of course, we can write them on a calendar in our phone or on the fridge. But how do we remember to write them or record them? It’s a fun thing to do January to go through each month and fill in birthdays on your calendar right then. This way you’re not doing it month to month. There are apps and online helps, but if you’re not into that, make it a point to do a simple fill-in at the beginning of the year. Make a list of all your friends and family that you want to remember, and note it...in January...NOW. A paper calendar affixed to the fridge is my fave for recording EVERYTHING. And it saves on marriage disputes as well because it’s right there – for him to read! ☺



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – All the Stuff** – by Marcy Lytle

Christmas is over, the presents are unwrapped and all the new “stuff” is now in your kiddos’ rooms waiting to be played with...or broken...whichever comes first! Some parents clean out their kids’ rooms before Christmas so that room is made for all the new. That’s a great idea. But sometimes, it’s overwhelming finding a place for all the toys and noise and parts!

A few ideas that might make your sanity return...

*For the Legos* and other toys that have tiny pieces – Provide bins with lids for each set. Label them. Don’t let them toss all Legos or pieces into a large bin where everything gets mixed together. I don’t know why toy companies don’t provide organizers with each toy! There are tiny pencil boxes that snap shut for tiny sets, and there are larger boxes like plastic shoe bins for the bigger sets. Then place all of these SETS in one place, training them to only get down one at a time to play with (good luck with that!)

<https://www.michaels.com/plastic-pencil-box/MD044198S.html>

*For the Barbies* and all of the accessories – There are all sorts of organizers you can purchase, but sometimes they’re expensive. Consider drawstring bags from Dollar Tree. Barbies can be stored in one, clothes in another, and accessories in a third (and inside can be tiny boxes if you like). Hang them on three hooks, provide a cute label, and there you go!

<https://www.dollartree.com/bulk/Drawstring-Backpack>

*Those big toys* – Make space on the floor of their closets, like a tiny parking garage, and even tape off “parking spaces.” Make sure each night before bed that each dinosaur that roars or Barbie van that rolls is parked and asleep when lights are out.

*Books and shelves* – Hopefully, the littles received some new reading material this Christmas. They can be added to an already packed shelf where books fall off daily, or you can organize them another way! What if you made a rotating “library” of books that you change out daily? Maybe 10 a week in a bin that they can choose from, and then the next week you rotate them out for 10 more. And the big shelf with all the choices is way up high, where only Mom/Dad can reach!

<https://www.walmart.com/ip/Storex-Interlocking-Book-Bins-12-6-x-5-3-x-14-3-5-Color-Set-Plastic/45755116>

*Art supplies* – Pencils, markers, crayons, scissors, color books, paint pots, brushes, stickers – oh my! A nightmare of artistry waiting to scare even the sanest of moms! There are these cool bathroom caddies (I found at Big Lots for \$2.50!) that can house lots of these artistic items. One per kid would be ideal, with their name on the front. Then store these in a closet up high, with a larger bin of the coloring books and paper beside. Again, let them ask or you provide the caddies when they’re interested in art time.

<https://www.biglots.com/product/clear-bath-caddy-with-handle/p810445669?N=376914851&pos=1:85>



A lot of angst can be avoided if parents put things away and kids have to ask for them, in order to use. Then, parents can monitor and not allow another toy out until that one is put away. This solves the problem of multiple messes all over the floor.

A lot of screaming can be spared if kids are required to put away every single toy they've gotten out each night before bed. It needs to be routine. Otherwise, messes are out of control and no one wants to clean that mountain before them.

A lot of organizing can bring peace, if the kids are involved in helping you out with labels or pictures, and choosing bins and places. Offer them ownership and reward them with wonderful words and hugs when they obey and put away.

Happy New Year to all you parents that are sitting and wishing for an elf to show up and shape up your house. I hope that happens, but if it doesn't, try some of the above ideas!

## **I Don't Do Teenagers – The Five C's – by Marcy Lytle**

Age appropriate activities, clothes, gadgets and more can be quite daunting. And our kiddos will never agree with us on what's appropriate, as they will push the envelope in just about every area. Can't you remember doing that with your mom? I know my kids pushed it with bed times, curfews, body piercings, where they could go, what they could do, and eat and all that jazz! It's hard on kids that desire to be adults and decide on their own, and it's hard on parents that are trying their best to be wise...but not parent out of fear!

Here are a few areas where it's hard to navigate teens and a few suggestions that might help you this new year:

Clothes: Always, always have conversations with your kids about why they want to wear that outfit that you don't want them to wear. If she wants to show her stomach or he wants to shave a part of his head, and those things are part of a rebellion or just to be like others, or because of insecurities, talk it out. Always, always get to the root of why your kids are drawn to baring it all or standing out in a crowd. Sometimes, that's all that's needed for a healthy conversation and decision between the two of you.

Curfews: Teens that aren't driving have curfews like when lights and electronics need to be off, and eyes need to be shut. Teens that are driving need curfews of when to be home from a night out with friends. And the family unit needs to come first, so that all can rest and stay healthy all year long. It's good to have discussions with teens about curfews, but it's ultimately what's best for mom/dad and the rest of the family. And if teens cannot obey, they don't get their electronics, and they don't get the keys. It's that simple.

Cheetos: That's the name of this category because it's referring to junk food and what's healthy and what's not. If we don't purchase all the junk and have it in the house, at least while our kids are home, they'll grab an actual ball that's called an orange, instead of those orange balls called Cheetos. If we provide an array of healthy food, along with fun snacks, so that there's a balance, our kids won't crave junk when they're away. (At least, that's the hope!) And if we eat healthy food in front of them, they will watch and consider that what we say is what we do.

Cells: Those phones are in a category all to themselves, aren't they? Rules have to be set up when teens first get these jewels, and we must obey the same things like: No phones at dinner, only certain times at night are on the phone – the rest is family time or homework or fun time, no phones after a certain time at night. Have a family meeting of all those with phones and stick to your rules. If teens see parents on phones while in bed and not talking to one another, or their parents repeatedly send them away because they're on the phone, kids will follow suit. Our teens are watching...

Character: This is a big one, isn't it? We only have a few short years to build character in our children, and two big things affect how their character emerges: How we present their Father to them, and how we exhibit our own character in front of them. Kids need to know the attributes of their heavenly Father from the get-go – so read up and share. Teens need to see us exhibit

those character qualities like honor, honesty, love, obedience and faith. They need to hear us apologize when we fail, make an effort to never slander, and pray often about everything.

That's only five incredible C's that affect our teens and where we must set up parameters, rules and boundaries. But none of the above will be valued by our teens if we don't value them, their opinions, their desires, and listen to their hearts. We can listen and then pray together, and build relationship to where they honor us as their parents. That's huge in setting up age appropriate behavior and lifelong character and graces that will be with them for a lifetime. And prayer and patience are two virtues we parents need for sure...

## **An Adage a Day – I Call it Stalling – by Carole Gilbert**

There's an old adage, or idiom, I find most fitting for a New Year. It's one we all need to hear and do some time or another. It's one I have to tell myself very often and I don't always like it. This adage is, "Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today." I find it funny I never have any problems doing what I like to do but those things I prefer not to do, or maybe it's something someone else wants me to do, I put off. I call it "stalling." Oh, I'll get it done but it may be at the last minute, just in the nick of time, but definitely, always, with a smile. This is called procrastination.

Are you a procrastinator? I bet I could go out on a limb and say all of us procrastinate about something, sometime. Just so we don't feel like the only one, did you know, Mozart, who wrote such beautiful operas, composed his famous *Don Giovanni* the night before it was to premiere? The story says the ink had not even fully dried on the sheets of music. There wasn't even time for rehearsal. And another, Leonardo Da Vinci, took 16 years to complete the painting of his *Mona Lisa*.

Although this idiom is attributed to Benjamin Franklin first saying it, a rendition of it appears in a poem written by Hesoid, an ancient Greek poet, to his brother, Persus, an avid procrastinator, around 700 BC. He wrote, "Do not put your work off till to-morrow and the day after; for a sluggish worker does not fill his barn, nor one who puts off his work: industry makes work go well, but a man who puts off work is always at hand-grips with ruin."

And we also read in Proverbs 6: 9-10, "How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest-and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man."

There are more famous procrastinators but I want to plead my case for the non-procrastinators, those of us that lean on never putting off until tomorrow what we can do today. After all, getting ourselves in gear for doing those things we put off is nothing more than a habit we need to start. Once we start, it becomes routine, and then it becomes as easy as pie because we don't worry and think about doing it. I learned this the hard way.

All of my adult life until I was pregnant with my first child, I would procrastinate about making my bed. My mother always made our beds and when my brother and I were old enough she taught us how. I never knew why but I knew it was what I should do. Then, adulthood set in and the first thing I didn't do was make my bed. I would procrastinate about it. I'd think, "I'll do it later." But later never came. Then when I was about six months pregnant with my first child, I was in a maternity clothing shop and I overheard a customer and saleslady talking about making their beds. Go figure why I heard this?

They were discussing all the benefits of a better night's sleep from clean crisp sheets that had been made all day and tucked away from the dust in the air. The customer told

the saleslady it was the very first thing she did every morning as she got out of her bed. She said that it would then be done. How simple, I thought, but I'm six months pregnant. I turned to look at her and she was due any day, so much more pregnant than me! On my way home I thought, "If she can do it, I can do it!" That procrastination became a habit, a part of my morning routine, something I did every day, and still do to this day, not putting it off until tomorrow.

What do you procrastinate about? What do you put off until tomorrow that you can do today? Just as Arnold Schwarzenegger must not procrastinate, I will not, in this New Year. At 72 years old, he made another Terminator movie, *Terminator 6* (Dark Fate). That's a lot of physical action for a 72-year old, even with a stunt man, something we all can learn from. He always did say, "I'll be back."

So I'll get back to not procrastinating whatever it is and stay with it every day. I hope you'll join me in this resolution and "Just do it!"

Again, Happy 2020!

## **Tiny Living – Clarity** – by Leyanne Enterline

2020! Here it is!

My husband said to me, “It’s gonna be a year of clarity!” I thought that was genius, but he said he’s pretty sure that’s what everyone is saying. 2020 vision!

Like I mentioned last month, 2019 has been a roller coaster of emotions for us. Instability, too many decisions that are not clear, losing focus, isolation, sickness...

*But also*, exciting adventures have happened!

As I type this, we are headed back from a two week trip to California and Hawaii! I cannot complain! But so much “baggage” came with this trip. I heard someone once say, “There’s a curse that comes with every blessing.” I thought that sounded kind of contradictory, but the more I think about it, that may be right.

I’m so thankful for my husband’s job that allows us to go with him sometimes on trips, but on the flip side there’s a lot of travel time that we’re apart. And that part I don’t dig. We’ve basically come to the conclusion that we can’t do that anymore. So unless it’s a super short trip, the kids and I will start going on every trip Brian has to go on, or he doesn’t go.

Some people can handle the long separations, but for our family it doesn’t work. Maybe the tiny trailer living has drawn us so close that when one is missing we feel like we’ve lost our arm or leg. We just can’t do it anymore.

Through the separation times; however, we have learned so much about each other and how the separation has drawn us closer...and closer to God. We truly have to rely on Him when we’re apart.

I have to do a lot of praying (not to pull my hair out) when dealing by myself with two children, two dogs, school, sports, and my own work. I truly have an appreciation for single parents. It’s tough! God designed us to raise these kiddos together and I see why!

It’s the same with Brian. Being on the road with a group of people who do not have similar beliefs can be a challenge. So lots of prayers, encouragement and accountability are a must between the two of us.

I feel like 2019 was a time of growth and now we’re ready to reap the benefits and take what we’ve learned and put it into practice and grow stronger together. Praying for 2020 vision for everyone!

This will be the year of clarity!

Amen!

## **A Night to Remember – Wise Wisdom** – by Marcy Lytle

Kids and wisdom, those two words seem like opposites, right? Kids run out across parking lots, they scream in public places, and they pick up food from the floor and eat it. Not very wise...but they're little and don't know better! It's hard to teach wisdom to kids, but it's necessary, and a brand new year is the best time to start! They can learn what wisdom is, what it looks like, and how to acquire it...all in a fun and effective way with the family!

Wisdom is making good decision when presented with lots of options. And the only way we gain wisdom is from gaining knowledge about the world and around about the Word within us.

**Preparation:** Ask the family to gather, and to bring one Christmas gift for show-and-tell.

James 1:5 says this "But if any of you needs wisdom, you should ask God for it. God is generous. He enjoys giving to all people, so God will give you wisdom."

*Let's stop now and ask God for wisdom (Pray together as a family)*

Psalms 16:7 says this, "The way you counsel and correct me makes me praise you more, for your whispers in the night give me **wisdom**, showing me what to do next."

Have you ever heard little whispers in your ear when you're about to do something you're not quite sure is right? (Let the kids answer and give examples.)

*Hand a piece of paper to two kids, and ask the other one to look as if he's copying answers...*

What if you're thinking of cheating on a test at school? What might be a wise whisper that you hear in your ear? If you obey that advice to turn away from cheating, that's a wise decision.

Psalms 73:24 says, "You lead me with your secret **wisdom**. And following you brings me into your brightness and glory!"

How many love a good secret? Let's whisper a secret around the room and see if we still have it correct with the last person!

*Whisper "Wisdom makes our little light shine and makes us have a happy heart," only once...and let each person whisper it to the next.*

Did we get it correct? We might need to ask the first person what they actually said! We must always go back to the Word to read what God says about wisdom, so that our whispers are good and true.

Psalms 104:24 says, "O Lord, what an amazing variety of all you have created! Wild and wonderful is this world you have made, while **wisdom** was there at your side. This world is full of so many creatures, yet each belongs to you!"

*Ask each person to look out the window into the yard and observe nature in the wintertime. Let them each note something spectacular in their view!*

God was very wise when he made seasons. During the winter, plants go dormant and roots grow deep so that when springs arrive, blooms are everywhere! What a wise God we serve!

Psalms 119:36 say, "Cause my heart to bow before your words of **wisdom** and not to the wealth of this world."

It's enticing to want money and things and gifts. In fact, we just had Christmas and did we get EVERYTHING we wanted? Perhaps, not.

*Ask each person to give thanks for one of the gifts of Christmas with a bit of show and tell time.*

It's a wise person indeed that realizes that every good gift comes from above, and we should always give thanks for God's word which brings life. Gifts break, we lose interest, and we grow out of them. But God's word lasts forever!

Proverbs 2:7-8 says, "For the Lord has a hidden storehouse of **wisdom** made accessible to his godly lovers. He becomes your personal bodyguard as you follow his ways, protecting and guarding you as you choose what is right."

Did you know that famous people have bodyguards? Why do you think that is? Because they're wealthy and well-known, often crazy people try to do them harm or hurt them.

*Ask two kids to act out one being a bodyguard for the other.*

When we obey God's word it's like our own personal bodyguard. Loving others, being kind, listening to His whispers, obeying what he says...all of those things protect us from harm.

Pretty cool!

Wisdom is something we learn as we grow all of our lives, IF we stay in God's words and obey what he says when he whispers in our ears good choices to make. And if we aren't sure what choice to make, we can always ask Him and ask a trustworthy adult for advice.

Wisdom in 2020 – a good plan for the wise – and that's us!





YOU

## **STRENGTHENING YOUR CORE – The Mind of Christ – by Marcy Lytle**

*The man knows his own mind because his mind is one with himself.*

*The Spirit of God knows the things of God because he is one with God.*

– Matthew Henry

We attended a crafts fair recently and there was an oracle booth near the exit, where consumers could sit down and have their “cards” read to them about their future and their lives. Those types of readings are attractive to people, because inside all of us is a spiritual being crying out for meaning and purpose for our existence. In great loss, we grasp to find the meaning and purpose of that dark season. Every human has a spiritual seeker inside their hearts/minds. It’s how we were created, a human, with a spiritual nature that seeks fulfillment in our hearts and souls.

I’ve thought before, long and hard, about the verse in the bible in I Corinthians 2 where it says we have the mind of Christ. And yet, days and weeks go by when I feel as though my mind is anything but His mind – because it’s riddled with worries, fears, questions and even doubts about who God is and why he exists, and the how’s and why’s of who he listens to and how he answers our prayers. Haven’t you pondered these things, as well?

Lately, I’ve been telling myself, when I’m having a bad day in the mind department, that I have the mind of Christ. But then I stop and ask the question, “Just what is the mind of Christ?” And if I have it, then why am I thinking things that are so contrary to what the son of God would think about his Father?

I decided to look at the entire chapter from which this verse came, which is a good thing to do, instead of pulling out one verse and trying to bank your existence on a few words without a framework. That kind of life is floppy and unsure.

In this chapter, Paul (the writer) reveals that he was afraid and “trembling” and not a great speaker, at all. He also mentions that he resolves to know nothing except Jesus and him crucified. He says there is no way to know the mind of God except through his Spirit. In fact, there is a wisdom that comes from God that we cannot know, unless his Spirit dwells within us. And his Spirit always points us back to the Father and his words, his character, and his truth.

If those who crucified Jesus had only known the character and words of God and believed them, they would not have crucified him. It was because of their lack of understanding that they crucified the One who could save them from sin and death.

*That’s where I stopped and paused...*

Discernment through the eyes of the Spirit, the presence of God that dwells inside of me, is what enables me to have the mind of Christ.

In other words, the days where I’m doubting and fearful and questioning and despondent are the days when I’ve looked away from the character of my Father and allowed my mind to

wander over into human judgment and parentheses. I begin to hem in circumstances in life into little boxes of my own understanding and then shake them in defiance and ask why these boxes aren't full of grace and mercy and peace.

*I shake them in his face...*

No one but I know the thoughts I think when I'm alone, the thoughts that reside in the deep recesses of my mind. And when those thoughts take up residence, I begin to look at God's ways and call them foolish, forfeiting peace so that I can understand and make sense. But who am I to instruct the Lord? It didn't fare well for Job, and it's not going to fare well for me, until I consider the works of his hands and the gift that came from those same hands...

Jesus. And him crucified.

It's when I'm still in the quiet of the morning and I consider the Father that gave his Son and freely gives his Spirit to reside in me that the mind of Christ begins to emerge once again.

*“What no eye has seen,  
what no ear has heard,  
and what no human mind has conceived”—  
the things God has prepared for those who love him—  
these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.*

I want to see those things with my mind's eyes, don't you? Especially, as a new year begins and an old one fades from view. I want to relish and adore this Jesus on a minute by minute basis, so that I'm listening and hearing those things revealed to me by his Spirit that resides in me, that always point me back to Jesus and the gift he gave to me, so that I can live, fully sane and fully unafraid, in a fully sound mind – the mind of Christ.

## Upper Quadrant – All This – by Marcy Lytle

I recently heard someone make the comment that everything we possess in life – houses, things, senses, money – will be taken from us at the end of our lives. And that comment made me sad. While it's true that all of those things will fade with time, it's sad to think about that day when they all fade away. And yet, as we age and observe our parents lose interest in things that once brought them life, and as they move into situations that require them to give up so much, it's disheartening and frankly quite scary to think we're on that same path toward that same end.

This is why we've got to live today.

I also recently read about a mom that was worrying about her son leaving for college the next day and already missing him, when her friend said, "You have him today. Enjoy." And that's so true, as well. We can enjoy what we have today, give thanks for it, and let time and old age creep in when it will...knowing full well that newness and life is on the other side.

That's the crux of my discussion in this article – today. With the passing of another year and a new one before us, we can all look at our parents, at our own future, at the possibilities of what might happen as we too get older and we can panic and fear and lose out on all of the grace we've been given today by worrying about tomorrow. I'm the world's worst at doing this. When I'm surrounded by God's beauty on any given day, whether it's sitting with my family nearby, or watching lights twinkle on the Christmas tree, I can ruin those beautiful moments with the thought of *what if this happens* to destroy all of this beauty.

I'm reading a book called *1000 Gifts* by Ann Voskamp. I'm pretty sure I'm way behind, as many of my friends read this book, years ago. It's a beautifully written book, but it's a hard read. It's because she reminds us to focus on "this" – those moment by moment graces – of "this" day. Not on what if "this" happens. That's a lot of references to the word "this!"

However, by definition "this" means a person or thing close at hand, or a specific situation just mentioned. And that is what we're supposed to be noticing, relishing, and rejoicing in.

Psalm 118:24 says *This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*

John 15:12 says *This is my command that you love one another as I have loved you.*

John 13:35 says *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

There must be 100's of verses that have the word "this" in them, drawing our attention to the now, the close at hand, the present situation.

We've been given today. Will we rejoice or worry? Will we be glad or sad? We've been given purpose in our lives – to love others like Christ loves us. This is our reason for living. We've been given the opportunity to make a difference – by the way we love others.

I need these kinds of reminders daily.

*When I wake up early in the morning*, sometimes my mind races about everything. Seriously, I don't know where all of these thoughts come from, but they do! I have to physically get up, read, pray, and focus my attention on the "this" for today. Somehow, seeing all of the paths out there in the future create this big spider web in which I become entangled until I turn my focus back to this day, this moment, this grace.

*When I leave my house* and have just received two texts of God's grace of healing on two of my friends in the same day, I cry tears of joy. And then immediately I think of the others that haven't gotten a good report, the ones still awaiting their healing, and I cry for them, as well. Those thoughts can sink me down into a pit of despair until I then remember that this day was good news. And who's to say that tomorrow's news won't be better?

*When I lay my head down* on my pillow at night wondering what the next season will hold, if my kids' needs will be met, if my dad is going to make it another year, if we are going to retain our health, and if friends are going to be near, my mind can become a whirlwind of activity that just stirs up so much dust and clutter I cannot see this – the day I was just given – the day I just lived – the breaths I just breathed. This day was a blessing, and I can count those blessings as I drift off to sleep...

We know the givens in life...death and taxes...as my mom used to say. It's like the givens in a math problem, the fixed values that cannot change. But those variables that change when we insert different numbers always produce different outcomes. And those variables are the different ways we choose to give thanks in noticing this moment, this day, and this gift. Today it might be the gift of health we are giving thanks for, and tomorrow it might be the sunrise. In fact, the sunrise is a given. Variables and the givens make for endless supplies of problems that can be worked out by the master mathematician who created all things in right order and with intricate design, and variations of color and size.

This day, I'm typing this article early, and I'm giving thanks for:

- Friends that text in the early morning just to say hi
- A sweet husband that rubbed my back just before falling asleep
- Ingredients that await me on the stove to fill my house with the aroma of winter smells
- A plaid headband to wear for the holidays
- The opportunity to share and to write and to send hope to you that read

This is your day. It's your turn to give thanks. For all this.

## Healthy Habits – Winter Walks – by Marcy Lytle

Walking. It's the easiest, most natural way, of keeping our health in check. It pumps the heart, it moves the body, it's fun to do alone or with friends, it's a time to notice nature, and it's so much more – it's something we can do anywhere, anytime, at any place. However, January – that month where frigid temps keep us indoors – is a hard time perhaps to find a place to walk. So there we sit, in front of the television, behind our laptop, or with phone in hand...doing nothing...except snacking.

I'm determined this winter to keep moving and walking, and I've thought of several ways to help us all get moving and stay moving even when days are short and temps are cold! And then when I'm done, I can sit by the fire, put my feet up, and relax!

- **The mall** – I never thought I'd see the day when we joined the ranks of mall walkers, but it's actually a great way to exercise. We often determine that we will walk twice around without stopping in any stores. We look at the stores, the people, the sights and we think about where we might want to stop on our third journey around.
- **Target** – There have been days that we've walked every aisle in Target at a fairly fast pace, just to get in our exercise for the evening. Maybe the cameras pick up this "strange couple" and employees laugh, but we enjoy it! Again, we walk every aisle and then go back and pick up what we need AFTER the walk is over. Target is a big place, and there are lots of aisles, and it takes a while!
- **At home** – Instead of walking in the house, we dance. We either watch YouTube dancing videos or just put on music and move for a certain amount of time. This gets the heart pumping and is actually quite enjoyable and makes us both laugh. It's good for our hearts!
- **Outside** – If the weather isn't too frigid, we bundle up with scarves and hats and coats and walk anyway. We find a trail, we pick a day that's not too windy, and we pack a thermos of something to drink and we go. It's fun walking trails, even when the green of spring is not yet here, and we like hearing the crackle of dead branches under our feet. And we pick a day when the sun's out so at least there's a little warmth to be felt!
- **Up the stairs** – Perhaps your house has a set of stairs, or there are stairs (or even an escalator) at a store you frequent, or stairs at your office. For one day's walking activity, take the stairs off and on, several times a day. Get your heart pumping and purpose to not ride the elevator, and to go up and down with your actual legs so that you get in some movement and muscle workouts!
- **Around a square** – Take a winter's drive to a small town that has a square, and pick a day that's not too blustery. Hand in hand, walk the square several times, and end the walk with a stop in a quaint coffee shop or diner. What a fun outing you'll have while you exercised, as well!
- **An outdoor shopping center** – Even though it's cold, you'll have places to enter as you walk. Determine a distance you want to walk and keep track of it, jutting inside stores when you're freezing, just to warm up, and then move again. Park your car far from the stores and walk from strip to strip. It might be fun to take \$10 cash each and see what you can find along your walk that day.

Make walking an adventure that you both enjoy, with your spouse or with a friend, or even go it alone. Walk in different places and vary up the scenery. Walk at different paces, up and down, or around the town. Use those seven ideas above and try one each day of the week! Whatever you do, this winter season, keep your sneakers by the door and walk some more...

## **Life Right Now – I Resolve** – by Bethany Gomez

First things, first. Happy New Year! Also, I just want to wish everyone luck, including myself, when trying to change the number 19 to a number 20. I can't believe another year has come and gone and I can't quite get over the fact that it is a new decade. Crazyness.

I wasn't sure I wanted to make any New Year's resolutions this year. The times that I have, I have failed miserably at them. *So why make any*, I thought? Because even when I fail at keeping my resolutions, there remains the fact that I strived to accomplish them and through the very striving I learned something through it or grew a little bit.

In 2020:

I resolve to get more sleep; to put my night owl ways aside. I have a bad habit of not only getting into bed later than I should, but then picking up my phone one last time. Yes, I am well aware of how unhealthy that is. I have read articles and heard people talk about the negative side effects of screen time before bed, so that is why I am bound and determined to stop scrolling and start snoozing. I have a feeling I will be a happier, healthier version of myself when I do.

I resolve to make a dentist appointment. I am not going to tell you the last time I went to the dentist that is because I can't remember when that was. Am I a little afraid of the dentist? Yes. Am I afraid of how much it will cost? You bet. You know that saying. If it's not broken don't fix it. Well, I have kind of adopted that as my reason for not going to the dentist. If there is no pain happening in my mouth then why go. I am totally aware that that is so bad on so many levels. There are at least three things I need to start telling myself about the dentist: he is not the enemy, going to the dentist is preventative care - not "wait till something goes wrong" care, and it will cost less if I go sooner rather than wait for an emergency tooth extraction or something of that nature.

I resolve to be better at budgeting my money. I recently had to add a car payment to my long list of bills and with that came an increase in my insurance bill. Sometimes I am struck with so much worry over the possibility of there not being enough money to pay all of my bills. It blinds me to the truth that God has always and will always provide everything I need. He is a good father that gives good things to those that ask. I will keep praying for provision, but at the same time do my part by being wise with what is ultimately God's money.

I resolve to be a better neighbor. I want my love for others to increase. I don't want to withhold kindness from anyone. One of the last movies I saw was *It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*. First of all, it is a wonderful movie. Tom Hanks was perfect as Mr. Rogers. The film had a lasting impact on me just like the Mr. Rogers show had a lasting impact on me growing up. His kindness and inclusiveness is something I admire. One of my favorite quotes from him is, "To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is. Right here and now."

My final resolution is not just for this year, it is a life resolution.

I resolve to strengthen my walk with the Lord. I pray that God will put in me a strong desire to read His word. I want to spend more time getting to know Jesus and to find out what He wants me to do next. I struggle with not wanting to stray too far off the path that I stall out and don't budge for fear of straying off of it. I fear that I am going to somehow miss where I am supposed to go next.



Psalm 119:105 says,

“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light to my path.”

If I just stay in His word and take the time to hear His words my path will be illuminated and not dark where I cannot see where I am going.

No matter what happens in 2020, whether I accomplish some or all of my resolutions, I can't do any of it without Jesus and I don't ever want to.

## **Created for Life - Running Toward Freedom – by Ginny Hurley**

This has been a season of incredible stories of miracles and incredible testimonies of abundant transformations. At the same time I hear about a stunning victory, I receive a text or email to pray for someone going through extreme trauma and difficult circumstance. Recently, I went through a surprise surgery and found myself in a new circumstance that I had never experienced. My family has experienced various trials and trying circumstances requiring daunting warfare, but I had never had any physical trial or ordeal. As I was being taken to the surgical area I can say that I truly felt the comfort and protection of the Lion and the Lamb. I felt held and drawn into a new level of trust. I was not afraid.

Patience has never been my best trait and being commanded to a period of non-movement, I quickly realized how much I can learn from the place of, 'be still, rest, and wait.' To say that I passed with flying colors would be a far truth, yet I really did embrace God's goodness through trials. That He makes us stronger through difficulties is true. It just is! As my faith is stretched, it grows.

As I was watching the movie, *Harriett*, based on the true story of Harriett Tubman, my heart pounded as her feet flew swiftly through the woods escaping cruel captors, literally running toward freedom. I found my feet moving back and forth and calling out, "Go, go, go!" I knew the story, but the picture of her hearing God's voice and submitting completely toward His directions, gave me such joy and excitement. I realized how Harriett was born for just such a time in history. Her bravery and ability to listen to God's voice transformed this nation and saved hundreds from the horrors of slavery.

At one point she is told that her desire to save more was absolutely impossible! The fact that she had no map, no directions, and couldn't read did not dissuade her and her reply was that the Lord would show her. And He did! Time after time! Nothing could stop her and she wasn't afraid of death, as she had already experienced so many hardships that freedom's call rang louder.

After the movie, I would close my eyes and see running feet, pounding toward freedom. I felt the Lord say that we are in similar days ourselves and that He has created us for just such a time in our age and culture. Our call to set the captives free and break down the barriers of hatred and sin is here right now. Now I hear the pounding of horses' hooves and am quite convinced that He is speaking very clearly. We just need to wait, listen, and obey when we hear.

Our trials and tribulations have made us strong. They have built our faith and given us a testimony. We have been through many and various circumstances and He has prepared us for courage and obedience. These are the days spoken of long ago, and those least in society are coming first. They are flocking toward freedom, and more will come. They are advancing toward relationship, love, and freedom.

Therefore, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Nothing is too difficult for Him. Listen to the running feet and the pounding of hooves toward freedom. He's calling us into intimately hearing His perfect voice.

“My fellow believers, when it seems as though you are facing nothing but difficulties, see it as an invaluable opportunity to experience the greatest joy that you can! For you know that when your faith is tested it stirs up power within you to endure all things. And then as your endurance grows even stronger it will release perfection into every part of your being until there is nothing missing and nothing lacking.”



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Connection, Please** – by Bekah Holland

If you are anything at all like me...or most people who know other people and celebrate Christmas, right now, you are just plain old stick-a-fork-in-me DONE. I don't think I remember the last time I sat down for more than 10 minutes before bed. In fact, currently, I'm standing in my kitchen, making a pot of gumbo for my husband's holiday party, meal prepping for the rest of the week because I didn't do it on Sunday (it's currently Wednesday, by the way), on a conference call for work, while writing my (extremely) late article about the joys of marriage.

*So yeah, done.*

What's funny is, every single year I look forward to Christmas time and the beginning of a new year. I love the lights, the movies that I keep hidden until Thanksgiving and the joy that comes from giving and fresh starts. But honestly, by the time we make it past Christmas morning, I'm ready to hibernate. Way too often, I'm so busy that I forget that the person I chose to do life with 14 years ago has received about 5 minutes of my attention in the last month. And if I'm being perfectly honest with you (and myself), if I'm not careful, time with my husband can feel like just one more item on a checklist that I'm constantly failing to complete.

And just so you know that I am an equal opportunity destroyer of love and joy, my daughter yelled at me tonight that I never check to see if she's okay, and she says she is most definitely not okay...not that I asked. I of course bristled at that, reminding her of the approximately 147 questions I ask her every day, trying to find out more about her day and her life, without much success other than the perfunctory 12 year old responses of, "Fine." But my questions aren't the right ones that make her feel valued and understood. And that's on me.

I need to slow down and see what is meaningful to my husband and my kids, not just checking in from an emotional distance. At this point, I'm semi confident that the only non-neglected member of this household is our big clumsy dog Harley, who forces his way into my face regardless of my busy schedule and nudges me until I love him back.

*So how do I deal with these kinds of less than warm fuzzy self-revelations?*

Currently I'm eating my feelings, which taste a lot like Ghirardelli chocolate and sadness. However, I'm going to make some suggestions for you and me and whoever else feels like they're missing the mark during and post holidays. Stop. Just stop. I find myself busy, while everyone else is lounging on our wonderfully cozy couch. I need to join them more. Or else bring my people in from their comfy spots to be with me. **Because, people, we need connection.**

That word has been resonating in my heart for weeks. We are most definitely connected to Netflix, and Disney + (I mean, seriously), our phones, our email, social media, our work. But the more we're connected to the outside world, the less connected we seem to be with those right here in the same room (okay fine, rarely is anyone ever in the same room in my house). And maybe I'm just talking crazy. Maybe I'm the only one feeling like there isn't ever enough of me to go around and never enough time to just be with my husband and my kids because my list is never done. But just maybe I'm not alone on this island.

So here's my plan. This year, we try to make some changes in the way we do things and what things we choose to give our time to. Now I'm not talking about New Year's Resolutions. Because I hate them. They rate somewhere around laundry on my scale of things I love. So

I'm not proposing we sit down and make a list filled with things we aren't going to do and then feel guilty about not doing. Do we really need another useless list?

1. Run a marathon
2. Lose 20 lbs
3. Give up sugar (kidding-that's never been on my list)

Unless that's your thing. If it is, then you go make that list and cross off that marathon! I'll be your biggest fan, most likely while eating the junk food you gave up. But if not, how about we just pick the thing that's the most important. For me, that's connecting with my husband and my kids and the people in my inner circle. Because I know that the laundry and the dishes, the cleaning and every other inconsequential thing will still be there tomorrow, or the next day, or Thursday night when I can't stand the mess any longer.

However, we aren't promised a single extra moment, so when I look back on my life, I want to look back and know that I took advantage of the time I had. I want my husband to know that I was intentional about the time and space I made for us and our marriage. I want my kids to look back on their childhood and know that despite my mistakes and messes, I always did my best to love them in a way that made each of them feel irreplaceable, safe and understood.

*This is our year for connection.*

This is our year for doing one thing better than before; for not beating ourselves up when we forget, but just taking a deep breath, owning our humanity and shortcomings, and then trying again. And again. And again. Maybe while we're working on connecting more with the ones we love, we'll also find that we have more connection with God and even ourselves.

"Paradise has never been about a place.

It exists in moments.

In connection. In flashes across time."

Victoria Erickson

## **MARRIAGE – Date Night Fun – Black and White**

Isn't black and white a great combo? I mean, one can add a pop of color and an outfit shines with the black and white background. A black and white "affair" is where people are dressed to the nines and there's a feast and fun for all. Black type on the pages of a book invites us in to a story and beyond. And black and white cookies? Well they're the best! If you haven't tried them, please do!

For January date ideas, we're sending out black and white ideas for you to try – for fun – to get your new year started off on a fun note – with a little pop of color! Which one will you try?

**Black and white all over** – Remember that joke "What's black and white and "red" all over?" The answer is a newspaper! ("read" all over.) So why not actually purchase a local newspaper (yeah, the paper kind) and read it from cover to cover, pick a place to eat that's advertised in it, use a coupon, do the puzzle, read stories aloud to each other, and plan your entire date from the black and white print before you! How fun would that be?

**Black and white cookies** – I mentioned these above, because they are seriously one of my favorite cookies ever. We first had them in New York. They're not so fast to make, because they require icing each side with black and white icing. So buy the ingredients, make a date in the kitchen together and bake some, decorate them, then sit down for a winter movie by the fire and enjoy. Here's the recipe.

<https://www.food.com/recipe/new-york-city-black-and-white-cookies-180805>

**Black and white outfits** – You know where I'm going with this. Go shopping together, in your closet, or in the stores, and pick out a black and white outfit for a night out on the town! Find a concert to attend, a sporting event, or a fine dining establishment and dress up and go! Look your best, feel your best, and offer your best to each other.

**Black and white with a pop of color** – January is a great month for a celebration of the new year. So invite a couple or two over for a black and white affair – and ask them to bring a decoration of a solid color and a food of that same color. Add those "pops" to your décor and your table, and enjoy a night together playing a game that involves dice. (You know, those black/white cubes?)

<https://www.thespruce.com/best-dice-games-4164423>

**Black and white type** – Go to the bookstore for date night and purchase a calendar with black/white squares and fill in outings and vacations and all sorts of things in the spaces provided. Purchase a new book with black/white type and sit and read together in the coffee shop, while you sip on a dark roast or hot chocolate. Purchase a piece of dark or white chocolate and enjoy bits of that along with your hot drink. And finally, end the night praying together about those "gray" areas that you're facing this new year – decisions that you need to make – and trust him to make it as clear and black and white.

## **After 40 Years – In Sickness – by Marcy Lytle**

I'll be the first to admit it. I'm not a good nurse. You don't want me as your nurse when you're ill or hurting. I faint when you look like you're in pain, and I'm impatient and gag at the sight of blood. I am so thankful for nurses and doctors, and even more thankful that I am not one!

However, we are called to love our spouses in sickness...and in health. I cannot even imagine what people go through with spouses that are chronically ill. I have several friends in that season, and I pray for them often. But we ALL have spouses that are ill from time to time. It cramps our style, they can't help us out like they usually do, and they need attention. All of those things require us to slow down and be still and just love.

Every winter season it seems that one of us gets a sinus infection or a flulike bug, and we're down for a couple of days. He recently had this, and we actually had to stay home one night – imagine that! I'm used to getting out each evening, since I work at home, and this night we needed to stay in because he wasn't feeling well. Like I admitted above, I'm not a good nurse or a patient one.

However, that night we got out a board game. *An American Trivia* board game. We watched a Hallmark movie together. I wrapped presents in front of the fire. I even made myself a fun snack, and he sat all cozied up in a blanket on the chair. We were together, in the house, just chilling.

Some of you may be thinking, "We do that all the time!" But for me, it's hard for me to sit still and be present in the moment...at home. I enjoy being out on the town, seeing and doing and experiencing something new and fun.

- He's been with me when my mom was sick for weeks.
- He's nursed me through long nights of coughs that required shots of honey/lemon.
- He's helped calm my fears by praying for me and holding me close.
- He's listened when I just needed to unload all of the heavy cares of the day.

He's just better at loving in that way than I am, but I have to learn. I have to give in seasons sickness, as well as in health. *Always*. And in that loving and being still and noticing and caring, and stroking and settling, and praying and again loving...we move closer.

I'm so thankful that he got better, and we're back to outings again. But I'm very aware that there are many people sitting by the bed of a spouse, waiting and serving and loving, who are weary. There are some that have no good prognosis on which to hang hope, while they wait and they sit by the one who is sick. And then there's the spouse that's the one who is sick. He or she is tired of the illness, feels bad that he cannot help, and longs to feel better so he can once again be a part of the duo that lives and moves together.

The longer we live together the more opportunities we will have to serve each other in sickness AND in health. We can make each other feel worse by our impatience and harsh words (I've done that), we can feel pitiful that we are causing the other so much worry by our pain, or we can choose to pull out the board game, light the fire, and make a fun snack.



Who wants to be a shut in, or serve a sick spouse, or be an ill partner? NO ONE. EVER. But neither do I want to be the one that makes my hurting husband feel worse when he's already hurting...EVER.

I'm praying for you today, whoever you are, if part of your duo is sick. I'm praying for healing. And I'm praying that while you wait that you find the strength that comes in the waiting...from the Servant of all servants...that serves you.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## Simple Truths - Turning Points – by Erica Simmons

I have never used the holidays in my articles, but with the New Year here I thought I would use this month's article to just highlight the God-things from 2019.

God wants nothing more from us than for us to lean into Him to truly desire Him and to learn to trust Him. That's it. That's all He wants. As I look back at 2019 and all the ups and downs, I notice the last couple months are surrounded by two things: Joy and Peace.

How did I get here?

Let's take a look back at some key turning points in my walk with my Heavenly Father for the answer to that question:

I am a very analytical person and I love math, which has taught me to be very structured and organized and deliberate in finding answers to problems. Because of this, I approach my faith with the same type of mentality. I often ask God to just reveal to me the steps to this walk with Him and I will take them.

I wanted to know the solution to effective prayer, to healing, to walking this life as He wanted me to and I wanted it all in 5 simple steps so I could easily implement them. I would have to say that destroying that way of thinking was the first turning point, although it was not the first word of knowledge I received. I will explain that a little later. Finally, realizing and accepting that there was no quick reveal master road map to this place of Joy and Peace was the beginning and the end **to** Joy and Peace.

Because I was so desperate to know what I needed to do, I leaned into God in a way I had never done previously and that was continuously. I have had amazing seasons with God, I have had amazing moments with God and I have time after time drifted away from the very thing that produced those moments: *time in His presence*. The last few months of 2019 I consistently spent time with Him and this new season has been prolonged and more fruitful because of it.

Stepping up and volunteering to lead a Life Group was another significant turning point. I knew God had been preparing me for a couple of years to do this and when the opportunity arose, I stepped out in faith. This new responsibility naturally came with the task of preparing lessons for the group time together. These times turned out to be the starting points of consistently spending time with God as I prepared.

My church's goal to create an outreach list was another turning point for me this year. One of the people I had on my list was a co-worker who I was in the process developing a friendship with. She and I had always connected and over the last few years our relationship began to deepen. She shared her story with me of how she used to go to church and things just happened, and she pulled away. Because she had seen Christians do, say and live their life contrary to the word of God, I had be more conscientious of how I lived in front of her. Don't get me wrong. I take my daily life commitment to Christ very seriously, but we all have areas we let slip and can definitely do a much better job. To woo her back to God, I have found that I now stop and make the conscious choice to choose to leave areas of my life more aligned with the Word. It has been great for me and I love what God is doing in her life as well.

Lastly, (because this list could go on and on) is truly understanding how to pray. This came for me from two different books recommended by a friend. The first *Prayer* by Richard Foster,

tackled an issue with my conception about prayer, which goes back to my original confession of doing it the right way. Here is the paragraph that just broke the chains of bondage I had been living with in regards to prayer.

*The truth of the matter is, we all come to prayer with a tangled mass of motives – altruistic and selfish, merciful and hateful, loving and bitter. Frankly, this side of eternity we will never unravel the good from the bad, the pure from the impure. But what I have come to see is that God is big enough to receive us will all our mixture. We do not have to be bright, or pure, or filled with faith or anything. That is what grace means and not only are we saved by grace, we live by it as well. And we pray by it.*

I felt the tumblers in the lock align and the chains of bondage over my prayer life fall off. I can't explain it any better than that. It just made sense to me and freed me from my struggles of having to pray the perfect prayer and thinking it had to be just so, in order for God to answer it. The second book *Praying Circles around your Children*, by Mark Batterson, was so inspirational that it is now the center of a small and hopefully growing group of women getting together and praying for our children. It is one of those books that I wish I had when the boys were younger.

Now back to my earlier statement about my first word of knowledge. About two years ago I had a "rebuke the enemy show down" in my car on the way to work about a generational curse that was taking hold in my children. I will never forget the night when the Holy Spirit roused me from my sleep and it felt in my spirit like the chains of that curse were broken. That day in the car was one of the early, if not the first, turning points in learning to live a life of Joy and Peace. You see, putting the enemy in his place was critical. It required me to know the Word because that is the only thing that will cause him to flee. It will not keep him from trying to come back, and that is why we have to stay diligent. We have to continue to press into God and His Word as they are what we need to attack in battle.

So that road map I desperately wanted?

I had it the whole time.

I leaned into Him, I truly desired Him and I learned to trust Him. As Richard Foster said in the excerpt, it does not have to be perfect, but it does need to be sincere and He knows the place that we seek Him from. So as I say good-bye to a wonderfully blessed 2019, I look forward to a more fruitful 2020 because I am going to make sure it is overflowing with time in His presence.

## **Firmly Planted – Expectations** – by Dina Cavazos

Right now, this moment, is a moment of peace—a moment of blessed silence. For the moment, the weed-eaters, the dog next door, and the teenagers revving their cars are taking a break. As I sit in my peaceful garden to write this, I'm relishing this moment because there are too few of them. The sounds of the moment are water gurgling, birds chirping, wings whooshing as they fly from one feeder to another, some stopping to get a drink. I hear the seed heads of Inland Sea Oats rustling, and, strangely, a cedar wax wing pecking at the fence like a woodpecker! Perfect weather, sunny but cool—God's gift to Texas this moment in December, and I'm so grateful.

As I said, these moments are few...as I finished the last sentence the neighbor let her dog out and the blessed silence is broken. It will be cooling down soon anyway, so I'm moving inside to my new prayer room—my new favorite spot besides the garden.

In between the to-do list of life, I've been looking back on the past year and considering moments that, strung together, reveal a slice of truth for my life—like a page in a personalized book—a truth revealed by God, if I'm willing to receive it. My life, like yours, is a complex book with many pages, but in all honesty and transparency, the past year is a page filled with many moments of disappointment, anger, and resentment. Feeling betrayed and baffled, judgment crept in. In retrospect, I see how God navigated me through the maze of moments, patiently waiting for me to realize the futility of expectations and the wisdom of accepting reality. If this sounds vague, I'll say it plain and simple: I had expectations of people that weren't met—expectations that people would be "different", more like Jesus, like we're *supposed* to be. I do believe this is a problem common to Man, and that's why this seemingly negative story is in the Encouragement section!

When will I accept with grace and hope that *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?"* Jeremiah 17:9

In retrospect, I see that in one situation I invited disappointment by creating my own expectations of how God was going to work things out. Instead of leaving things entirely in his hands, knowing he works in hidden ways, I presumptuously expected "godly" people to play a part I had assigned them. In my mind I created a scenario of how God was going to answer my prayer and when it didn't happen, I blamed people for not doing what I expected. I've had many moments dwelling on something from the past—decisions made by God-loving people had devastating consequences on the lives of their long-time friends and their church. In between the major disappointments were repetitive moments of people failing to understand, not making time, constantly forgetting the important things, rejecting someone close to me, not being kind or thoughtful...missing the mark.

As I consider all these moments strung together, a slice of truth emerges. In the wrestling with negative emotions and a sense of betrayal, choosing to forgive but not feeling it, questioning and judging...my own frail humanity screams its imperfection. The reality that we all miss the mark is clear. The truth that Jesus came for this very reason is clear. He is the perfect balance of grace and truth and no human can ever achieve that, but it's easy to forget as we live our lives day by day with others. In moments of personal revelation Jesus reveals himself as real,

imparting transformational grace and truth. My expectation can only be in him, anything else will disappoint. Let's pray for each other to know him, to hear him, to abide in him.

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14*

## **Moving Forward – New Beginnings – by Pam Charro**

Another year is almost over and another is about to begin. Most, for me, have gone by in a blur, but this past year has been one new beginning after another.

I made a major decision in my personal life almost exactly a year ago which required a complete renovation, and I spent 2019 walking it out. I also started a new job last spring at a hotel which didn't actually open until a few months ago. The work involved in both areas of my life had some amazing similarities.

One of the things they had in common was both seemed to take forever! Before the hotel opened, we were all cleaners, regardless of the job we had been hired to do. I would show up every day in workout clothes and a ponytail, look around at all of the construction dust, and feel like we were never actually going to open. It seemed I would spend the rest of my life scraping paint and cleaning up dust. My personal life also appeared to be nothing but a shapeless, chaotic mess with no relief in sight. Everything seemed uncomfortable, unfamiliar, and unrewarding. It was hard, most of this past year, to dream very big.

Eventually, the hotel started having furniture brought in, and I could see things beginning to take shape. It still seemed like a distant dream to think I would not always be cleaning, but the lobby of the hotel no longer resembled a blizzard. In the same way, I started feeling some order and accomplishment in my personal life. It still seemed lonely and unfamiliar, but I felt a little bit of pride in how far I had come.

*Life was no longer completely formless.*

Another similarity between work and home was, even when we finally did open, there was still so much hard work ahead! At my job, we have gone through one transition after another in the past few months. I remember thinking several times that I just wanted to get through the year so I could feel like I knew what I was doing and things would finally start to settle down. But, here we are at the beginning of a new year, and so much still feels unstable and unfamiliar.

I have had to learn so much in the past year. Life has changed and so have I. I have felt completely lost, miserable, exhausted beyond words, without resources and without hope. I broke down sobbing while trying to write this. But the beautiful thing about a new job, a new life, and God himself, is that the rebuilding continues regardless of how I think or feel. While nothing in any area of my life has gone or turned out the way I thought it would, I am not only excited about the future; I am also more confident than ever that, with God, I can handle whatever lies ahead. Both the hotel where I work and my personal life have become beautiful works of art. I couldn't be more proud of both.

## **Best of the Mess – Weighty Comments** – by Ashley Zanella

Now that everyone's New Year's resolutions are set, and usually they are surrounding fitness or weight loss, I want to take a step back and talk about a big frustration I've experienced as part of my baby making and weight loss journey.

As I started to put on the pounds with my first pregnancy, I could tell a shift in how people would interact with me. Some would say things like, "Don't worry, the pounds fly off when you start breastfeeding," or "You still look great..." What do you mean by "still?" I knew exactly what they were talking about and why they would make these comments. But let me tell you, it was freaking CONSTANT.

Then about seven months after my second son, once the pounds started coming off, another shift in those same interactions happened. I would hear, "Oh WOW, you look great!" And "You look so skinny!!" Or "You've lost a lot of weight, I can tell! Like wow, a lot!"

Cue red face. Cue eye roll. Cue gag emoji. I still get these comments literally every single time I see certain people. It makes me grind my teeth. It truly, truly irks me. This is one of my, what Marcy calls, "whiny windows." It bugs me for so many reasons, but maybe not for the reasons you might think.

Now let me take a step back and say I do not think these people have *meant* harm by these comments. I do think they just have a little bit of an unhealthy perspective of the human body and what a healthy boundary should look like in regards to commenting on another woman's body. Because yes. Most of these comments came from other women.

Some of you may be reading this and wondering why any of those comments would cause frustration. "They were being nice, encouraging." That's okay. Some of you may be triggered right now and all frustrated right alongside me because you see where I'm coming from already. So let me share that perspective...

First, it is a natural, God-given fact that a women's body has to grow and expand to hold another life. To expand on that, if you see a pregnant woman, her body is going through unspeakable changes and every woman is affected by that differently. Some, like myself, are so sick during pregnancy that it literally takes all their energy just to go to the bathroom. Forget the hair. Forget the makeup. Forget making any of the healthy meals her body has become used to. Forget the workouts she had on lockdown. The pounds compile from there.

Second, not all women lose weight during breastfeeding. In fact many women, such as myself, have the complete opposite effect. Our body holds onto the fat because it is now fuel to producing that precious milk. That weight doesn't budge until the milk is gone.

But most importantly, why is it so acceptable for one of the first things we notice about another woman, one of the first things we feel comfortable commenting on, is her weight?



Why do we feel okay blurting out that, "Oh you'll lose that baby weight when you breastfeed?"  
When we don't actually know that to be true?

Why is it that we can look at a woman who has ALWAYS been beautiful, and tell her in admiration, now that she's lost a bit of weight, that she looks "so skinny" or be astonished with how "great" she looks because she's lost some weight?

We feel comfortable with this because it is a cultural norm. And it's a cultural norm that I want to reject. These comments may seem flattering, and I always accept them graciously. But in reality, they grind my darn gears because my fitness journey is for MY health, not for your visual pleasure. When you comment on how much weight I've lost, it just makes me feel doomed because no, I'm not done having kids. And now the next time I start packing on the pounds, I'm going to know what you really think about how I look.

Then I see my friends who are still on their weight loss journeys or maybe those that aren't in a place to prioritize that right now in their life. Or those that have health conditions that make weight loss near impossible. Or those that really just do not care. They are gorgeous to me, but I can't help but see their faces drop when you comment on my "success." Then I see my friends who battle with eating disorders, who hear these comments and are triggered again into a black hole that they just fought out of.

I didn't want to make anyone feel bad by writing this. I needed to write this because I want us all to think a little bit more the next time we go to make these kinds of comments. The way we look is not everything. The weight our friend, co-worker, or family member is losing or gaining is not about us, nor is it for us. There are many other ways to have a conversation, and it does not need to be and really should never be about their most recent body changes. Don't feel bad if you've made these comments to a loved one, just recognize how it may not be the best approach going forward.

God bless, love y'all!

## **Real Stories – This is Life – by Debra Gomez**

*I first met this couple several decades ago at church and fell in love with their entire family as we both grew our families together. In fact, their youngest daughter and our son are only one day apart. And who knew that years later, that same daughter would marry a guy, and then that guy's sister would marry our son! God did. And that's the beauty of this story Debra is sharing with you. In God's wisdom and kindness he brought our families together, and he's still bringing families together through Peter and Debra Gomez, in a whole new experience of life...*

A long-time friend of our family, Cynthia Borsellino, told me about a place called Hope Rising, when I participated in the very first 1012 Dance Upon Injustice Movement. Hope Rising is located in Brenham, Texas and we just recently became foster parents at this child placing agency, now that our own kids are all grown and gone. We live in one of the foster homes out in the country on 15 acres, with four teenage girls, four dogs, 10 horse, two goats, and 15 chickens! This is our new life...

Before moving here, we met with the director, the horse-trainer, and a board member at Hope Rising. We fell in love with the place and with the fact that they offered equine therapy with the girls. Not only that, but they help and support their house parents and the girls with trauma-informed counseling with licensed mental health professionals, an online computer school that the girls attend, a boutique with clothing and personal care items, respite caregivers! What a great Christian organization, we realized that Hope Rising is! We found out that pre-placement screenings take place so that a traumatized girl can function in a normal foster home.

*Of course, we didn't consider this new move lightly.* Plenty of fear and trepidation was involved in making such a big change after being "empty nesters" and being stuck in our ways for so long. We wondered how in the world we would be able to stay in touch with our own children and grandchildren if we moved away from them. The commitment to these girls at Hope Rising is huge, and it would be hard to go back to raising teenagers – teenagers that don't know you at all! However, Peter and I have been married for 37 years and want to spend the next 5-10 years making an eternal difference for the kingdom of God – where young people can come to know Christ and their true worth by giving them a chance to start again...on the right path.

What does our day look like at Hope Rising? It's very busy and complex. We work with caseworkers, staff members, an online virtual school and have out-of-town visits for the girls. Sometimes there are court appointments, meetings with CASA mentors, doctors' appointments, cooking, cleaning, feeding animals and giving the girls life skills. We are on the go providing fun for the girls as well, taking them to movies and to bowl, to the park, and providing all that they need (and want.)

One of our biggest challenges as a couple is communicating by staying connected to the Holy Spirit and each other. We have so many different players in these girls' lives. It is quite intimidating to talk to caseworkers, law enforcement people and attorneys. However, we've realized that they are just people like us, and that they like what they see in our home and what we are trying to do. Scheduling all of these meetings is daunting, as well as all of the other activities.

One of the most enjoyable things about our new place is the setting. It's so pretty. We started attending Cowboy Church in Brenham, where great people attend, and we have connected with a small group called a "Round Pen!" The concept of a round pen is that it is a corral with no corners, because it limits the ways and options for a horse to avoid being trained. It also focuses on the development of trust between horse and trainer. We feel like this is also how God is making us grow – forcing us to learn and serve where otherwise we may not – if we were on our own without outside pressure.

Some of the cool things we've had the privilege of experiencing are helping the girls learn to drive, visiting colleges to enlarge their horizons, helping them in court appearances, getting them to life skills' classes, teaching them cooking lessons and sharing our own lives on a personal and daily basis. This is life to us.

For all of us, God's timing is now, his wisdom is present, and his provision is always there when we step up for his kingdom. Despite how difficult it is, getting out of our comfort zones can be accomplished, and there are hidden treasures we cannot see when we do. For us, this particular ministry time is the culmination of everything we've done in our lives. We are utilizing untapped abilities. It does take humility, maturity and God's wisdom to see everyone and everything by the Spirit.

Remember us when you pray! We want these girls to truly come to know and trust their One and Only true source – Jesus!

*Financial donations to us personally are always welcome. We are running a home where we buy groceries, fix things, pay bills, and buy things for our new family. Visit our website to see our need list. We run a boutique of nice teenage (up to date!) fashionable clothing from workout wear, to coats, dresses, jeans, shoes and more...*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – All the Lights – by Marcy Lytle**

I absolutely love the holiday season, except for the fact that it goes by so quickly. I hear so many people express that same observation, every single year. And this past holiday season was no exception. I often even anticipate with dread the weeks after Christmas is over, because of the fact that it flies by and I want to savor every moment just a bit longer...

But this past December I realized that one of the biggest things I love and that I then miss when the holidays are over are the lights! I love the lights! From the time the first house on our street hangs them on the roofs or around their windows, it makes me smile. I love it when Christmas trees are lit on little town squares, with all the people gathered around to count down and watch the moment they shine! I light candles, I have battery operated lights strung or stuffed into many little Christmas objects, and we string lights around our own tree, and I sit back and...*sigh*...it's so beautiful. The lights are breathtaking and they draw me in to sit a while and just gaze at the sparkle...

And then, January 1 hits and it seems there's this mad rush to get back to the norm, put away the mess, and get the house back in order. I feel that way, as well. But I also enjoy having some of the winter décor linger a bit longer (like snowmen and even trees!) and this year, I've decided to let the lights remain for a bit longer, as well. Probably not on the outside of the house, but above the fireplace especially, I want to enjoy those flickers. I've even thought of ways to incorporate lights throughout the year so that the warmth and smiles that they bring is never extinguished!

*In February*, I think I'll add a few twinkles of red around a heart, and for sure keep candles aflame.

*In March*, it might be fun to check our lights out in the garden, so that they twinkle at sunset and usher in spring.

*In April*, why not enhance the light show around the theme of Easter, with flowers in vases, also adorned with a few twinkles?

*In May*, I'd like to purchase a few summer scented candles and place them around, to replace the pumpkins and apples and vanillas of fall/winter. Perhaps sage and rosemary and lavender scents will be present, as they burn and the fragrance fills our home.

*In June*, summer lights enjoyed in outdoor concerts on the green, especially the lights of our downtown city as they come on at night will be enjoyed!

*In July*, of course, the lights of the night that come with fireworks are a must!

*In August*, it's hot and sultry, so morning lights on the porch before it's hot might be enjoyable with him.

*In September*, the start of the fall season begins and all of the lights and flickers that we love so much will begin appearing everywhere as we start preparing for that fast and furious countdown til the end of the year once again.

Jesus called himself the Light of the World, perhaps because people are drawn to the light. No one wants to sit in darkness where things aren't visible, we end up with bruises from the unseen, and scary things come at us to whisper doom and gloom. We are born to enjoy the light, be the light, and spread the light. It's why we exist.

So if you're also a little gloomy that the holiday lights are being packed up and put away until December, why don't you too let a few of those strands linger...and purpose to let a little light shine throughout the year? I plan to, and I'm excited about it.

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

“Look at that fruitless pear tree,” he said to me. He has pointed those little trees out to me before, and each time I’ve wondered why in the world a tree would be called a fruit tree, but produce no fruit? What’s that all about?

I decided to investigate.

Fruitless pear trees have showy blooms and color but no fruit production. They are low maintenance, so they pop up all over in urban and home landscapes. They are shallow-rooted and can grow most anywhere, in any soil. Again, this makes them a popular choice for landscapes. A few can produce fruit, but they are inconsequential – and eaten by birds! These trees do not have a strong branch structure so are susceptible to wind and strong rain. In fact, those types of storms may knock them down!

But you can read all of that for yourself...if you google “fruitless pear trees.” And if you read further on these fruitless trees, you’ll find that they cause all sorts of problems. In fact, one tree can spawn hundreds of evil progeny!

*But their white flowers are so pretty!*

Reading further, it’s found that they don’t pollinate with themselves, which is why no fruit is produced, but they do pollinate everything else and cause thorny thickets that choke out the life of stately trees that we DO want! And they stink!

I had no idea!

It’s hard to get rid of a fruitless pear tree. It’s a battle and can take up to two years to win the battle with their root systems.

I don’t need to really write much and tell you how this story of the fruitless pear relates when we compare it to a fruitless life. But I’ll write my thoughts anyway, just in case...

Some say, as Christians, that we are content to just love God and be. We don’t want to be bothered with all of that fruit-producing talk about being an influencer out there to the ones that don’t know Jesus. We don’t really want to work on our grudges and bitter hearts and stinky ways. We’d rather wallow in grace like a pig in mud, and then sit in the sun and bask...in the dirt. We are perfectly fine with presenting to others around us a pretty picture of kindness and love, when it’s convenient. And we love the accolades from those looking at us when they observe our “showy flowers.”

But I’m thinking that because we were created as His offspring and made to bear fruit, that unless we actually are bearing fruit, we’re a stinky addition to the landscape around us! We’re shallow, easily toppled by storms and a prey to pecking birds.

Eewww!

I'm thinking about the fruitless pear this year and looking at my own showy flowers to see if I've succumbed to settling for the show, or if I'm cultivating for the produce.

It's a sobering thought, that fruitless pear tree...and I'm pretty sure I don't want to resemble one. So I'm thinking a little digging might be in order for the year of 2020...



## **FRESH THYME - Redefining Friendship – by Marcy Lytle**

Friends come and go in our lives, because of proximity or hurts or different seasons, or for so many other reasons. But when friends go just because we've had a set of rules that friends must follow in order to be friends, we need to rethink and reevaluate our rules. I know I'm learning this still...

Here are a few of the rules I've had over the years that are not fair when placing them on others, because everyone has different ideas and situations and life experiences that shape them into friends and how they behave:

**Friends should call often** – Who defines “often?” I've been disappointed before because friends don't call or check in, at an interval I deem friendly. Having this expectation leads to disappointment from most people, and it doesn't mean they're not a good friend. No way. It means they aren't like you.

**Friends should know how to spell your name** – I had a friend I'd known for decades and she STILL spelled my name with an “i” instead of a “y” and it made me so mad! How could she be a true friend and not know that? Many people don't think when they write and there's no evil intent or slam intended when they don't recall spelling. We can let this one go...out the door.

**Friends should reciprocate and invite you over or out** – We love to go do things, and we love to invite others. However, many, many people prefer to wait and be asked...simply because they don't know what to do or where to go. And just because they don't reciprocate doesn't mean they're not friendly. Now, if they don't reciprocate because they don't like us...well that's another story altogether.

**Friends should communicate well** – Again, definitions. We have these parameters and rules of what good communication looks like. We look at ourselves and think we're awesome communicators, and we place that mantel on our friends to be the same. If communication is our specialty, then we can find a kind way to ask them why they don't communicate better and be satisfied with their answer.

**Friends should not drop by without calling first** – I was raised with this rule of etiquette so it stands to reason that everyone else should know that, right? Nope. And just because I think that's proper doesn't make it so. Friends that drop by aren't rude. They're friendly. And we can nicely say we're busy, if that's the case...or we can invite them in and enjoy their visit!

**Friends should want to do fun things** – This is a huge one for me! However, not all friends created equal are they? Just because I enjoy festivals and walks and movies and talks, other friends may consider a perfect evening just dining over a slow meal and nice conversation. And that's it. And those are good friends, friends we need, when we're always running.

**Friends should be friends forever** – I think that “forever” word is a can of worms. Friends move away or their family and even church dynamics morph; and they have to attend to new things that crowd out old habits or time spent. That's not awful, or mean, or unfriendly. It's life.

And we can be happy when we see them and hug them, and remember the times when we were together. Still friends.

**Friends should have kids that are my kids' friends as well** – This just doesn't happen with each friend! Just because you love her and she loves you, does not mean that your daughters will be best friends! Don't place that expectation on them! I learned this the hard way...

**Friends should rejoice when you rejoice** – This is great to have friends like this, and to be a friend who does this. But sometimes, life is hard and circumstances and losses make it hard to rejoice for others. That's just reality, and it doesn't mean they're not a good friend when we win the lottery, and they aren't so thrilled. Okay, that's never happened...

**Friends should be your rock in hard times** - If friends are kind and considerate and giving in hard times, give thanks. But don't look for them to be your rock. There's only one rocking neighbor that doesn't roll...and his name is not Jones.

What rules have you silently placed on your group of friends that to be looked at, and definitions that need to be redefined? Doing so might release some of the stress you've carried on your shoulders and in your hearts for years...



# FEATURE STORY

## **FEATURE STORY – Sour Milk and Broken Globes – by Marcy Lytle**

Have you ever thrown away an empty gallon of milk into the garbage without first rinsing it out? If you have, you'll only do it once. After a while, the stench of sour milk will hit your nostrils and send you running to retrieve that sack of trash and take it out of your house! Sour milk is an awful smell, as moms of small babies know, and anyone that's smelled it knows! I did this once, and then realized that there are some containers that totally have to be rinsed before placing them in the trash can, unless that trash is immediately taken outside.

What about when you do take the time to rinse out that carton really well, smash it and discard it? It's then gone, and you make room for the brand new carton of milk as it takes its place on the refrigerator shelf! I love it when we finish that last bit of milk and are able to get rid of it, and replace it with a new one...with a brand new expiration date. Fresh milk for cereal, for baking, for drinking, for making all things good...

That simple act of discarding the old and making room for the new milk made me think about a lot of things that need to be rinsed and discarded, because they're about to sour. And what better time to look at that list than the start of a brand new year?

**Judgments:** Maybe over the past year those little verdicts we've given our friends or foes about how they acted and why they acted, and they wound up on our "naughty" list. It's time to rinse and discard.

**Attitudes:** Perhaps we've picked up cynicism or sarcasm a little too often this past year and it's starting to smell sour when we speak. It's time to rinse, *smash* and discard!

**Burdens:** Is your back a little achy from the holiday season, picking up the burdens that others carry, or carrying your own until you're about to drop? Remember that little verse that invites you to "come" if you're weary and He will give you rest? Carrying burdens we weren't meant to carry is sour milk, and it makes us sick to our stomachs. Time to rinse and discard, and rest.

**Lies:** Picked up a few thoughts about yourself last year that just aren't true? Maybe you've decided that no one loves you, you messed up too many times, or that your children will never amount to anything. Maybe you've included God in that sentiment and believe that he can't possibly love you either, because of...circumstances. It's time to make room for a new carton of "milk" and toss out the old. There's no place for the both of them.

**Bad habits:** Maybe last January you resolved to relax, scream less, quit biting your nails or quit telling tales and you didn't succeed at anything you tried. In fact, you fell in to all sorts of bad habits that you now regret. Who says that stinky milk has to stay on your shelf? Just toss it out and start all over with a new expiration date! Again and again...

I just finished a Hallmark movie where a young girl broke the town snow globe – a cardinal sin – stinky milk! She felt absolutely horrible, until the end of the movie when all that happened after

the break led her into all sorts of good things. She met the young man that owned a shop where broken things are fixed...better than new.

I don't know about you, but January is a great time for me to not only get rid of the stinky milk on my shelves, but to look forward to fresh and new cartons of milk over and over again this year. There's always life to be had when we know Jesus. He's the great fixer-upper, fresh milk, and creator of good things. We just have to be willing to toss out the old and make room for the new.

Be sure to rinse well, smash and discard...and then pop off the top of that brand new life...and drink.



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

February 2020



TIPS

## **Seven for You – Gifted** – by Marcy Lytle

We asked our panel of women to share their favorite gifts they received for Christmas. After all, Valentine's Day is this month and hopefully you will pamper yourself with a gift or receive one from a friend or spouse! But as you'll read below, even if your other half is not good at picking out a present for you, pick out one for yourself! Hope you find a treat idea among our list of our faves!

Two gifts I bought for myself! My husband is not a gift giver, so I usually pick things out myself and buy them. I had been looking at a cute Fossil bag for a while...waiting for it to go on sale. It finally did right before Christmas!! And my next gift to myself was a Smartwatch. Having a son in the military, I never know when/where I might get a call. I wanted to be able to receive that call anytime/anywhere. I am not one to carry my cell with me everywhere, so the watch gives me the convenience of seeing/answering his call quickly. This was also quite expensive; and unfortunately not on sale. However, they were my "Merry CHRISTmas" to myself!

My favorite gift this year was a new Bible. My old one was falling apart. I wanted a study Bible of some kind, and spent several weeks looking at different versions. I finally settled on the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible. And it's pretty too! That was also one of my wishes - to have a pretty cover.

<https://www.amazon.com/NIV-Cultural-Backgrounds-Study-Bible/dp/0310431581>

I always buy gifts for myself for my husband to wrap. That way I can try it on or pick something I need or want. There's an area I really like to shop in Southlake, Texas, and I timed my shopping perfectly this year. I was in Soft Surroundings the weekend after Black Friday and everything was marked down even more than usual. I found a blouse I really, really loved and what I loved more was it was only \$20.00. I wouldn't have bought it at its regular price! It was a Merry Christmas to me!

This may sound silly, but my husband gave me two new Calphalon cooking pans and I love them. I had needed them but just didn't want to go spend the money! I was very happy that he heard me saying what I needed and then went and got it for me. The other gift I am excited about is some gift cards to Alamo Drafthouse. We love going to the movies but don't seem to get there often enough. This will get us there! The last gift was really just a sentimental one but Millie (my granddaughter) made me a Christmas card and it simply said *Mery Christmas Nana I love you*. That was the best!

My favorite gift has a bit of a story behind it... In the early days of my mother's retirement she took up painting. Over 30 years ago she created a small oil painting of her living room decorated for Christmas. It was an amazingly detailed image of her beautiful mantle and Christmas tree during the holidays. It was the scene that my children grew up knowing as the place that Christmas magic happened. Several years ago, as she prepared to move into an independent living center, I became the owner of the very special picture. And every Christmas it now finds a



place of special importance among my decorations. So this Christmas, my precious daughter-in-law painted a very similar picture of our Christmas tree and mantle complete with initials on the stockings and everything just as it is, during our Christmas Eve celebrations. Now I have the painting of my mother's home that reminds us of the many wonderful memories from many years ago, near the current painting of my home, which I hope will create that Christmas magic going forward for my grandchildren as well.

This year my favorite Christmas gift was a set of soy candle votives. The smell is so light and fresh and healthy. It was an unlikely gift from my hubby. I appreciated his effort to find a product that he was unfamiliar with. I specifically asked for SOY candles. Also, I bought a little wooden nativity for myself, on sale. I was surprised how cute it was after I put it together. The candles are from Lulu Candles. The Nativity is from JOANN Fabric and Crafts.

<https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/shop/product/luxury-scented-soy-candle-8715876>

Since my husband passed away in October, I was not in a festive mood this Christmas. Besides, all my decorations were in the attic and I just couldn't ask anyone to go up there and get them. But, mostly, my heart just wasn't in it. Then a sewing forum I belong to on Facebook released a tutorial about how to make these "festive fabric trees" and about a week before Christmas I made a whole bunch of them for gifts, including this trio of different sized trees for my own table. I think they are so cute and they really cheered me up! <https://www.patternsforpirates.com/product/fabric-trees/> Anyone can join this sewing forum and then download the free pattern.

My favorite gift for Christmas was my beautiful Vera Wang purse and matching wallet from my daughter! It's everything I love in a purse; well made, roomy, several compartments to organize items I carry & stylish!

One of my favorite gifts was a cuff bracelet from ZYMBOL. We saw it at a festival and it ended up under the tree! You'll want to read the story behind the jewelry. The cuff comes in different sizes for all wrists, and it's so beautiful. I love it!

<https://www.zymbol.net/>

Both my daughter and daughter-in-law gave me a necklace. One was from Madewell, and the other from Jimani. Both are so beautifully made and I love the length, they're so fun to wear!

We travel a lot, so my husband got both of us a travel pillow that unzips, and inside is a blanket! And...he found some travel shoe bags that he gave me, as well. We are headed on vacation later in February, so these will be great!

<https://www.amazon.com/BlueHills-Premium-Airplane-Pillowcase-Backpack/dp/B07GTBS7D2>

My favorite gift I gave this Christmas were small wooden plaques I had made by an artist in Round Rock, Texas with "And I Think to Myself What a Wonderful World" written on it. I have a bigger version that she gave me a while back and every time I see it I smile and start humming

the song. For some reason, it just makes me happy. It was a big hit with family members and friends. I need to order a lot more!

## **The Dressing – Pretty in Pink – by Marcy Lytle**

Pink might be one of my least favorite colors, maybe because it used to be that girls were all dressed in pink and boys in blue. That drove me crazy! When my daughter was small, I traveled out of town to find her clothes that were NOT pink! I seriously had a problem with labels. However, I do have a few pink items in my closet that I love, now. I've outgrown my annoyance and embrace this pale hue, in moderation, as I add it with other colors.

This month we're suggesting pink purchases, and ways to pair them up with what you already have!

A pink throw – This fringed pink throw from Urban Outfitters is so comfy and cozy and pretty. It would look absolutely divine thrown over a gray or navy sofa, or chair.

<https://www.urbanoutfitters.com/shop/amped-fleece-fringe-trim-throw-blanket?category=SEARCHRESULTS&color=006>

A pink graphic tee – What's cuter this time of year than a pink tee that simply says "love?" And this tee from H&M is only \$4.99! It may not be made to last, but if you only wear a few times this season, it will be worth the five bucks! Try pairing it with jeans and a black cardigan – beautiful!

[https://www2.hm.com/en\\_us/productpage.0717490008.html](https://www2.hm.com/en_us/productpage.0717490008.html)

Pink Sneakers – Just a different color on your feet sometimes is all the pop you need! Pink sneakers from H&M for the win! These can be paired with any of your favorite skinny jeans, and try a pretty gray sweater on top, or even a navy one. Navy and pink - a great pair!

[https://www2.hm.com/en\\_us/productpage.0622966009.html](https://www2.hm.com/en_us/productpage.0622966009.html)

Pink clutch – I love this clutch with the ring handle from Nordstrom! She's wearing it with gray, but you could totally wear it with brown as well! That tortoise handle is the bomb...

<https://shop.nordstrom.com/s/bp-ring-handle-classic-clutch/5329405/full?origin=keywordsearch-personalizedsort&breadcrumb=Home%2FAI%20Results&color=pink%20blush>

Pink coat – This is the time of year to get coats on sale! This pink suede coat from Zara looks stunning with a crisp white tee underneath. That makes it great for this time of year! This is soooo pretty!

<https://www.zara.com/us/en/suede-look-coat-p02712626.html?v1=13167447&v2=1428608>

Pink blouse – This flowy blouse from JCP is pretty for February. There are lots of options for prints, but the way it's made looks soft and comfy and yet dressy. It's paired with jeans here, but a pair of white trousers would look stunning as well.

<https://www.jcpenny.com/p/ana-womens-v-neck-long-sleeve-blouse/ppr5007805226?pTmpType=regular&catId=SearchResults&searchTerm=pink+blouse&productG>

[ridView=medium&urlState=color%3Dpink%26product\\_type%3Dshirts%2B%252B%2Btops&badge=onlyatjcp&selectedSKUId=84222060042&facetSelected=color](#)

Pink cuff – I absolutely love cuff bracelets and have several, as I prefer wider bands. However, I know that so many women adore Kendra Scott jewelry. There's a pretty pink cuff bracelet that is feminine and pretty, available this season. How stunning it would look on your wrist, to dress up any outfit at all!

[https://www.google.com/search?q=pink+cuff+bracelet&rlz=1C1CHBD\\_enUS839US839&source=Inms&tbm=shop&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjPpuXdIPTmAhXEG80KHeVYDGIQ\\_AUoAXoECA0QAw&biw=1600&bih=708#spd=4768024848483075166](https://www.google.com/search?q=pink+cuff+bracelet&rlz=1C1CHBD_enUS839US839&source=Inms&tbm=shop&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjPpuXdIPTmAhXEG80KHeVYDGIQ_AUoAXoECA0QAw&biw=1600&bih=708#spd=4768024848483075166)

Maybe you're a fan or not, of pink, but I hope you consider wearing something bright and colorful to bring you cheer this month! Try adding one little accessory, a fun coat (you'll need it – on into spring), a new pair of shoes, or a bag! Smile, you are loved...

## Selah's Style – Sisters

Elizabeth, age 10, has always been drawn to athletic workout style clothes including unique sneakers or more eclectic fashion ideas. She loves to have leisure clothes as she is an avid runner. Her unique personality shines through, in her unique style. She has a huge heart for others and a willingness to serve anyhow and anywhere she can.

Abigail, age 9, has always been a fashionista. Even before she could walk she would crawl to the closet and beg for shoes. Abigail loves to dress fancy and is always decked out with accessories from jewelry, to bags, and bows. She doesn't know a stranger and has a gift of bonding with others and making them feel included and special.

Dressing up: As you see Abigail takes dressing up seriously, full velvet, tulle and glitter. Accessories include a black glitter cardigan and pink glitter ballet flats. All from The Children's Place. Elizabeth has a more laid back look on glamour with a bohemian style dress scattered with a flower print and fringe tie front. She completes her look with white sandals. Dress from Justice, sandals from Kohl's.

Twinning moment: Elizabeth and Abigail still find it fun to match. Especially when they can rep their favorite dude, dad! They went all out on this *twinspiration* with matching white canvas tennis shoes and maroon bomber jackets. T-shirt, jacket, and shoes from The Children's Place. Black leggings from Target.

Leisure: This is how you'll find Abigail and Elizabeth on a typical Saturday. They spend all week at school in uniforms, so they love to be comfy and cozy while being bold and bright. Liz has always been drawn to blue while Abby has always been drawn to pink. They found "their" colors in tie-dye crop top sweaters and coordinating leggings. Staying true to themselves, Liz completes her look with tennis shoes while Abby embraces the glitter ballet flat. Sweaters and leggings from Justice.

Abigail, the individual. Bow, earrings, bracelet, boots. Yellow floral print dress with flounce sleeves for that extra touch. With Abigail, it is all the individual pieces that make the outfit complete. She gravitates to dresses and feminine style and rocks it with confidence. Dress and boots from Kohl's

Elizabeth, the individual. Jeans, with sparkle to make them special. Ombre colored shirt with cross back, in blue of course. Black combat boots to complete the look and make it her own. This is a girl who can conquer the world. Shirt and jeans from Justice. Boots from The Children's Place.

Elizabeth and Abigail's parents are Joshua and Karissa O'Brien. Joshua works at Lockheed Martin working with the assembly of F35 fighter jets. Karissa is a financial analyst with the University of North Texas Health Science Center. In their "free" time Josh and Karissa work as children's ministers at their local church for ages birth-14. Sharing how to grow a relationship with the Lord to the next generation is a great passion of theirs. Abigail and Elizabeth also serve in ministry helping to set-up and tear down on weekdays and services and for special events. Willing to jump in wherever needed to make sure things

run smoothly for every service. In their FREE "free" time The O'Brien's love to do anything they can together as a family. Especially spending as much time as possible at Six Flags for family fun and thrills.

## **In the Kitchen – Favorites** – by Marcy Lytle

Rather than share recipes this month, I decided to share my faves in the kitchen. There are always new products that are advertised around the holidays and then we buy them, and they end up in that junk drawer – at the bottom – never to be used. Mostly, it's because they aren't that great, they are too difficult to maneuver, or time-consuming, or just odd! However, there are some things in my drawers and on my shelves that I use over and over again, because I love them! So, why not share?

**A tiny colander** – I love having a few of these for holding fruit – either in the fridge or out on the counter. And since my kitchen is orange/gray I love this tiny one for holding cuties!

[https://www.amazon.com/Calypso-Basics-08650-Durable-Colander/dp/B07FMBXKSD/ref=sr\\_1\\_10?qid=1578590030&refinements=p\\_n\\_feature\\_twenty\\_browse-bin%3A3254105011&s=kitchen&sr=1-10](https://www.amazon.com/Calypso-Basics-08650-Durable-Colander/dp/B07FMBXKSD/ref=sr_1_10?qid=1578590030&refinements=p_n_feature_twenty_browse-bin%3A3254105011&s=kitchen&sr=1-10)

**Spreaders** – I have seasonal spreaders, but I absolutely love this new set I found at World Market. The colors are fantastic, and they are heavy duty. They're great for spreading jam, or butter, or whatever! Just google and search for some you love...

**A ladybug timer** – My oven timer is never loud enough, and sometimes I just need a timer for other things. Sure, I use my phone quite often, but this ladybug – she's SO cute!

<https://www.bedbathandbeyond.com/store/product/kikkerland-reg-ladybug-kitchen-timer/1017285033>

**Tiny mitts** – A friend made these for me, but then I looked on line at christmas and found more on Etsy! They're great because they have a magnet inside, they're tiny for grabbing items from the toaster oven, and they come in such cute fabric choices!

[https://www.etsy.com/listing/629479302/ready-to-ship-2-mini-microwaveoven?ga\\_order=most\\_relevant&ga\\_search\\_type=all&ga\\_view\\_type=gallery&ga\\_search\\_query=small+oven+mitten&ref=sr\\_gallery-1-14](https://www.etsy.com/listing/629479302/ready-to-ship-2-mini-microwaveoven?ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=small+oven+mitten&ref=sr_gallery-1-14)

**A salt/pepper box** – One of my longstanding faves! Kosher salt in one side, ground pepper in the other – for cooking and pinching – and looking pretty on the counter...

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/olive+wood+salt+cellar+with+swivel+lid.do>

**Olive oil flask** – This one is from Rachel Ray's cooking collection – again orange because I like orange! It looks pretty by the stove, so much prettier than the olive oil bottles from the store. And it holds a lot! It's from Target.

<https://www.target.com/s/rachael+ray+oil+bottle>

**A tin box with a chalkboard** – This box sits in the corner on my kitchen counter and holds all those bottles like balsamic and apple cider vinegar, flavored oils, and more. And the chalkboard is our message board to each other! Check Hobby Lobby!

<https://www.hobbylobby.com/Home-Decor-Frames/Storage-Organization/Boxes-Trunks/Galvanized-Tin-Box-Set-with-Chalkboard-Labels/p/138186>

**This box!** – I've talked about this before, but this file box is from Lakeshore Collections and I have two of them in the kitchen! Inside I have all of my clippings and printed recipes organized by categories. The best!

<https://www.lakeside.com/Books--Crafts--Office-Supplies/Office-Organizers---Supplies/Blue-Chic-File-Organizer//prod2700616.jsp?fm=search>

**These pouches** – I found these magnetic pouches for the fridge at Target. I bought three and hung them in a column on the side of the fridge, mostly for holding notepads and pens. I change out notepads each month! Not sure Target has them anymore...but check Amazon.

<https://www.amazon.com/Kicode-Refrigerator-Magnet-Storage-Organizer/dp/B073GX4ZTV>

**Utensil organizer** – It doesn't take up much space, there are lots of cute options, and it holds those items I use over and over again – so it's a quick grab and a quick put away...

<https://www.kirklands.com/product/Ceramic-Utensil-Holder/224109.uts>

**The zester** – I realize a lot of people don't have one of these! I love to zest lemon and lime for dishes – and I hold it with the grate on the bottom, so I can see how much zesting is accumulating on top. Works!

[https://www.target.com/p/oxo-softworks-zester/-/A-13775733?ref=tgt\\_adv\\_XS000000&AFID=google\\_pla\\_df&fndsrc=tgtao&CPNG=PLA\\_Kitchen%2BShopping\\_Local&adgroup=SC\\_Kitchen&LID=700000001170770pgs&network=g&device=c&location=9028263&gclid=EAlaIqobChMI05W7p4X35gIVf\\_jBx2g\\_AT\\_EAkYByABEgLCzPD\\_BwE&gclidsrc=aw.ds](https://www.target.com/p/oxo-softworks-zester/-/A-13775733?ref=tgt_adv_XS000000&AFID=google_pla_df&fndsrc=tgtao&CPNG=PLA_Kitchen%2BShopping_Local&adgroup=SC_Kitchen&LID=700000001170770pgs&network=g&device=c&location=9028263&gclid=EAlaIqobChMI05W7p4X35gIVf_jBx2g_AT_EAkYByABEgLCzPD_BwE&gclidsrc=aw.ds)

What about you? What are your favorite kitchen items unique to your space, that we might like to try? Leave a comment below!



## Tried and True – Be the Gift – by Marcy Lytle

In a group of friends that we gather with every other week, we recently talked about “being the gift.” One of the friends asked, “Just what does that mean?” We were discussing how we could show up at church, at work, in life, and at home as the gift for someone. And we even talked about the characteristics that make a gift a good one! If it’s something we need or wanted, it’s a great gift. If the giver made it, we treasure it...things like that.

In a month where gifts are expected from those we love, tokens of love are hoped for, and gestures of adoration are longed for...it might be good to stop and realize that the greatest pleasure comes in not receiving...but in **being**...the gift!

To remind us all about being the gift to someone else, here are 10 tried and true ways to truly be a gift to someone else and reap all the joy, feels, and satisfaction of giving. Giving away joy and expecting nothing in return is awesome, because HE sees our hearts and HE rewards us with all good things much better than a box of chocolates...

1. **Be present** – Make eye contact, listen, genuinely hear what your kids, your spouse, or your friends saying. This requires hiding our phones...
2. **Give anonymously** – Maybe there’s someone that truly needs to know they are loved “out of the blue” – so pick up a candle and set it on her desk or have one delivered to her home. Just sign it “From someone that loves you and prays for you often.”
3. **Pray** – and then let that person know that you thought of her and prayed. Praying is awesome, but letting that person know that you prayed is even more awesome.
4. **Offer a scripture** – Actually buy a box of cards and ask God to give you an encouraging verse for someone, writ it out, and place a stamp on the envelope and mail it. Any age, any gender, any person LOVES receiving a personal note in the mail.
5. **Affirm that person** – This means just pray and ask Him to give you His eyes for that person and then encourage them with kind words. Speak them out, leave your friend a voice mail, and lift her/his spirits. You too, will be refreshed!
6. **Volunteer** – It doesn’t have to be a full weekend job where you build an entire house! Just offer to run an errand for her if you’re already at Target. If you have a free evening, see if that single mom might like a couple hours to herself and offer to watch her kids. Just say “I’m here” and offer your time for any increment that works. It doesn’t have to be an eternity...
7. **Text** – Use that phone you’re on constantly and when a thought of that friend and how nice she is, or how cute she looks, or even how tired she seemed, text her! Tell her what you’re thinking and that she’s loved.
8. **Show him** – Maybe you tell him you love him daily, but show him by doing something unusual or out of the ordinary. Surprise him with a mint on his pillow. Hand him tickets to an event and take him out, instead of waiting on him to take you out.
9. **Coffee** - Do you have an hour that you could text her and see if she can also take an hour to catch up? Just meet, sip, smile, and enjoy each other’s company. What a gift!
10. **Email** – This might be something a bit longer than a text, where you actually want to write out something to a particular person. Maybe you have an experience or story to

share, one that will encourage them like it encouraged you! An email like this, instead of a dozen junk ones, will bright up her inbox on a Monday morning!

What else can you think of to give away this month? Proverbs says whoever refreshes others will be refreshed. Sometimes, we think we have no energy or time to refresh anyone, and barely have time to refresh ourselves. However, little acts of kindness like one of the above only takes a few minutes and a redirection of a time, and we will actually find ourselves with a little skip in our steps as well!



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Add a Pearl** – by Marcy Lytle

When I was a kid, my mom started me an “add a pearl necklace” and she’d give me a new pearl on my birthday each year, and on other occasions with the hope that when I became a grown woman I’d have this full strand of pearls to wear, ones that had been collected over the years. Unfortunately, that strand of pearls was taken in a burglary the first few years of my marriage, as intruders broke in and took everything I owned in the way of jewelry. Sad story, right? It is, but the beauty is the love that my mom gave me when she started the necklace. While I’m sad that the necklace is gone, I still remember her love and the purpose behind that love.

We recently decided to do something for our grandkids that parents can do for their kids, as well. So if you’re reading and you’re a parent or a grandparent, this is a fun idea that you can start now, or any time, with the kiddos you love.

We purchased some really cute gift cards (blank ones inside, animals on the outside) and since we have three kiddos, we purchased a couple of boxes so we’d have plenty. We decided that once a month we will write each kid a personal card and send it in the mail to “add a pearl” of wisdom to their little lives. Or maybe you prefer to call it “stacking stones,” like the people did in the Old Testament to remember God’s promises. Hopefully, the kids will keep each card and in a year they’ll have 12, and if we keep going, they’ll have an entire set when they’re grown!

Inside the cards we’re writing:

- Memories of how God took care of their parents as they were growing up
- Scriptures that will encourage them at night when they’re afraid to go to sleep
- Encouragement in sports or learning when failures or losses occur
- Promises of God’s love and faithfulness always
- Stories that we make up, of kids and a lesson learned
- Real life ways that God showed up for us
- Prayers we’re praying for them
- Character qualities of their heavenly father

Each one will only take us a few minutes to write, as we are writing in their language and making it a short story they’ll want to read.

The hope is that they will look forward to their “pearl” or “stone” each month in the mail. Maybe sometimes we will add a sticker or pin in the envelope, with the card! We are only just beginning, and I don’t know if they will keep them all, take care of them, or even value what’s written inside, but I pray they will.

It’s little acts of kindness to our children and little pearls of wisdom and little stones of remembering that will serve as a big and wide foundation when they’re no longer little and small.

## **I Don't Do Teens – The Art of Cleaning – by Marcy Lytle**

If you have teens in the house, you only have them a few more years before they exit your home for college...and then for good. They will then clean their own toilets, beds, clothes and bodies, without your constant reminders. And teens can be downright dirty in the way they eat in bed, throw their clothes on the floor and leave the bathroom a wreck when trying to get ready for a date or visit with friends!

Cleaning really can be an art, something enjoyable, and it has to be taught – whether or not they completely learn it or not. If we show them the way, hopefully they'll get sick of their filth and remember that way and walk in it (we can hope!) Of course, some teens are clean freaks by nature, but most of them are not...and neither were we!

### **Here are a few ideas for teaching your teens the art of cleaning:**

First, sit down with your teens and talk about cleanliness and what is expected as long as they live under your roof. Don't belittle them or despise their filth, but rather just state the facts – if they want to be trusted, gain privileges and be helped out with gas and fun, then they will contribute to a clean house. Period.

Let them buy the cleaning products for their own bathroom and take ownership for that space. Maybe they can learn a skill of making a DIY cleaning product that's safe and effective. Perhaps they'd like to set up a caddy with their own supplies that are not yours. They might enjoy buying a specific fragrance to spray or candle to burn. Once their space is really theirs, maybe they'll keep it clean.

Teach them to use the washer/dryer and give them a day of their choice that's totally their day to wash and dry. If he's working and only is off on Monday evening, then that's the night that the washroom is clean from our own things, and open for his. Make this happen weekly, so that he can strip his bed, wash his clothes, and put everything away. If possible, provide teens with two sets of sheets, so they can switch one out for the other. Affirm them, notice their closet that's straight, thank them, and love them. Again, allow the teen their own choice of products, perhaps a wrinkle releaser, cute hangers for the closet, and suggestions of places to give and donate old clothing.

Good hygiene is a must for our teens, especially as they start to interview for jobs. Also, if they play sports and work out, smelly bodies are not attractive! Don't make them embarrassed, but shop with them the first time as they choose deodorant, shampoo, wash cloths, makeup removers, hygiene powders and other products for their faces, bodies and feet. The theme in this article is ownership. Let them choose (within a budget) their own products and provide cute caboodles or cool zipper pouches to house their personal products.

One of the best ways to train our teens in the art of cleaning is by being good stewards of our things and ourselves, as well. Sure, we will all have piles of laundry, stinky bodies, and dirty sheets on weeks where life gets crazy. But as a general rule, they need to see us try to maintain good health spiritually, physically and in the spaces where we live. We can always

offer to pitch in and help them on weeks that are busy, and hopefully they just might do the same for us when they see us under pressure.

Teens are fickle sometimes. Teens can be terrible at taking care of what they own – did I mention the inside of their cars? They will fail, they will get behind, and we'll all scream a time or two, "Clean up this mess!"

Art takes skill, time, patience and enjoyment. And so does cleaning. I hate unloading the dishwasher, and he doesn't mind it, so he often does it for me. I love ironing, as many of my friends know and wonder about, but I do! So I iron his shirts and keep our clothes buttoned on the hangers, and straight. Teens will learn by example, by patience and by giving them ownership and accolades. Yes, we all need a little "Good job" now and then...

## **An Adage a Day - Labor of Love – by Carole Gilbert**

By the time I was four years old I had composed my first poem in the form of a song. I can still remember the words and the tune. That's probably because I sang it over and over and over and, well, you get the picture but it was to the enjoyment of my grandmother and mother, or so they said. It was short and it was about love. It went, "Oh beware of the little white dove. Because he's coming for all of your love." I don't remember why I wrote this but I must've been in love with something.

Our world is filled with adages, old and new, and thoughts of all kinds about love. And we all know where true love originated. In fact, true love is what the greatest commandments from our God is all about. Jesus is asked about this in Matthew 22:35-39. He replies, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." If God says it, we should do it, especially if He commands it. And I don't have any problem loving. It's always good to be crazy in love with someone or something, somehow.

I'm a sucker for true love stories also. I'm a romantic at heart. And I remember writing the popular Elizabeth Barrett Browning phrase, "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways," on several, if not many, Valentine's days growing up. She must have been a romantic, too.

Another popular phrase this time of the year, "Love is in the air," originated from a song with the same name. It was a 1977 disco song and sung by John Paul Young. Since then it has been used as a movie and TV show episode title as well as a favorite everyday expression for that feel good feeling we have when we or someone we know is in *loooovvve*. But do you know how February became the love month or even know how February 14 became Valentine's Day?

It's February, love is in the air.

It's time to show your loved one just how much you care.

Valentine's Day was started, about 270 A.D. in Rome, by a true love story,  
From Valentinus and his love for God and God's Glory.

You see, Valentinus wouldn't bow to other gods, so off to prison he did go.

But a jailer showed compassion, and Valentinus he got to know.

The jailer told Valentinus about his daughter, Julia, and that she was born blind.

He asked Valentinus to teach her anything that came to his mind.

Being a man of knowledge, he taught her Rome's history, and arithmetic too.

He also taught her about God and everything, for her, God wanted to do.

And from the story, we know, Valentinus and Julia fell in love.

It was a love so deep, because it came from God above.

She saw beauty from his eyes, and from him felt a strength to begin.

It didn't take long for their love to grow, and for her, a love for God within.

So Valentinus prayed with her to be saved and that moment God sent her light.

Not only light in her heart but also light in her sight!

They wouldn't have long, the fourteenth was his execution date.  
They would have to rely on something like the phrase, "True love waits."  
On the Eve of his death he sent her a note,  
"Stay close to God, from your Valentine," he wrote.  
After he died, Julia planted a pink-blossomed almond tree in Rome.  
It was to keep their love growing, until together in heaven, their forever home.  
A beautiful bride she was never to be since execution took him as was known and foreseen.  
That true love story from 270 A.D., will be celebrated forever because of them on  
February fourteen.  
So on this Valentine's Day, remember who you love,  
But remember most of all our God up above.  
And an adage for you until we meet again,  
Is, "love is in the air," from the beginning to the end.



## **Tiny Living – Sunday, Sunday** – by Leyanne Enterline

Okay, all of you mamas with kiddos still living at home...

Why does Sunday morning always seem the most hectic? Since we've had kids, my hubby has worked at a church. So maybe it's the fact that I'm on my own getting everyone out the door that makes it a bit chaotic for us, and now add dogs into the mix - I'm really struggling! Is it that the devil is on guard and more ready to attack on Sundays?

Tiny living does not exclude us from the challenge. Perhaps maybe getting out the door is even more of one, since we're so jammed packed!

I'm constantly:

stubbing my toe on a dog crate...

ramming my knee into a space heater...

trying to squeeze through a door full of coats hanging on it...

moving trash and recyclables out of my way to open the pantry...

It's a bit tight!

This past Sunday was a doozy! After getting myself completely dressed and waking up the boys, I let the dogs out and fed them. Of course, I put my nice dress shoe into a pile of wet dog poop! Nice! I left that outside to deal with later and rushed back in, to change. Back inside, I have my 12-year old crying that he's wearing *high-waters* and can't go out in public like this! I think boys grow overnight!

As I'm scrambling to find something that will fit him, the other son can't find his shoe. Where do they go in a tiny space? Surely, they can't go far! The boys only have two pairs each, to eliminate space, so the shoes must be somewhere close. I remember when they were babies one of them always spit up on their nice church outfit or had a blowout that caused us to be late. Now, the bigger they are, and with us the parents, there are more people moving around and maybe more chaos than ever before!

I'm praying for all you mamas out there on a Sunday morning, parenting alone or not, living tiny or large. Sunday (and every day!) is a challenging day for some reason, and we all need all the prayers we can get...

## **A Night to Remember – Hearts on a Wire** – by Marcy Lytle

Kids can make hearts at an early age, because they're easy to draw and cut out. Kids' hearts are also easy to mold at shape, if we do so at an early age, before they're wounded and bitter adults. Family devo time this month will include talk about hearts, cutting out hearts, and hanging hearts on a wire.

**Preparation:** You'll need a wire or twine that is hung up where it can stay for a couple of weeks, like along a wall in the family room or playroom. You'll also need pink, white and red hearts cut out of construction paper, plenty to choose from while you learn. Let the kiddos cut them out. And if you can find a pack of tiny clothespins, that's ideal. If not, paperclips will do! Everyone will need a pen, crayons or a marker. Finally, hide a few hearts in the room.

The idea is to study and talk and learn, and hang hearts on the wire...like this:

Proverbs 4:23 says *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*

Place the first heart that's cut out inside an envelope and write on the front – “sealed with a kiss.” Remind kids that our hearts are sealed to Jesus and his safekeeping all of our lives...when we believe and love him with all our might. Hang up the heart...

Jeremiah 29:13 says *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

Let the kids find the hidden hearts in the room and hang them on the wire, and remind them that seeking Jesus (by reading and praying and loving) will fill us with joy like nothing else.

Psalms 51:10 says *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

Find the white hearts in the pile and hang on the wire. This heart represents purity – no anger, hurt, hatred – because Jesus creates and erases and heals when our hearts get dirty, bruised and hurt.

Proverbs 3:3-4 says *Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.*

Did you know that our hearts are tablets? We write in them God's faithfulness to us so that we remember that HE is always good and loving. Write down 2 things you're thankful for on a heart, and hang up your heart tablet.

Proverbs 17:22 says *A cheerful heart is good medicine...*

Draw a smiley face and hang your heart. And ask everyone to smile, to practice smiling, and realize and remember that it's healthy to be cheerful. When we're not cheerful, we can ask God to cheer us up.

Psalms 19:14 says *May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

If our heart is good, our words will be good. Draw an open mouth on your heart and hang it. Pray together for God to give you clean and helpful words, not nasty and mean words.

Look at your hearts on a wire often, as you pass by this month. Remember to keep your real heart pumping and alive as you love Jesus, and love others, all year long.



YOU

## Strengthening Your Core - All You Need is Love – by Marcy Lytle

You know that old song, “All you need is love...love is all you need.” And yet we know countless individuals that loved someone passionately and then left their spouses. We ourselves have loved and been hurt, and fallen “out” of love. So apparently, love is not all you need to thrive in marriage, in relationships, or even in our walk with Him.

Falling in love with someone is one of the highlights of life, isn't it? I remember when I fell in love with my husband. One night we both kept our phones off the hook (you know, those old phones that plugged into the wall) so that it could feel like we were by each other all night. We were crazy in love!

I have loved to spend time with a certain friend, only to find out she's moving or she's moving on, and she's not so interested in spending time with me. Ouch, that hurts, and though my love is still there, our relationship suffers.

Loving God seems such a given and something that should be so easy to do – if we truly believe He is good all the time. But we step in and out of that belief don't we? We love him, but we sure don't like Him when he says no or tells us to wait.

I got this bracelet for Christmas that was started by a lady that wrote the phrase “Love is all u need” using the letters right on top of each other, so that it created a symbol. You can check out their story here. I thought about that phrase all during the holiday season.  
<https://www.zymbol.net/>

With Valentine's Day upon us, love will be present in the air again. There will be proposals made, young love will be voiced, and chocolates and hearts will bring love to little kids as well as grown adults. Love is presented in so many pretty ways with rings, sweets, notes and hugs. But...wait until the day after Valentine's Day when we're disappointed that he forgot to make reservations. Or maybe we have an argument and love is the last thing we feel for that person or this kid!

Since we often have “lost that loving feeling...” (another song!), what kind of love is **all** that we need?

It's that love that lays down your life for another. That love that Jesus had, that made him willing to obey his Father's command to come down to earth and love the very people that would crucify him. That's the kind of love we all need. I realize daily how much Jesus loves me when I get angry, spout off to my husband, feel an angry thought about a friend, or just feel absolute hatred at something someone said! My kind of love is dependent on others and how they treat me and how they demonstrate love to me.

And people, as long as we live on this earth, are going to disappoint us. Love is not all we need. We need grace and mercy and compassion that *moves* us to love - period. We need a fresh experience of that love he gave to us so freely and willingly, the love that keeps on loving when we are not lovable one bit.

I think I have that kind of love for my children. They do make me mad sometimes, but because they're part of my flesh and a gift from God, and they were created out of love, they belong to me. I cherish them. I'd never want to see them suffer and hurt, if I can step in and help. But even a mom's love isn't perfect. We hover, interfere, and love too much and not with pure motives. Love isn't all we need.

I don't know where you are this February on the love scale, but if you're like me, you probably could stand to improve in your love for others. The bible says there's no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend. I'm not sure if that means literally and physically, but I'm certain it means to lay aside grievances, hurts, wounds, and judgments – all of them – so that love can run red for everyone. Laying down our lives must look like giving up our time and our possessions in order to love on others, including our spouse, our children, those we meet in social gatherings, and even the stranger on the street that flips us off because we're driving too slowly.

The heart is deceitful and wicked, except for Jesus. Because he laid down his life for us, we too can lay down our lives at his feet, and for others. I don't know how, but I know that we can. And I know that we won't do it perfectly or consistently, but that's okay.

Happy Valentine's Day as you feel his love, and extend that love to all that you know and are about to meet...

## **Upper Quadrant – Will I Know? – by Marcy Lytle**

Observing my parents as they've aged and my in-laws as well, I've wondered a few things. In talking with other women my age, it seems they are wondering too...

Will I know when I'm too old to drive and willingly give up the keys?

Will I realize that I need to keep bathing so that I'm presentable and fresh?

Will I know that my clothes are dirty and unkempt?

I sure hope so...

Will I know when I need a cane and humbly grab one instead of stumbling around?

Will I realize I need help and ask for it, without feeling like a burden to my children?

Will I know that I'm losing my hearing and seek for aid, or grumble at the table?

I hope I will...

Will I know when to call it quits and when to keep pursuing...work and activity?

Will I realize that compliments to the younger generation are better than criticism?

Will I still know to give and expect nothing in return?

I wonder...

I know that my generation observed things in the older generation and made changes...for the better, I hope. We talked more to our kids, loved our spouses better, and hopefully smiled a bit more. But then, maybe the older generation had more reasons to frown (The Depression!) and were told to marry for money (The Depression!) and didn't have skills like we do now. I also know that I've made new mistakes with my kids, ones that hopefully they will correct with their children.

It's maddening and frustrating when our elderly parents won't listen to us, won't realize they need help, and won't stop letting those words fly out of an unfiltered mouth. Can they help it? If they'd known what we know now about God and life and love, and getting rid of bitterness and not letting it take root, and working on being teachable and not stubborn, could they be different now that they're old?

We do not get to choose what ailments or shin splints we experience at the end of our race here on earth, although we can take care to stay as healthy as possible. Because of hurdles and storms and others on the race beside us, there are sure to be wounds and scrapes near the end. I can hardly bear to think about being a burden to my kids or realizing that they no longer enjoy my presence because I'm cantankerous and fragile.

We can sit and wonder all day if we are going to be able to change and be an asset and not an ass, and we still won't know. All I do know is that really want to be pliable and teachable and forgiving and loving, and I want to never stop learning and growing...and I hope that helps.

I pray for all of us in the throes of parenting our parents, a job that's not fun or pleasant or pretty. But then maybe that's a hurdle and a curve in the track that we're supposed to run so that we can become stronger and better and more loving and caring...just for them...and for those behind us.



## **Healthy Habits – Life by Chocolate – by Marcy Lytle**

We switched over from milk chocolate to dark chocolate only, a good while back. We used to take a box of Goobers (chocolate covered peanuts) with us to the theater to enjoy with our popcorn. Then we went to a chocolate factory and learned that if dark chocolate bars are a certain percentage of cacao, they are really good for your heart! At first the taste was a little bitter, but now we actually prefer the dark over the milk!

I decided to do a bit of research to find out just how healthy chocolate can be, since this is the month where chocolates are flying off the shelves and landing in our mouths!

I'm not a chocolate maker or a doctor, but here are some things I found out about chocolate from the American Heart Association, Healthline, and WebMd.

Milk chocolate contains about 10% cocoa. Cocoa is the heated version of cacao (I did not know that!) Cacao is the raw form of chocolate and the percentage in a dark chocolate bar is often printed on the paper cover. White chocolate only contains cocoa butter – no cocoa solids at all!

If we choose a milk chocolate bar versus a dark chocolate bar of the same size, we will get about the same number of calories. However, the milk chocolate bar will contain about twice the sugar.

There are some that suggest that the bigger percentage of cacao in a dark chocolate the more heart healthy benefits there are, but it's not conclusive enough to suggest downing huge amounts of that dark sweetness. Dark chocolate is loaded with compounds that do function as antioxidants. And if it does indeed lower blood pressure as some suggest, it's very slight. And dark chocolate can improve risk factors for heart disease, including lowering cholesterol. Some studies show that the flavanols in dark chocolate can help protect our skin from sun damage!

All of the above is interesting and probably worth noting, BUT it doesn't mean we can consume excess amounts of dark chocolate and call it healthy! Bummer, I know.

However, making a switch from milk to dark might be a good start as well as these other ideas when the box of candy lands in your lap or on your table:

- Enlist the help of a disciplined person in the house (or a friend) to hold you accountable for only eating one piece per day and no more!
- Eat your meal, wait a while, and see if you're still craving chocolate. Sometimes we eat it right after a meal and then feel stuffed.
- Include a few squares of the dark chocolate (70% or more) in your diet daily, until you no longer have a sweet tooth for the milk or white chocolate. It will take a while, but it will happen...
- Consider eating one square of chocolate with a few nuts, instead of an entire chocolate bar. The nuts are good for you, too!
- Drink a large glass of water before consuming chocolate. You'll feel full before you start with the first bite.

- Don't skip meals. Skipping meals cause cravings. And cravings cause indulging. And indulging causes guilt.
- Have you tried chocolate tea? Some say it satisfies the craving without the calories.
- If stress is creating the craving, take a walk, lie down, and mediate on the Word...instead.

My favorite 70% chocolate bar is by Lindt. I've tried several other brands and this particular one is creamy and tastes SO good, alongside a few peanuts or almonds. We gave up butter on our popcorn long ago, and now just plain popcorn with a few squares of dark chocolate and a few nuts really serves as a fun meal while the action plays in front of us on the big screen, and we snuggle together when the last piece is eaten...until the credits roll.

<https://recipes.sparkpeople.com/recipe-detail.asp?recipe=1954608>

## **Created for Life - Justice Found – by Ginny Hurley**

The headlines scream of lies, hidden agendas, falsified documents, and the list goes on. Crazy media scrambling for the next best story to expose someone, so that they can receive applause and be discovered, is dominating our airwaves. Our street corners and sidewalks are flowing with homeless and vulnerable people asking for handouts. Again, the list goes on. We can quickly pass by, close our eyes, or make a false judgment that we know nothing about. These are all people created in God's image, carrying within their hearts a heavenly knowledge that there is something greater.

Recently, we saw the movie about the security guard that was accused of the 1996 bombing during the Atlanta Olympics. It appeared that no one was really looking at any other perpetrator. All eyes were obsessed with Richard Jewell. Of course, if you know the story, justice was served and righteousness prevailed, but how long did it take? The toll placed on those involved was enormous.

As I was pondering these things, Isaiah 59 came to mind. Verses 14-16:

*Justice is driven away, and righteousness stands on the sidelines, for truth has stumbled in the public square and morality cannot enter. Yes, truth has disappeared and those who turn from evil become the next victim. And then He was astonished that there was no champion, not even one who would rescue the oppressed. So then His almighty power was released to deliver, and His own righteousness supported Him.*

Verses 20-21

*He will come to Zion as a Kinsman-Redeemer...*

Truly, He has done it! He has brought the One who has become sin, so we can be filled with Truth and Justice!

Real, actual, total, complete, finished FORGIVENESS has carried our pain and sorry into the Sea of Forgetfulness! When there was no champion, God sent His Champion! Now, we are filled with JUSTICE, TRUTH, and FORGIVENESS! Stories are flowing out of our prisons and jails of captives being set truly free! Transformed lives are rising up out of the ashes! Ministries for the homeless and orphans are beginning to bring Holy Spirit's love and power for the forgotten. By His Spirit living within passionate believers, God is bringing restitution and revival, and it's growing and expanding more than ever before.

Psalm 7: 10-11

*God, Your wrap-around presence is my protection and my defense. You bring victory in all who reach out for You. Righteousness is revealed every time You judge. Because of the strength of Your FORGIVENESS!*

People in politics, media, and these systems of men, are individuals with choices. The problems are huge with no one person to blame. Many called into these areas are there for great purpose. I want to support my leaders with honor, whether I agree with them or

not. I want to make a difference, so I will pray and decree the truths that I know to be real and full of life for everyone.

I do not have to fret or worry about injustice, but I can join the crowd of transformers and dive into purpose and passion. There is nothing too difficult for Him and no person too far gone. The least of the least are hearing the call. It is impossible to be excluded from His divine love and compassion. And that, my friends, is irresistible!

**Justice has been found!**

## **Life Right Now – Observing Today** – by Bethany Gomez

I wouldn't know yet, but I've heard that when you have kids of your own, you think they are simply the cutest kid(s) in the world. That is just how I feel about the students in my class. They are the cutest students in the entire school not just because of their itty bitty size, although that is one of the things that makes them so cute. But honestly, every single one of them is adorable and really sweet.

I am currently an assistant teacher in a special education preschool classroom at an elementary school in Round Rock. This is my 2<sup>nd</sup> year at this school, and I'd like to share my thoughts on my job...as I experience it each day.

I work with a lead teacher and another assistant teacher and every day is an adventure with our now, 15 students. Our lead teacher is out on maternity leave at the moment, so it is an even bigger adventure. We are literally counting down the days till she returns, with none other than a brightly colored paper chain.

I love what I do, even though it gets exhausting at times. The days are long and sometimes the weeks feel like they will never end. However, I look at the calendar and it tells me we are already half way through another school year. It shocks me every time how fast time goes by.

My schedule is a little different than all the other assistants on campus. Our classroom includes a childcare program for the teachers' kids, called "Together We Can" and I am the one that stays with the "TWC" kids, (as we call them) until they get picked up after school. I go into work at 8 and leave at 5. Due to those hours, I get a one hour lunch break. I have come to like this schedule even though my days end later than I would like. I have never had an hour lunch before and (let me tell you) it is kind of nice! I usually have the break room to myself at that hour, so it is peaceful and quiet. Sometimes, I put in my headphones and watch a show on my phone to decompress. Recently, I have taken to reading a book while I eat, since one hour is long enough to read a significant amount of a good story. I am intent on reading more this year, so any suggestions on must-reads are welcome!

If someone were to ask me what I love most about my job, I would have to say being able to help create a safe and loving environment for these little students to learn and grow in. Sometimes I worry if I am making a difference at all, but then I see one of the children coming out of their shell a little more and learning new things. Maybe I am making a difference, after all! And there is nothing better than walking into class every morning

and being greeted by several little voices, almost in unison. It gets even better when instead of a chorus of, "Hi Miss Bethany," it is mostly "Hi, Miss Befany." Some of them can't quite say the "th" sound yet and that brightens my day.

If someone were to ask me what I love least about my job, I suppose I would have to say it is the lack of friendships. I was hoping to make more good friends here like I did at my old school, but for whatever reason that has not come about. It could very well be me and my introverted tendencies. Or it could be the fact that everyone is in their own little classroom bubble (including me) with very little time to get to know one another. Don't get me wrong. Everyone I do talk to is very friendly, but that does not mean they are open to a new friendship. I feel like a little kid telling my mommy that no one wants to be my friend at school. It would be nice to have at least one true friend and to not feel so alone and unseen at work, since it is where I spend the majority of my time, but I will still try to make others feel seen and love them - no matter what.

I have come to realize that around the same time I've been feeling discouraged about my lack of friends at work, I have gained a few more friends outside of work. God has brought a few amazing women into my life. They go to my church and they are all beautiful, encouraging women of God. We are slowly getting to know each other. I already know that when I need prayer for anything they are there to offer words of encouragement and prayer. They are reminding me that I am always seen by the One that knows us all the best and loves us the most...Jesus.

A day at work, observing and learning and teaching, and then thinking and thanking and loving...I'm reminded that all of my experiences are seen and noted and led by my best Friend of all.



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – One Single Day** – by Bekah Holland

Ah, February...the month of love. Every store front from the Dollar Tree to the doctor's office is filled with hearts and flying babies sporting their weapon of choice.

I hate Valentine's Day. HATE IT! Seriously.

And that leads us to our useless info of the day portion of this show. Did you know that Valentine's Day stemmed from a Roman festival to celebrate the beginning of spring, honor the god of agriculture and fertility by pairing off women whom the men had won by lottery? Super romantic, right? Funny enough, that's not where my loveless relationship with this holiday begins. And before I delve into why I'm a love day scrooge, let me just say that if you love *love* and love this day then I will pray it rains down glitter and heart shaped balloons on you and brings you joy. You do you!

Also, full disclosure, I totally fill my kids' valentine morning with love notes about how special they are, all the candy, and all the stuff. Yes, *every* year. One year I even added a new sticky note to their door every single February day with something that I love about them. All the mush and sap. My husband gets a kiss and a reminder to take out the trash (I'm mostly kidding.)

When I was younger, I was completely caught up in the mania. In school it always felt like some kind of competition to see who got the most cards and candy and flowers, which obviously meant they were the most loved. As an adult, I realized that, to me anyway, it felt like the same popularity contest just on a more expensive scale. I felt myself basing my value and worth on some forced grand romantic gesture...and I created unrealistic expectations of my poor, unsuspecting husband, who just thought I'd like a food processor! (Actually, I really did love the food processor, and I had tossed all my roses and candlelit dinner plans out the window many years before).

Not that the cards and the words and the romance isn't nice. It is. And I love it any and every other time of year. But I decided that in my marriage, I didn't want a designated day of the year that forced us to put on a show. I wanted to think about my husband on a random Tuesday and grab his favorite candy bar on the way home.

My favorite days are ones that aren't planned, and to anyone else, they don't look like anything special. They aren't filled with candy and champagne and fancy dinners (unless candy, champagne and fancy dinners are available for delivery!) The days I feel the most loved are when I get a text from my husband in the middle of the day just to say I love you, or when he puts on a TV show that he knows I like instead of ESPN. Just the other night, we kicked the kids out (no one panic...they just went upstairs where there is more than enough entertainment) and watched a movie together on the couch. We laughed until we cried, and then we watched the gag reel and laughed some more. There wasn't anything special about our evening. But laughing together was like a huge sigh of relief. In fact, it made my whole week. It's what works for us.

I would pick staying home in stretchy pants with take-out over a night on the town 10 times out of 10. I have friends who itch to get out and ditch the kids and live big. They put on their dancing shoes and party like it's 1999. We like to party until around 9pm or so...with an obscene amount of carbs and ice cream. I've both dined out on Valentine's Day and served



people who did. I've eaten a multi-course dinner and also driven through McDonalds. We've run the gauntlet with this mandated date night.

However, I'm most content, and feel the most connected, not on a big manufactured holiday, filled with red and pink and (shudder) glitter. I feel most connected in our moments together that look and seem simple. I no longer base my value or worth as a woman, wife, lover on what happens one day during the year.

*Because it's just that....one single day.*

I would rather a hundred small moments than one big grand gesture. I'll take a sticky note on the mirror over a store bought card (I mean, I still really love a good card, but they cost as much as a #4 at Whataburger, so, priorities). And if the big hoorah is what makes you feel connected, then go big or go home (where I'll be). Just make sure those moments don't define how you gauge your relationship. All of the little moments add up to a great big love and a great big life.

"What we do every day matters more than what we do once in a while." John Gottman

## **Date Night Fun – In and Out – by Marcy Lytle**

Some like to spend big on date night. Others are overwhelmed by the cost of babysitting (for parents with young kids), eating out blows their budget, and trying to decide where to go (and deal with traffic) is not fun – one bit! This month, we thought we'd share some date night ideas on a budget for the stay at home couples, as well as the city roamer folks. Whether you stay in or go out, enjoy yourself without being overwhelmed. Just choose something from the list below and make it happen!

### **Out:**

1. Get all dressed up and get your favorite fast food, bring some fancy plates, and park on a hillside near sunset. Open the back of your car or just sit on the hood and enjoy yourselves. Take some fun pictures. After dark, get back in the car and listen to your favorite tunes.
2. Make the meal all about dessert! It won't hurt to do this ONE NIGHT. Search your area and find a good pastry, some fantastic ice cream, and great coffee. Make the three stops, and play a different game at each place.
3. The bookstore might be for you! We've mentioned this idea before, but here's a different twist. Browse the cooking section for a new cookbook on the bargain shelf! Sit down and pick out a favorite drink and dessert. Head to the store and get the ingredients, then arrive at home to make it together and enjoy...by candlelight.
4. Pick a street. Find a street in your town (or one nearby) that has lights, sights, brews and stews. Walk from one end to the other. Stop in a couple of places. Hold hands. Head home.
5. Taco Tour. Find three taco places and plan to purchase one at each restaurant. Either go in, or enjoy in the car. Play Latino music. Finally, either buy or find a place that serves churros to end your themed date.

### **In:**

1. Vintage games. Dig out the old games you haven't played in years, or if you have none – head to a place like Marshalls – that sells retro games. Plan a snack like graham crackers, strawberry cream cheese and fresh strawberries (tastes SO good!) Let your competitive streak flow!
2. Breakfast and Puzzles. Make breakfast together (even if it's evening) – your faves. Settle down in front of a jigsaw and complete it (get 100-piece). Clean up together and snuggle in for a movie.
3. Color Together. Get out the kids coloring books (or if you prefer, adult ones) and color using crayons or markers or pencils! The evening attire must include cozy socks and comfy pants, and a pizza delivered at your door!
4. On the Floor. If it's cold where you live, have a fire going and spread out a blanket and a couple of large pillows. Make milkshakes together and serve them in really cute tall glasses from the Dollar Store.
5. Irish Dancing? Yes! Move the furniture back, search on YOU TUBE for tutorials and learn to Irish dance. It's SO FUN. Enjoy Irish nachos, they're tasty and easy!

<https://www.delish.com/cooking/recipe-ideas/a51636/irish-nachos-recipe/>

## **After 40 Years – One Single Day** – by Marcy Lytle

I hadn't written my article yet, when I got an email from our writer on the other marriage article "In This Together." She expressed strong opinions about the V-Day and about how she's not a fan of celebrating one single day, but rather all year long. I LOVED what she wrote, and I know many women (and men) that feel the same way. They'd rather be purposeful all year long, remembering niceties and kind gestures every day, not just on V-Day.

I thought I'd write an article with the same title but with a different feeling towards the day of red hearts and pink roses. I do not like either of those things, by the way, but I really do love celebrating holidays of any kind, all year long. And...I also like celebrating each day. I guess you could call me selfish, self-absorbed, or self-driven...but I want to be taken out and our love to be celebrated on Valentine's Day.

The cool thing is that the writer of "In This Together" and I are super great friends, and we still are, even with our difference of opinion! And that leads me to my spin on this holiday, and others like it, where we are pushed, prodded, and pointed to all things commercial to buy and experience to make that someone feel special.

My husband and I are very different. I plan to the detail, over plan, and over stuff fun days. He goes along and enjoys each thing we do, because he's a contented man. He seriously is. He knows that I love getting out of the house and traveling and running around town, experiencing new things. And he has learned that I DO want a date night (but not flowers and roses – nope – don't like those) on Valentine's Day. And he knows that I love celebrating every single holiday that's on the calendar, with fun food, outings, and fun. That word – fun – it's important to me!

*Our differences don't keep us from enjoying life together.*

*Instead, we've learned what floats the other boat and we've jumped in for the ride...*

I grew up in a rather legalistic environment and somehow in my head I equated fun with sin. Yeah, not a fun childhood to talk about. It "seemed" that all the things I wanted to do (aside from be at church at every event) were either not proper or evil or unholy. Imagine my freedom when I finally realized at age 30 that going to movies wasn't wrong, it was a delight! And over the years, I've experienced freedom to enjoy life and not feel guilty. My husband didn't grow up that way, so he didn't have these hang-ups, but he listened when I explained and he got it.

I'm guessing that's why I long for and look forward to the very next event on the calendar. Now I don't care if we spend big and stay out late, I just want to do something FUN. Can I say it enough? FUN! And while staying home with a movie and a candy bar was fun when the kids were at home, I want to leave the house to create a different ambience and cheer!

I read the other article and smiled, because I thought...*How cool is that?* Both she and her husband relish their relationship over revelry on any given celebratory day. That's a solid marriage. And I thought about how we enjoy getting out and I do quite desire that he plan something for us to do – on THE day. And that too is a solid marriage.

A solid marriage does not mean that my marriage looks like yours, or that yours looks like mine. What it means is that communication has taken place and each knows what the other loves and is willing to give and serve, and enjoy the journey. I know that my husband loves it when I plan a birthday day surprise for him, and he doesn't want to know anything ahead of time. He loves the surprise! I, on the other hand, want him to plan but I want to know and have input and not be surprised. We are different. And when I try to change him or he tries to change me, we have a problem.

If you're staying home on Valentine's night and that's what you love doing, enjoy every minute of it. If you're lonely and have no one to celebrate and all of the hoopla has you depressed and down, call a friend or plan an outing that you ENJOY. And if you and your husband are dressed up and out dining and dancing, look around...you might see us there as well.



ENCOURAGEMENT

I've never been a planner. As a child I spent a lot of time constructing cloud pictures, taking long walks in the woods and playing with ant lions in the dirt. Each day rolled from sunrise to sunset in haphazard bliss. As a teen, idealism and searching for answers to life's big questions were intensified by the 70's culture. I was determined not to follow the status quo. Problem was, I didn't have an alternate plan. I enrolled in college but at the last moment changed to another school in another town, which changed the direction of my life forever.

How can I describe the state of my being at that time? To sum it up in two words: total confusion. I had zero confidence in myself, zero direction, zero comprehension of "the real world", zero experience. I dropped out of school because I had no idea what I wanted to do—I just knew I wanted something different. I felt empty inside and didn't know how to fill the emptiness. I met someone who filled the emptiness with everything alluring...someone different. This was the first twenty years.

The next twenty years were spent getting educated in the school of Life—all courses were mandatory, no electives in this school. Again, there was no planning ahead. During times of pain and struggle, it's enough just to get through the day. The silver lining is that this "dark night of the soul" led me to turn towards the Light. The Light came into my life and began to illuminate everything that had to go. This is where the emptiness was truly filled—not with the alluring, but with Truth. Four "unplanned" lives gave me purpose and courage. We hadn't planned them, but God did. Towards the end of this time period I began to plan—to leave.

God is gracious, full of mercy and compassion—I've seen it over and over; but he's fair and not a pushover. The next twenty years were full of regret and sorrow, but also healing and hope. The reaping of what I had sown wasn't over. There were devastating effects of the choices I'd made in ignorance, in darkness, in confusion...choices that affected my four innocent and beautiful children, and extended family. It's been a time of transformation, restoration, and consolation—a time of overwhelming thankfulness and joy because of God's goodness. I've experienced more forgiveness and grace, especially from my children, than I deserve...but that's what grace is, isn't it.

Light came in and delivered me from the darkness. That simple statement doesn't convey the complex process that began and never ends while on this earth, just as this simple story doesn't convey the complex details and timeline of our lives. I've come to know the reality of GOD WITH US. There's much I don't understand, but I believe God was working out his plans all along. I feel like a tool forged in the fire for a purpose, and I'm *planning* for the next twenty years.

Be encouraged! When you step into the Light of Christ, he begins to dispel the darkness and makes a way where there seems no way.

## Simple Truths - The Power – by Erica Simmons

As I was on the phone with a friend, I approached a 4-way stop. The person across from me was next, but they hesitated so I started to go, but then stopped and waved the rightful person with the right of way to proceed. As I was doing so, I mentioned the situation to my friend and shared with her that I was becoming the very thing I hated.

I have this thing about people not waiting their turn at stop signs.

I have always viewed it as them taking something that is not theirs, and I detest takers. So...I started taking what was someone else's to keep that someone from taking what I felt was mine.

I shared this in a prior article and shared that the root cause is from my childhood where my parents took things that were mine and gave to them to my siblings. Therefore, deep in me, I have allowed the enemy to use this root to steal away my joy - in the blink of an eye. Years ago I became aware of this and made a conscious effort to break this mentality. The initial reaction still rises up in me on occasion, but I squash it quickly. I have also begun to realize that in order to prevent it from happening...I have become what I hate.

This made me examine and identify other areas of my life where my past has led me to become someone I am less than proud of, in that area. I would like to say there were no others, but unfortunately I can't. The echoes of a father's word, words meant to hurt, words meant to demean from one of the two people who were supposed to love me unconditional. The million pieces of shattered dreams, dreams of being a wife, dreams of having a partner in life to raise the children we both so eagerly wanted. Dreams shattered by rejection and violence. These and many more come together to create the threads of fabric of a lie that became all too real to me: *I am unworthy*. This lie became the foundation upon which I would go on to build my life for many, many years.

I just finished reading a three-book series about a female detective who was working in the sex crimes division. The character is everything I love about female characters. She is strong, fierce and broken. I found I like to read series because I can follow the story of the main characters as they grow from what they are to individuals that overcome their shortcomings and limitations and become better versions of themselves.

In this particular series, the lead character discovers she is not who her parents tell her she is. Intertwined in this story is the beginning of a new relationship. She goes on the quest to discover who she is and how she ended up placed in an anonymous box for unwanted children at the age of four. In the course of doing so, she makes choices that cost her career. In the final book, she struggles to create a new life for herself that does not include being a detective, which she loved and also played a huge role in defining who she was. She does this by working toward a PI license and takes on a case that in the end reveals to another character that she too had a life that was built around lies - shattering the character's life as she knew it. In a conversation between the two, the question is asked,

“What matters, then?” “What truly matters if life is built on lies?”

In which the lead character replies, “Truth matters.”



In the beginning of the story the main character was starting to struggle with her life. At the end of the story, she was happy, truly happy, for the first time in her life.

This story depicts a perfect picture of what a life built on the lies of the enemy looks and feels like, compared to a life built on the truth of God's word. You see, the emotions of what happened to me at a 4-way stop sign had nothing to do with the action of my mother taking my hard earned money and using it to buy clothes for my brother for college. It had to do with the lies that the enemy was able to get me to build my life upon. Lies that I am not worthy, that I am less than, that I don't deserve the best, because the clothes I had to settle for were cheap clearance item clothes.

So the task ahead of me is more than not becoming what I hate at a 4-way stop, it is also about the hurt of a father's words, and the pain of rejection. I have had decisions to make, to tear down the lies of the enemy that I have built my life around and to seek truth, God's truth, about who I am. I can rebuild my life around that truth, or continue to have a life in some areas that are less than. Less than what God has for me, because He can't make me let go of the lie. I have to choose to trade it in for His truth.

"I am unworthy" is the biggest lie, and it is the foundation of so many parts of my life. For the last month, I have been looking at the life I built upon it and now I am asking myself, "Is destroying it worth it? Does it matter now? It only affects me." I would love to tell you that the answer is a resounding "Yes!" but I can't. I can say, however, that it is a very strong "Maybe," and every day it gets stronger and I know it will get to an affirmative, as I allow God's truth to do the work it does on me in so many areas of my life; transforming me.

That is the choice we all have to let God exchange our bad for His - oh so amazing - GOOD.

What choice will you make?

## **Moving Forward – Every Single Moment – by Pam Charro**

Regardless of how you feel about it, it's almost Valentine's Day again.

I know that not everyone feels the way I do, but I think it's a super fun holiday. It's a great reminder for couples to appreciate and celebrate what they have. And even though I don't have that special relationship right now, I look forward to and believe in that fun aspect of love. Roses, candy hearts, pink champagne, diamond jewelry, steak dinners with chocolate covered strawberries...so much fun!

I don't have to have it to enjoy that other people do.

But we know that love is not always fun. It's staying up all night with a sick baby, taking care of an elderly parent or spouse, working two jobs to put food on the table, driving all night to be with someone in a crisis situation. It's giving when you're exhausted and sometimes it's taking risks when there's no guarantee that anything will be understood or returned.

Love is often uncomfortable and even painful.

God knows all about the not-so-fun aspects of love.

1 John 4:10 says,  
"Now this is love:  
Not that we loved God,  
but that he loved us and sent his son as an  
atoning sacrifice for our sins."

How that was worth it to him is something we will probably never wrap our heads around until we see him face to face, but it does mean we have a Lover who is way crazier about us than we are about him. And he is excited about what he is getting out of the deal. It wasn't something he did with his hands on his hips thinking we'd darn well better appreciate it. He did it for the joy set before him. And we, in all of our imperfections and distractions, are that joy. He did all of that to win us over.

So, if, like me, you aren't getting any roses or candy hearts this year, just know that a very important someone is head over heels loopy for you and is always patiently waiting to be a little closer to you. He gave of the very deepest kind of not-fun love so that you would know what it means to be his beloved. He smiles at the thought of you. He is excited about your tomorrow.

You are treasured.

You are precious, every single moment of every single day.

You are loved.

## **Best of the Mess – Potty Progress** – by Ashley Zanella

The last few months, this page has been all about my fitness journey after having two babies. If you want to read about that, check out our archives!

This month I'm taking a sharp turn into *momville*. Specifically, I want to share the long, crazy, frustrating, exciting and rewarding journey of potty training my 2.5 year old.

When he was about 18 months old, Axel started to show signs that he wanted to use the big boy potty. He followed us in there, he'd try to pull himself up, he'd indicate when he had to go to the bathroom and started wanting his diaper changed anytime he went. I thought "Wow.... I don't know if I am ready for this.." but the more research I did suggested that it's better to start when they show signs instead of following a predetermined time that you set. I had to have been 6 months pregnant with Jaxson when we started this process. And let me tell you, there have been SO many lessons learned. So, I wanted to share those. Obviously every child is different and boys are vastly different than girls, but if I could go back and save myself some of the frustration, I would in a heartbeat.

**Lesson #1:** Be all in, or just don't. When we started, I was 100% dedicated when we were at home....but not so much when we got in the car, went to the store, the park, the gym, church or anywhere really. This ultimately led to months of confusion and frustration for my little guy. I didn't know it was causing confusion, I just knew that when we would get home and I would take his diaper off, it was like I had to retrain him. Every time. Finally, one day about 6 months in, I decided to line the car seat with towels, get a foldable potty seat and leave the diapers at home. There was a little learning curve, and I became an expert at removing the car seat cover, but the progress I had been desperate to see for months finally came. If I could go back and do it again, this is probably the biggest thing I would've considered - whether I was ready to go all in, or to wait longer before even starting.

**Lesson #2:** Stickers, stickers, stickers. When I decided to start potty training, I was flooded with all the suggestions. "My son loved M&Ms when he went potty." "Mine liked to aim at Cheerios." "Mine would get a new toy from the dollar store." You name it, I heard it. So I tried them. The M&Ms resulted in tantrums because he would just want them, forget about going potty, and then have an accident while I was trying to calm him down and explain how to get an M&M. What finally did work, was sticker charts! Pinterest has a bunch of great templates but I just made my own using a marker and paper. At first I made these huge elaborate charts that had a trail of spots for going pee, spots for going poo with the famous poo emoji all over, and spots for accident-free days. I wanted to keep him motivated with the stickers, so I would get different kinds of stickers with different fun characters. Then I started using flashcard paper for his charts so that we could take them to the store when he filled it up and trade it in for a hot wheels or Play-Doh. Almost immediately after I started using stickers, we made a huge transition from me taking him to the bathroom on a schedule, to him actively telling me he had to go potty. Or more, he'd yell "I gotta go I gotta go!"

**Lesson #3:** Be open and if anything, over communicate with childcare. When I work out or go to church, there is a team there helping care for my son. One of the biggest struggles has been him having accidents there. It wasn't until I found that sticker charts worked so well, and had the childcare workers willing to use them, that he started going accident-free there, too. It also helped that I had switched to flashcards because I could put one of the cards and a sheet of stickers in a baggie for them to use. I had to make sure to show him where the potty was and check if he needed to go before I left him there. I'd show him the stickers and remind him and the workers how he would earn a sticker. Once that consistency was there, the accidents stopped.

So here we are. He's just over 2 ½ years old and not only have the accidents almost entirely stopped, but now Axel has become super independent. He will go to the bathroom, use his stool to turn on the light, close the door, take off his pants and go potty all by himself! Now we are working on putting his pants back on by himself, and we are a very long way from when we started.

Needless to say, this mom is SO happy with his progress!

## Real Stories - Don't Forget to Play – by Dena Dyer

Carey, my husband of 25 years, is a comedian—in both the best and worst sense of the word. He makes me laugh so hard I snort; this is a good quality. However, he also has favorite jokes he has repeated—ad nauseum—for two decades.

Two. Decades.

For instance, if one of us is eating a Caesar salad, this man of mine can't help himself from grinning and quipping, "This salad is so good, I could et tu" (as in "Et tu, Brute?"). See how funny that *isn't*? I do appreciate a good joke, but not when it's repeated hundreds (maybe even thousands!) of times.

That said, I am grateful for a mate with a sense of humor. Laughter keeps us bonded in fun ways. It has also provided us with countless, priceless memories. (Even doctors say laughter is good for your body. It increases blood and oxygen flow and even works your abdominal muscles. Score!)

While pondering this topic, my friends and I came up with some ideas about ways to keep the laughs coming in a relationship:

- Play miniature golf, arcade games, or bocce ball (or just do some old-fashioned bowling).
- Do a "Goodwill" date. Each of you takes \$20 and finds the other person an outfit. Then you both must wear what the other picked out while you go to dinner.
- Send each other funny memes, texts, videos, or gifs.
- Play pranks on each other (but ONLY if you know the other person is okay with it. Some people hate to be pranked!)
- Buy your partner a funny gift. For Valentine's Day last year, I got Carey chattering teeth. He loved them and keeps them in his office!
- Be spontaneous once in a while...and not just in the bedroom. Take a road trip with no map—just drive and see where you end up.
- Watch funny movies, comedy specials, or favorite sitcoms together.
- Try not to take yourselves too seriously.
- Tease one another...up to a point. Have a code word or "look" when things get to be too personal or annoying, so you don't upset the other person.
- Buy "googly eyes" or other fun cheap items and put them in strange places. Jackson, my 15-year old, put a pair of stick-on eyes on our coffee maker, and it makes me smile every morning.

Truly, laughter lightens the heaviest load. In fact, Proverbs 17:22 (NLT) says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength." Both Carey and I are in ministry jobs, and we sometimes come home burdened. It's a real blessing to have a fun atmosphere around the house.

Our sons are young adults now, but when we do sit around the dinner table, it's a lively place, full of puns and wordplay. I hope the boys will continue to bring laughter into their own homes when they marry and have kids. I also think they've learned that it's dangerous to go too far when you're ribbing a family member. It's all good fun, until someone gets hurt--so it's wise to know when to quit.

And while it can be infuriating at times that Carey is young-at-heart (I do feel like he gets to be "Peter Pan" while I am the level-headed one), I wouldn't trade his optimism and good humor for

anything. I can tend towards negative thoughts and worrying. If left to my own devices, I'd probably drown my sorrows in tortilla chips and the latest sad movie too often, and he is good about pulling me out of my seriousness when I need it.

So I'll quote him to end my encouragement to you about playing together: getting older is inevitable; growing up isn't.

---

*This article was adapted from Dena and Carey's book, [Love at First Fight: 52 Story-Based Meditations for Married Couples](#) (Barbour). Dena Dyer is the author or co-author of ten books for women and hundreds of articles in magazines, newspapers, and websites. She lives in Texas with Carey and their sons Jordan and Jackson. She loves bargain shopping, decorating, and traveling. Find her on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#), or at her [website](#).*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – Lights Out? – by Marcy Lytle**

I walked into the bathroom early one morning in the dark and since I knew right where the switch was (behind the door), I turned it on and there was light. However, when guests come over, I have to alert them to the location of the switch – as they have walk into the dark room to find it. Also, early in the morning I walk through our den to the kitchen, only illuminated by a light over the stove that we leave on during the night. Although I know the pathway to the kitchen, it helps to have that tiny bit of light to give me shadows to see...

As I was thinking about this, I realized something cool and applicable to my spiritual walk, as well. (God is so good to speak to me practically, and I love it!)

The REASON I know how to walk through my house and into the bathroom, without stumbling or falling in the dark, is because I've walked through it a million times in the light!

It stands to reason, then, that when dark times come, or clouds roll in, or all the “power” seems blown for the moment, we don't have to fear. Not only is the LIGHT with us, he has given us light to walk in when the sun is shining, the power is full...and we have learned some important things!

What are they?

- We can memorize his word and hide it in our hearts, so that when darkness falls, we remember his mercy and grace and truth to lead us through the dark.
- We can recall just where we stepped and walked when the lights were up, so that can carefully walk without falling. We remember where things were placed and we step around those, into the room where there is light. (Thinks like trust, faith, and obedience in Him.)
- We can enter the darkness in confidence knowing that the switch to turn on the light is right where it was last time the room was dark. The Light of the World is always with us!
- We can thank Him for the tiny illumination he too leaves on to guide us through a dark place, that illumination of hope and blessings and promises and truth.

I don't ever want to go through a dark period of life without having learned how to walk in the light. But I can only learn that as I lean into Him, read his word, walk in his footsteps and place things so that there's a path between them.

Next time you wake up and walk through your house in the dark or into a dark room, give thanks for what you learned while it was light. And if you do stumble and get a bruise on your thigh from the edge of your bed (that you've hit a thousand times!) just rub your thigh and let out an “Ouch!” and keep walking toward the light.

The power never subsides, there are never blackouts, and transformers never blow – with Jesus. Any time it's dark it's only because he's calling us to remember the light and step carefully, hold his hand, and remember that HE IS GOOD.



## **FRESH THYME - Slow Down-** by Marcy Lytle

This year I'm really trying to slow down. I'm a person that doesn't require a lot of sleep, my mind constantly ticks and clicks, and sitting and doing nothing is NOT something I enjoy – at all. However, running at that pace does make me tired and cranky sometimes. I was putting on my mascara this morning and realized that I actually do slow down for some things, because it just doesn't work to hurry up the process.

For instance, you just cannot hurry when:

- Putting on mascara
- Threading a needle (does anyone do that anymore?)
- Changing a dirty diaper
- Getting across a parking lot in the rain
- Driving in traffic that's not moving

So just how do we slow down? I don't really have the answer to that question, but I have observed some of my friends that live a slower paced life and seem less stressed...and here's what I've observed. I'm trying to learn from them this year, although it's super hard. However, when I do succeed in doing one of the following things, I breathe a little slower, sigh in relief, and smile a bit more...

A slower pace of life might look like:

- Gardening for beauty and fun
- Reading a good book that's an escape, not a how-to or self-help
- Walking the dog or with a friend, not to burn calories, but to observe the sky and the trees
- Baking a loaf of bread, kneading, and waiting for that rise...
- Taking a nap in the car with just the right amount of sun warmth on the window
- Getting out of town without an agenda, with only the purpose to roam and discover
- Writing a journal for fun, to empty our hearts and our minds and remind ourselves of the Good
- Alone time or time with a friend, whichever is missing from our lives at the moment
- Listening to music that soothes, without any lyrics
- Creating something with colors or paints or wood

The song says you "can't hurry love" and "love don't come easy" and "you'll just have to wait." It's an old song by The Supremes. Loving others is also a way to slow down and enjoy life. Yes, we've all been hurt and disappointed by loving and losing. But we are created to be loved and to love, to work and to rest, and we need a good balance of it all...not just all work and no play.

This month, slow down with me. Breathe, love, create, and notice the foliage as it struggles to try and determine the season, whether to bloom or to wait. We were made to bloom, just like the trees in the dead of winter, as they wait for the consistent warm days to come out in full

array. And remember...there are no beautiful blooms without the cycle of rest being present in our lives of busyness.

## **FRESH THYME – Til the Water Runs Clear**

It's an activity we all do...multiple times in multiple ways. For me, it was this morning when I rinsed my makeup sponge. I do it every Friday, and I have to use soap and squeeze and squeeze until the water runs clear. It's also something we do when coloring our hair and applying conditioner. We wash and squeeze and let the water run through until it's clear once again. That clear water indicates all of the product is gone and out, and we are squeaky clean! It also means my sponge is clean and ready to be used again for another week...

I don't know why, but as I was squeezing the sponge this morning I thought about how unpleasant that squeeze would feel if the sponge were a living being and could speak. I'm sure it would say, "Stop, that hurts," as I squeezed again and again. Perhaps it would step away from the flow of water and demand to be put back in the drawer and left alone. Or at the very least, after a couple of squeezes, I'm betting the sponge would say, "Enough, already! I'm clean!"

However, my eyes can see when the sponge runs clear water, and I don't stop until it does!

I was thinking about how we gather dirt and filth and "extra" junk every day as we live, and it weighs us down, gets stinky and renders us unfit for good use –just like that sponge. We have to stand under the warm water of his grace and mercy and forgiveness, which actually feels great. But we also have to undergo a squeeze to get every last drop out!

For example, some days I end up fretting over the future, gathering thoughts that are lies about myself and God's view of me, soaking up disappointments in relationships and swiping every last ounce of my own strength to get through...until my sponge is super nasty! Have you had days like that?

That blending sponge or bud, or whatever you call it, is a great resource for applying makeup. However, if it's left uncleaned and unsqueezed, it can become a petri dish of bacteria and become bad for me!

Just this past weekend, I was that dirty sponge, all covered in usage. And to be honest, I'd rather not undergo a good squeeze or stand under the full force of warm water. I'd rather hibernate in the drawer, in the dark, and be left alone with my thoughts. Squeezing means pressure, and it can be tight and uncomfortable. Staying still under the water until the holder of the sponge decides that it's clean is also hard. I want to determine when that moment is that I can go back to being myself without the *cleaner* up in my business.

It's just a fact, I think, that life sprinkles lots of dust on us throughout the day, even as we are being used for good purposes. But it's also a fact, I think, that unless we let Him squeeze and wash and observe until the water runs clear, our good purposes will produce bad effects. Not only am I good for nothing to myself, but I shun others, growl at them and frown at everything, when I refuse to settle in and let the water flow and the squeeze happen – until the water runs clear.

I'm going through that squeezing process at this very moment, which isn't pleasant. Warm water alone doesn't clean a filthy sponge. The sponge has to be squeezed over and over again...until that water...runs clear.

Clear of lies, clear of mistrust, clear of disappointment, clear of hopelessness.

Analogies like this, simple but dirt makeup sponges, speak to me. I learn from the practical and God is so kind to use little everyday objects and experiences to show me His faithfulness to pursue me, whether or not I want to be pursued. He also is the good shepherd that tackles me and follows me constantly offering goodness and mercy – that clean warm water – to wash me clean. And that squeeze? It's never meant to hurt me, only to heal me.

So I'm hoping I can stand still long enough today and tomorrow and again next week, each time my heaviness and saturation of the filth of the day makes me a good candidate for the squeeze and the flow.

## **FRESH THYME – Two Months Down – by Marcy Lytle**

It's been two months now since we made our New Year's resolutions...if we made any. I rarely do, but I did decide a couple of things since the New Year began that I'm happy to say are sticking with me! One decision came after reading *One Thousand Gifts* by Ann Voskamp, and the other decision was made during a fast our church was participating in...

The book I read was written by an author that decided to write down her observation of thanks until she had 1000. I thought that was an incredible feat. And when I thought about 365 days in the coming year, if I started writing down three a day, I'd have over 1000 by the end of 2020. The best place for me to do this was in this beautiful planner I ordered from Good Housekeeping. It not only is a planner but it has photos, inspiration, recipes and more. I started with 1-2-3 on January 1 and continued from there, each morning or evening writing down little, or big, things for which I was thankful.

Honestly, it wasn't as easy or dynamic at first as I thought it would be. I found myself thanking God for obvious things like the usual – food, a good day – things we all give thanks for at least every so often. And some days if I forgot, it required me to think back about the details of that day, to stop and observe. As the days went on, I began thanking God for things he was doing in my heart and my soul, not just the external blessings I could see. It's been an awesome journey, giving thanks for three items a day, and I just penciled in #84! I look forward to looking back to see God's faithfulness as the year rolls on...

The second thing I mentioned was a fast. Some people fasted food or time from electronics or social media, but I couldn't really get into any of those. Finally, on the third week I felt like I was to fast from petitions – asking God for things. Here's why:

I pray a lot, I count it a privilege to pray for others, and an honor. However, if I'm not careful my entire prayer time is spent begging and pleading for answers and healings and provision. And when I'm done with that, I'm exhausted and don't feel like sitting and listening and praising and being. So I felt prompted to at least for one week, to only give thanks.

Boy, what a week it was! Illness, super-sized needs, a death of a friend, and so much more happened in one short week. My usual response would have been to fall on my face and moan and groan, cry and squirm while I pleaded with God for help. That's not a bad thing, but it had become my only thing.

Turning those requests into declarations of thanksgiving did something. I tasted pockets of peace that I hadn't tasted in years. Somehow, giving thanks that he is my Father – he's up there in heaven with a different perspective – and His name is hallowed and great – settled my soul. No, it wasn't a fix-all where I gave thanks the first day and I was at peace all week. It came daily as I gave thanks, and then the next day and the next.

Two months have now passed and I'm still going on the thanks in both areas – written in my planner – and spoken on my lips.

There's a reason, I'm sure, that he said "in everything give thanks" and I see that it's not only to declare our trust in Him but to experience life without constant upheaval on stormy seas. Before that phrase in that verse, it says to rejoice always and pray continually. This is His will. And later it says, "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it." Do what? Sanctify us through and through. That means we will be set apart from all else – and that includes fear.

Join me in writing down your thanks and changing your verbiage during prayer...let's see how we are transformed together. Pretty exciting stuff...



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

March 2020



TIPS



## **THE DRESSING – BAGS FOR SPRING** – by Marcy Lytle

I just recently purchased a mini bag from a new online store that I love, called Marks and Spencer. The bag is such a pretty color, bright and bold. I'm pretty sure it's last year's design but I don't care – I love it! So I thought I'd look around and see what trends in bags are prominent this season. After all, can one have too many bags? I don't think so... I enjoy changing out my purses to match my outfits, but only when my purse is organized. That makes it easy. Otherwise, it's a pain! Come with me now, and shop for your new style this coming spring season...

**The bucket bag is back!** – It's different and updated, though. Check out this one with colored piping. It's available in a couple of colors and so cute with your denim this spring. I'd choose the blue hue! It's from Zara.

<https://www.zara.com/us/en/pleated-bucket-bag-p16450510.html?v1=40050255&v2=1445798>

**Sling and Cross** – I love this crossbody canvas number from Marks and Spencer! Great color blocking for the spring/summer months!

<https://www.marksandspencer.com/us/canvas-cross-body-bag/p/000000000060371389.html>

**Mini Green** – Bright green and bright orange are in for this new season, but if bright's not your thing then this subdued green slingpack from Target might work perfectly. It's so cute and small, and would be great for outings or road trips or shopping!

<https://www.target.com/p/mini-sling-pack-wild-fable-8482-green/-/A-78443636>

**Straw Shoulder Bag** – Straw and neutral hues are one of my favorite colors/textures for spring. Check out this pretty purse from H&M at a price point that's amazing. The metal chain dresses it up!

[https://www2.hm.com/en\\_us/productpage.0853325003.html](https://www2.hm.com/en_us/productpage.0853325003.html)

**Bright and bold** – If you DO like bright colors, this orange hued circular bag might be for you! It will go with ALL of your denim, navy, white, neutrals – and add a true pop of color! Or if you don't like orange, choose the blue. So cute, from Nordstrom!

[https://shop.nordstrom.com/s/mali-lili-shania-vegan-leather-crossbody-bag/5244151/lite?origin=coordinating-5244151-0-2-PDP\\_AV.MPDP\\_AV\\_INSIZE-recbot-also\\_viewed&recs\\_placement=PDP\\_AV.MPDP\\_AV\\_INSIZE&recs\\_strategy=also\\_viewed&recs\\_source=recbot&recs\\_page\\_type=product&recs\\_seed=5240881](https://shop.nordstrom.com/s/mali-lili-shania-vegan-leather-crossbody-bag/5244151/lite?origin=coordinating-5244151-0-2-PDP_AV.MPDP_AV_INSIZE-recbot-also_viewed&recs_placement=PDP_AV.MPDP_AV_INSIZE&recs_strategy=also_viewed&recs_source=recbot&recs_page_type=product&recs_seed=5240881)

**Geometric Rattan** – I had to include another straw bag because of the price AND the details, from Amazon! I just ordered this for myself! Be sure and read about options of handles and the cute drawstring bag inside!

[https://www.amazon.com/Crossbody-Handmade-Handbag-Handbags-Beige-1/dp/B07S5ZM37R/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=straw%2Bbag&m=A37DQI88PLL947&qid=1581426259&s=merchant-items&sr=1-1&th=1](https://www.amazon.com/Crossbody-Handmade-Handbag-Handbags-Beige-1/dp/B07S5ZM37R/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=straw%2Bbag&m=A37DQI88PLL947&qid=1581426259&s=merchant-items&sr=1-1&th=1)

**Tobacco Tote** – Nothing says spring like a fun tote in a pretty spring hue, and this one from Old Navy is simply practical and cute! They even show you how to put together outfits to go with this bag – how fun is that?

<https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/product.do?pid=452479012&pcid=999&vid=1#pdp-page-content>

## Seven for You – Spring Cleaners – by Marcy Lytle

It's that time of year for preparing our homes for the next season, now that winter is coming to an end...and we want to start opening windows and breathing fresh air and enjoying sunshine that streams in to make us smile! We asked our panel of readers to share with us their favorite cleaning products and why they like them. Check out their answers and try one this season!

I have three cleaning products that are helpful. Two make cleaning easier and the last one is helpful for the budget. I like the **Libman Wonder Mop** because it is easy to ring out and the mop head is washable and/or replaceable. I love the **Swiffer duster**. It makes dusting so easy. And the third product is a **recipe** for economical laundry detergent. It's a little expensive at first, but lasts a long time. (see pic)

<https://www.walmart.com/ip/Libman-Wonder-Mop/15716680>

<https://www.walmart.com/ip/Swiffer-Dusters-Dusting-Kit-1-Handle-5-Dusters/11027564>

Most of my cleaners are basic name brands or Costco (Kirkland). However, I do use **Meyer's** in the kitchen – love their products. So many scents and natural scents too – basil, lemon verbena, and lavender for example. They are aroma-therapeutic household products and are gentle on the home and hand.

I'm an old soul so I still prefer the old cleaners like **Windex and Lysol**. They've been around and worked a long time, sort of like me. I use the Windex Original on my windows with old newspapers to keep it from streaking and the Windex Multi-surface for my kitchen countertops with a wash rag. There are a lot of new good cleaners out there but, for me, these are tried and true!

This one is easy. Laundry is **All Free and Clear** liquid, **Borax** and for stains, **Fels Naptha** bar. Dishwasher is **Finish** tablets. For everything else, it's a mix of white vinegar, Dawn dish soap and water in a sprayer. I also have one with just vinegar and water. I keep **Bar Keepers Friend** for tough kitchen jobs but it's rare. I use **Lysol wipes** to spot clean the bathrooms sometimes but I do not buy any other cleaning products.

<https://www.amazon.com/Fels-Naptha-Laundry-Stain-Remover/dp/B0063KXEIG>

<https://www.amazon.com/all-Laundry-Detergent-Sensitive-Concentrated/dp/B07GWW54HL>

Of course, I have to give props to my mom (she owns a cleaning business!) for this one, but **Dawn dish soap and vinegar** works WONDERS for the toilet and shower/bathtub! You just put half and half in a spray bottle and when you go to use it, lightly mix it, spray it on the surface, and scrub away! It's also non-toxic which I love so that I'm not breathing in any harmful chemicals while cleaning.

This DIY cleaning tool has simplified bathroom cleaning for both my husband and me. I've become more aware of harmful chemicals in a lot of pre-made products and this formula gives me peace of mind about cleaning with a little lady in the house. It includes equal parts **Dawn dish soap and White Vinegar** and is so versatile that I use it on every surface of the bathroom. You can even pour a little from the wand into the toilet bowl to swish around with your toilet brush! Feel free to add in a drop or two of your favorite essential oil to enhance the aroma!

I just started using **Dropps** for the washer, little pods delivered in an eco-friendly box. Mrs. Meyers is my choice for surface cleaners, Comet for the toilet. I just use Costco dishwasher detergent and **Bona** as a floor cleaner! I'm trying to use products that have fewer fumes and additives. With the laundry pods, they are delivered by mail every month and there is no large plastic jug to have to dispose of afterwards.

<https://www.dropps.com/>

<https://us.bona.com/home.html>

I have ordered some of the supplies (toilet cleaner) from a company called **Grove Collaborative**. They have some interesting items and I have purchased some other things from them. I basically go back to my old standby of **Bon Ami & Pine Sol**. But you can buy Mrs. Meyer's hand soap and dish soap at a lower cost. I have tried their bamboo paper towels and toilet tissue but they just don't work for me. Probably good for environment, but my husband refuses to use the toilet tissue! Washer detergent is All Free & Clear, as it doesn't irritate my husband's sensitive skin. Finish is my choice for the dishwasher, and just a small amount of dish soap water for our floors!

<https://www.grove.co/>

I recently discovered **Frey** detergent for the washer. The scent is amazing, and it is concentrated, so it only takes up a little space in a small bottle with a pump dispenser. It can be ordered online, and comes in a beautiful box. They have other products as well, including shampoo – which I love. There are two scents and both are awesome.

<https://frey.com/>

I use **Method** soap for dishes, because it comes in an orange hue and looks pretty on my counter – yes – that's important! However, it works well! And Finish is also my choice for the dishwasher. For surface cleaning, I use Lysol wipes. I'm open to trying something new, though!

**Gain** is my detergent for the wash, because it smells so good, and I love Dawn pods for the dishwasher – it's a super anti-greaser! I use **Thieves** (from Young Living) for almost everything, as a daily cleaner for the bathroom and the kitchen. It smells amazing and is made with essential oils, so I feel as if it's a healthier choice. SOS pad are great for scrubbing hard spots, and I mop our hardwood floors with **Old English!** I use Swiffer sheets for quick cleanings. The toilet? I like the Clorox toilet cleaner with bleach.

[https://www.youngliving.com/en\\_US/products/thieves-essential-oil-blend](https://www.youngliving.com/en_US/products/thieves-essential-oil-blend)

<https://www.amazon.com/Hoover-40303036-English-Cleaning-Concentrate/dp/B0002JE8UC>

## Selah's Style – Mireya & Deuce

When Mireya was born, her mom just couldn't believe that she deserved such a gift. "She is the daughter I always dreamed of," says Chelsea. Mireya is sweet, beautiful and sensitive to the feelings of others. She loves music! Her mom is constantly adding new songs to her Spotify playlist that she thinks she will like. She learns the lyrics and started matching pitch at around two years old. She also has a sassy side and is not afraid to show it.

Dominique (we call him Deuce since he has his father's name) is the cool laid back child that his parents did not know they needed. He started sleeping through the night at around eight weeks, which was when his had to go back to work. Friends and family say that they can't believe how Deuce just goes with the flow. Unlike his sister, Deuce LOVES food. He will try anything that he's given to eat and he rarely tastes a food that he does not like. Like his sister, he is sweet. He loves to wrestle, snuggle, and run around the house in his diaper.

Just a normal day watching cartoons before school! This outfit is Carter's

Reya wore this dress for her 4th birthday. She picked it out at the store all by herself. This dress is from Burlington.

The shark jacket is from Old Navy. The appeal is pretty obvious, don't you think?

Reya received this dress on her 3rd birthday as a gift. She was so excited to wear it for family pictures because it had "sleeves likeayah" - her big sister.

What a ladies' man! This was taken at our family photo shoot. The shirt is Carter's and the pants are JCPenney.

This NASA shirt was a birthday gift from my cousin who is a NASA enthusiast. Shirt is Target and pants are Carter's.

Mireya LOVES her hair and always wants to wear it down. Her mom prayed for those gorgeous curls and she's so happy she loves them as much as her mom does!

This was Reya's first day of pre-K. She loves silly poses and her elephant backpack. Skirt is from Crazy 8 and backpack is from the Waco Zoo.

Reya is a big fan of "pink tails." Her mom enjoys finding holiday themed bows and clothes and Reya never disappoints when it comes to posing. This top is from Old Navy and hair ties are from Wal Mart.

## **In the Kitchen – Popcorn, Anyone? – by Marcy Lytle**

I love popcorn, and it seems most people do! I love it plain, most of all, when we go to the theater or watch a movie at home. However, I've been trying some flavored popcorn lately, to vary up our stash that we take with us, and it's been good! I'm sharing this month some popcorn recipes you might want to include next time you and yours sit down to enjoy a wonderful film together:

### **Popcorn Salsa**

This may not “sound” good to you, but trust me – it is! The key is to use smaller popcorn kernels (not the big fluffy kind) and to keep the popcorn from getting soggy. I modified the recipe I had used before, and came up with a combo that works. And yes, you eat it with tortilla chips!

- 1 quart freshly popped popcorn
- Diced peppers (green, yellow, red)
- Diced celery
- Chopped cilantro
- Pepitas
- Himalayan pink salt, wet with lime juice

Stir all ingredients together, then sprinkle with the wet salt – just pinch and drop it in – then toss gently.

### **Nutty Bites**

I didn't quite get the consistency right when I made the mixture, but after it sat a while, the popcorn dried and we were able to enjoy. The flavors were delicious, and it's quite rich! Enjoy...

- 1 quart freshly popped popcorn
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ½ cup whole, shelled pistachios
- ½ cup toasted flaked almonds
- Few drops of almond extract

Dissolve the sugar in a heavy bottomed pan with 2/3 c water over gentle heat, stirring. When sugar melts, bring to a boil and cook 3 minutes or until a light syrup as formed (Mine didn't form at 3 minutes, so this may take a bit longer). Remove from heat and stir in the nuts and almond extract. Let cool slightly. Gently stir in the popcorn and let cool a bit before eating.

### **Chocolate Peanut Popcorn**

This mixture is SO TASTY but can be messy unless the chocolate is allowed to harden. I even put the mixture in the fridge and that worked well!

- 2 T vegetable oil
- 1/3 cup popcorn kernels
- 2 T unsalted butter
- ½ cup toffee chips
- ½ cup honey roasted peanuts
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips

Combine the oil and 1 kernel in heavy pot over high heat, cover. When it pops, add the rest of the kernels, partially cover and cook, shaking the pot – until you no longer hear popping. Remove from heat and spread the popcorn on a baking sheet.

In same pot, melt the butter over medium heat and add the toffee chips and peanuts, stirring about 2 minutes. Pour over the popcorn, use rubber spatula to toss and evenly coat.

Put chocolate chips in microwave safe bowl and microwave at 30 sec intervals, stirring, til melted. Dip a whisk in the melted chocolate and drizzle over popcorn. Let harden before serving.

I have this cookbook called *The Hoppin and Poppin Popcorn Cookbook* that has so many recipes for popcorn – some that look amazing – and some I still haven't been willing to try! However, we've begun branching out with popcorn and have found it to be so versatile and flavorful when combined with other ingredients! Happy popping!

### **Dill Popcorn**

I love the flavor of dill and used to get a huge dill pickle to enjoy with theater popcorn. Now, we pop our popcorn at home and take it with us to the theater in big ziplock bags. This tasty flavor combo gives the zing of the pickle and the flavor of the dill...try it!

- 1 T sea salt
- 1 ½ tsp dried dill
- ½ t coriander
- ¾ t garlic powder
- ½ t light mustard seeds
- ½ t onion powder
- 1 t dill seed
- ½ t citric acid (found it in the pickling ingredients at the store)

Mix all of the spices together in a bowl and just press down on the seeds as you mix. (Or you can pulse together in a spice grinder)

Spray your popcorn lightly with cooking spray or butter. Sprinkle the mix over top and toss.

Enjoy!

## **Tried and True – Trays!** – by Marcy Lytle

I recently read an article and watched a video about how to use trays for decorating in your house! I loved it and was hooked from the get-go. I realized I had some trays I could use, and that I wanted to purchase a few more, and then set them for styling, organizing and decorating. They work and they're a fairly inexpensive way to re-do and up-do a room!

Here are a few ideas of how to use trays on your tables or shelves or counters, for a tiny little spark of something new this spring:

**In a corner** – In the kitchen, try arranging 3 large glass jars with neutral ingredients like pasta, popcorn or granola, and then place lemons or oranges for a final touch. This tray I found at Target on clearance, and I love the simplicity yet prettiness of it!

**Behind the sofa** – We recently moved a table to right behind our sofa and I placed this tray I already had in the center, again with three items. Three is a good number for a grouping. This tray is from Nadeau. They have the coolest accessories.

<https://www.furniturewithasoul.com/austin/>

**By the coffee pot** – This tiny tray is from the dollar store and holds his morning mug and honey. Looks cute, and stays so neat!

**On top of the fridge** – I found these trays at Party City for \$3.99 each and use them for when we want to eat on our laps. They hold a couple of small plates and a drink and being plain white, I can dress them up with all colors of napkins! We just store them on the top of the fridge until we need them!

<https://www.partycity.com/white-plastic-rectangular-platter-685380.html>

**By the stove** – I found this long tray at Marshalls and use it to house my olive oil and cooking utensils. It looks so pretty sitting there, and it's easy to move to the other side, should I need the counter space.

**Against a wall** – I have this large tray, cutting board, cheese board – whatever you want to call it. It's for décor against the wall, and we use it as a big dessert board when hosting guests for a party! Works great!

**Tiers of trays** – This cute cart is also from Marshalls and it has been a dream! The top tray is for veggies and fruit, the middle and bottom to house a few appliances so that my pantry shelves are free.

[https://www.marshalls.com/us/store/shop/?\\_dyncharset=utf-8&initSubmit=true&Ntt=cart&qfh\\_sch=Search](https://www.marshalls.com/us/store/shop/?_dyncharset=utf-8&initSubmit=true&Ntt=cart&qfh_sch=Search)

**As a base** – This is another board I had, and I'm using it as a tray to hold a vase, a succulent, and a candle. I love all the wood accents in the kitchen that using wood trays and boards bring!



See what trays you already have, shop around for a few new ones, and start organizing and decorating. See what you can do to bring a little newness to your space that makes you smile...



HOME

## **PRACTICAL PARENTING – YOUR SIDEWALKS** – by Marcy Lytle

We recently attended a funeral and the priest spoke about paths. It was an unusual topic for a funeral, so I thought, but I was intrigued – because I like unusual! He mentioned a high school in our area that waited to lay its sidewalks when the school was built, until the crew observed how the students and faculty walked and the paths they took. What an interesting concept!

After well-worn trails were visible, the contractors came along and laid the sidewalks and the paths were set. And as the school grew and rains poured and mud appeared, the sidewalks were widened to accommodate the growth.

His reason for this story was to say that we all lay paths in life. As parents, our kiddos watch and see the paths we walk.

- They see if we walk to a place of solitude and drop to our knees in worship and prayer, or walk outside to shake our fists in the air.
- They see if we run to spread rumors when we get a phone call about those people and what they did or we walk in the sunshine and speak words of blessing.
- They see if we are diligent to make a pathway toward holiness by our attitudes and actions, or if we succumb to dark paths where no one can see us.
- They see if we walk to a neighbor's aid when in need or walk to shut our blinds so we can't see.
- They see the places we frequent the most, for self-help or giving selflessly.
- They see the roads we travel to get to a place of happiness and peace, through external pleasures or internal worship and praise.
- They see how often we invite another to walk the same sidewalks we walk, as we place our arms around them, or whether we narrow our steps so no one can join...

It's daunting isn't it? Our kiddos, from the time they can open their eyes and recognize our faces, start following us. Babies follow our paths across the room and smile when we reenter their vision again. Toddlers watch our paths out doors and across streets and run after us, as we insist that they hold our hands and be careful and look before crossing. As long as our kids live under our roofs, they will see the sidewalks and paths we've laid by walking in consistency to the places and spaces we go.

I have thought about that sermon for a few days now, and the visual of students walking and taking paths, and then the concrete being laid, has stuck with me. It needs to stick with all of us as parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. We need to think about why we cross through that piece of land over there, under those trees and around that barrier, to get to our destination. We need to see if there are shorter and safer routes to peace and happiness that will bring life and purpose to those watching us. And by all means, we need to widen our paths to include others so that they don't have to walk in the mud when it rains.

Where do your sidewalks lead? Why do you walk that direction? Look behind you, because they're watching and waiting and deciding whether or not they want to walk on those paths or not...depending on where they lead and how you appear when you arrive.

And if you have this crazy maze of trails and broken concrete over which you've walked for years that you'd rather your kids not experience, then start walking straighter and taller and toward life and peace. You still have time to redirect their paths, as you redirect yours...

Proverbs 3:5, 6

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.*

## **I Don't Do Teens – Their Language** – by Marcy Lytle

You know that book *5 Love Languages* – it's so popular for couples. But there are also languages our teens speak that we can learn, if we notice, pray and notice some more. Their body language, facial expressions, words they say or don't say, and their actions all are speaking loudly. Sometimes it's deafening and we want to just run away and hide, but more often than not they're crying out for someone to understand their language...

**Eye rolling** – Pretty sure this might be the most common facial expression our teens give us, either in our presence or when they walk away. It's saying, "This is dumb and so are you," more or less. Do we let it slide or say something? It's a good time to talk about respect. While it's true that they can still give us eye rolls in their minds, it's helpful to have a conversation about that attitude. Use non-accusatory language and never attack your teen's character, but ask them and listen to their answer, about why they are giving you the roll.

**Lip biting** – Little kids often bite their lips when they're nervous, and that emotion is still there in their teens. If we see nervousness displayed in any way, before a test, a date or prior to a performance or a game – we can stop and pray peace over them. Speak scripture and give them hope, and remind them that He is always near, and so are you.

**Patterns of attitude** – Hopefully we are not too busy or focused on our own work or phone or life to see patterns in our teens. If they always cop an attitude after being with a particular peer, we can sit down and ask why. If he's moody and rude every morning, maybe we need to check and look at his sleep patterns and time that he's actually sleeping. If she's defiant every time we insist on a clean room, we need to have a talk and discuss ways to change. Patterns are telling...

**Smart mouth** – Our reaction to this might be a desire to scream or demean or threaten something crazy, but gentle correction is always a good option. I read in a Focus on the Family article that one mom says, "You need to circle 'round the airport and land that plane again," when her teen talks back. A soft answer turns away wrath, is what the Good Book says. So we can try it, and pray, and try it again.

**Boredom and listlessness** – Teens often just hang around and become grumblers and complainers, often because they want to do something, go somewhere or figure out their purpose. It's NOT true that we need to back off from our teens just because they're not kiddos anymore. Invite him/her to go with you to plan a meal at the store, to ride a bike, or to watch a show. Make eye contact and truly enjoy their presence, not using time together to correct or instruct. Just hang with them.

**Stammering or talking too much** – Often this signals lying from our teens. We need to take notice the first time this occurs. If our kids are lying, they're either disobeying and/or afraid to tell us the truth. It's probably a given that all kids will lie at some point, to their parents. They will test the water to see how deep they can go. We need to be aware and care, and get to the root of why they feel the need to lie. And we need to stay tuned to really hear what they're saying and why they're doing what they do.

**Defiant arm crossing** – This is a scary one, isn't it? When our kids are so angry or so frustrated with our parenting that they stand close in defense, as if they're going to strike, it's not an easy situation to handle. Rather than standing and shaking a finger in their face, we too need to gather our senses and calm down before correcting. Maybe time apart needs to take place so thoughts can be collected, and arms can then unfold and embrace.

All of the above can get out of control quickly in our teens. And teens try parents' patience, for sure. They give us gray hairs and sour stomachs. Some teens need help from outside influences like teachers, counselors or pastors, because they just do. Let them seek that help, and don't feel bad that you can't solve all of their problems. Some teens respond to quiet correction and reasoning, others have to suffer consequences. All teens are different.

However, the one way we parents can remain consistent is by praying, observing, communication and loving well, even when he slams the door or she stomps away. It's hard, and we too need the support of other friends, praying friends, and our loving heavenly Father. He really does care, and once we take their body language concerns to Him, he's promised to love them and pursue them with his goodness and mercy – all the days of their lives – when we offer them to Him. It's one of the hardest parts of parenting – raising teens to mature adults. And it's not up to us to be perfect, their best friend, or to know just what to do in every situation.

Ease up on yourself, breathe deep, and let a long sigh...and lift your own eyes to the sky. He's listening and He cares.

## **An Adage a Day - The Wildflowers of My Youth** – by Carole Gilbert

When I started this column last September, “Pretty is as pretty does,” was one of the proverbs listed in the comments when you were asked to share an adage, saying, proverb, or quote you liked. This proverb has been around since the 14th century and started in the version of “Handsome is as handsome does” and we all know the version made famous by Forrest Gump, “Stupid is as stupid does.” I can just hear him say it, with the emphasis on the words, “is” and “does.”

Another one was, “Beauty is only skin deep.” This proverb was first written in a poem by Thomas Overbury around 1613 titled, *A Wife*. The poem stated, “All the carnal beauty of my wife is but skin-deep.” In this poem he describes what he feels a man should expect from his wife. Unfortunately, especially for him, his poem was not well received and is even attributed largely in his murder shortly thereafter. Wow, those were the times!

These two go hand in hand. They both refer to what you see is not always what is real or true. The true characteristics of a person are revealed by their actions from the heart. In other words, we aren't to judge a book by its cover but look to the inside for its real value. These are also the topic for this month, along with one of my favorites, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”

This phrase has been around in some way or another since the 3rd century B.C. but it was first used as the way we know it and written in 1878 by author Margaret Wolfe Hungerford in her book, *Molly Bawn*. It basically means we're all different and we all see things differently. If we could only let each other have our own perceptions and be respectful of them, then we might see some things differently ourselves. I find it interesting how these idioms, adages, proverbs, and quotes go on through the ages. They might be changed a little depending on the culture, but the meaning remains basically the same.

I, myself, learned these firsthand together in a very odd way. I had a beautiful flower garden when I was little girl and I would go and sit and be like *Ferdinand, the Bull*, and just smell the flowers. Unfortunately, not everyone thought my garden was pretty. You see, my flower garden was actually a bunch of flowering weeds that had grown up around a pile of bricks.

We lived way out in the country so no one cared about the bricks but some did care about my flowering weeds! Remember, beauty is in the eye of the beholder and it was all very simple to me. Those flowers were beautiful, they were mine and they weren't to be picked! And like the proverb, “Pretty is as pretty does,” my “prettiness” was ready to come out when someone got close to picking my flowers.

Our neighbors had a cousin who wanted nothing more than to pick my flowers every time she came to visit. She didn't want to pick them to put in a vase. She wanted to pick them to throw on the ground and make me mad. The one time I decided to stop her I came up behind her and raised my hand to slap her on the back as hard as I could. Of course, my mom was in the doorway of our house watching the entire chain of events and stopped me just in time. “Carole

Lynn! Come here now!" That's all it took and I knew what was going to happen next. As I pleaded with my mom that my retaliation was warranted she impressed upon me, especially my behind, that "pretty is as pretty does." And I didn't look very pretty that day!

I'm back living in the country and have been on this dead end street for twenty years. The wind blows, the hot sun beats down, and my patio area will never be as lush as others I've seen and would like. My backyard won't even produce wild flowers! But, like the wildflowers of my youth, I still see the beauty in it. It's what God has given me and I'm eternally grateful. It may not seem beautiful to others, and I might feel the same about something of theirs, but "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" and should not be criticized, looked down upon, or picked. So I'll oooh and ahhh at those other yards and then go home and love what I have.

If we look at these proverbs on a personal note with all the products, all the advice, and all the examples of what makes a woman beautiful today, we can get taken down a very wrong path, an outward path instead of inward. These things are fine and dandy as long as we remember it doesn't matter what we put on, what we try, or who we listen to. True beauty comes from within.

I love the verse 1 Peter 3:3-4, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight."



## **Tiny Living – Ready for Heat – by Leyanne Enterline**

We're closer to spring! Praise the Lord!

I am a Texas girl and love our HEAT! I feel like this has been a pretty chilly winter!

With the cold weather comes our wars with the heater in our tiny space. The boys and I are pretty cold natured and Brian is always HOT! So we have some problems. I keep the heat on all day if we're at home which causes our propane to run out (of course, in the middle of the night) so we are all icicles until Brian decides to go out and change the tank. I feel horrible that he has to do that. Just like sickness with kids happens in the dead of night, why does the propane tank run out in the middle of the night, too?

Brian told me, "No more heater *all* day!" He said I needed to get those space heater things instead. Not to mention the fact that propane is not cheap when you have to buy it every other week! This is a pain in the butt. Brian has to load up three large tanks and haul them over to the gas station and pray that someone wants to come out and fill them up. If there is the slightest bit of precipitation or if it's before 10am or after 5pm, or the weekend, they won't fill it! So you have to hit the timing just right!

So...space heaters we got!

We have three of them, and all three of us (besides Brian) are almost sitting on top of them in the mornings. I am afraid one of us is going to get electrocuted or catch on fire! We need to scoot back! We try to dress in layers with thick socks and beanies, but that's quite a bit to put on when we first wake up. The heaters are plugged in immediately, instead. I also sleep with ski socks, heating pad and a heated blanket. For real, people, it's that cold! I guess it's because a trailer is not quite insulated like a house is, so it does not stay warm.

To all that I say, "Please Lord, bring our heat back again! I love it and will not complain about our 100 degree days!"

## **A Night to Remember – Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>** – by Marcy Lytle

There's a Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> in March this year, so why not talk to our kiddos about superstitions? After all, do bad things really happen on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>? If they haven't heard it already, they will start to hear about sayings and things people believe that are silly and absurd. Some say...that the fear of the 13<sup>th</sup> began back in Jesus' day when Judas was the 13<sup>th</sup> person at the table on the Friday before the resurrection. *What?*

Whatever the origin, we know that superstitions are not based on anything to fear. In fact, there is no reason to live in fear, and our kids need to be taught that now, before they grow to invite fear as a friend. Fear is NOT a friend, and we need to tell them why...

Let's look at some silly superstitions and banish fear! Scroll down and cut out the pictures and lay them out on the table. Let the kids draw one as you talk and learn, and enjoy a fun snack together.

First let's define **luck** – it's thinking things occur or don't occur in our life just due to an accident or something random like rubbing a rabbit's foot. Yes, some people carry a rabbit's foot in their pocket to bring them good luck, but all it brings is a dirty pocket!

*Step on a crack, break your mother's back* – this is meant to say that if you step on a crack in the sidewalk then bad luck will happen. Is there such a thing as bad luck, to those who follow Jesus? No way. The Bible says in this world we will have trials (hard things) but they are NOT due to bad luck. Bad things do happen, but God has already promised to work everything together for good and give us the hope of healing and a forever home without any pain or sorrow! (Romans 8:28)

*Don't walk under a ladder!* Supposedly, criminals had to walk under a ladder on their way to the gallows a long time ago. All sorts of phrases and things people say are rooted in stories that have nothing to do with our lives today. It might be wise to avoid the ladder in case it falls, but walking under a ladder won't bring us all sorts of woes. It's good counsel to listen to sound wisdom (like look before you cross a street) but not silly sayings. (Proverbs 8:17)

*A broken mirror brings 7 years of bad luck* – Remember when Snow White peered into the mirror to ask "Who's the fairest of them all?" An evil witch looked back at her. People in ancient times actually consulted mirrors about their lives – isn't that crazy? The only mirror we need to consult is God's word that tells us that we are beautifully and wonderfully made, and our future is secure. (Psalm 139:14)

*Black cats on your path are bad luck* – Black cats were thought to house evil spirits and therefore if they crossed your path, they brought evil into your lives. Cats are just cats. And we carry God's spirit in us that enables us to walk without fear on any path he leads us. Black, yellow, white – it doesn't matter – cats are just animals that God created to make us smile. Never be afraid of what people say...and walk on His paths without fear. (Proverbs 3:5, 6)

*Knock on wood if you want something good to happen* – People used to believe that kind spirits lived in wood so if they knocked, the kind spirit would make something nice happen. It's silly to

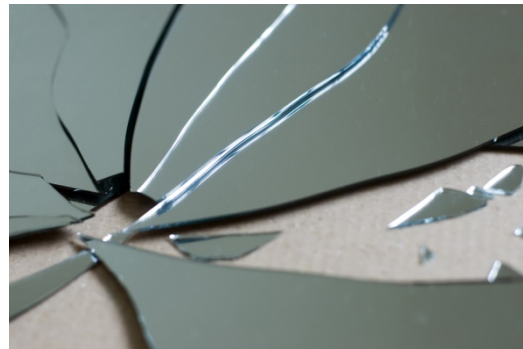
think that something that has no breath can live and do anything at all. It's just not true! Knocking on wood should only be done when we're knocking to enter a door to visit a friend. And when we ask, seek, and knock in prayer. (Matthew 7:7)

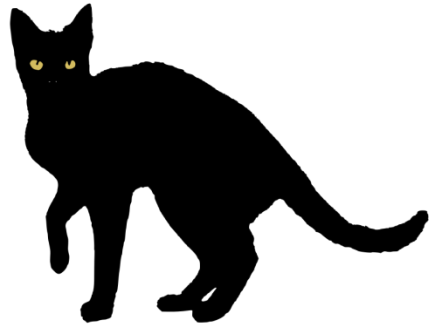
*Find a penny pick it up, and have good luck* – Somehow people began believing that if they stopped to pick up the smallest denomination of coin they would have good luck. Who knows why they believed that? Finding a penny might be fun, but everything cost more than a penny, that's for sure! Saving pennies, and then giving them away, now that's a wise thing to do. (Mark 12:41-44)

How do people start believing these silly sayings? It seems that someone starts it and others follow. We have to be careful about who we listen to and what we follow as truth. The only truth about who God is and how he cares for us is found in His word. We have to read about his character and his care over our lives.

He isn't about bringing us "good luck" so that we can have a life where we win at everything we do. He's about making us into his image of a caring, loving, whole individual without fear and without sin, able to live in peace and joy for all eternity. And that doesn't happen by hoping for good luck and avoiding back luck, but by simply believing in Jesus and loving him with all our hearts. He has then promised to be with us in every hard time, carry us through, and meet ALL of our needs.

And that's the truth!







YOU

## **Strengthening Your Core — The Portal** - by Marcy Lytle

What has strengthened you spiritually more than anything in your life?

- Was it a good sermon? Or do you usually forget the topic an hour after the last amen?
- Was it a seminar or conference you attended where emotions ran high for a weekend?
- Was it having all of your prayers answered and having plenty of money in the bank?
- Was it a book you read with stirring stories that made you weep?

As I think about myself and my growth, none of the above would be the answer. I think sermons are awesome and stirring, conferences can provide lessons to learn, answered prayers bring happiness for a while, and books and their messages can move my emotions.

But what has strengthened me spiritually more than anything else?

*Let me tell you three things:*

When we lost our home, which is a story I've relayed so often to friends, it was perhaps one of the most trying times, as I was embarrassed, disappointed, and felt like a failure. However, decades later that experience has provided me with empathy for those suffering financial struggles in a way I did not before – back when I was haughty and proud.

When I began to see that I was destroying my relationship with my husband by being sarcastic and demeaning in my conversation, and realized that God could really take care of him and I didn't need to shake a constant finger in his face, my eyes were opened. I fell in love all over again and saw him in a whole new way. He's quite handsome, by the way.

When I have experienced forgiveness over and over again for misspoken words, unkind deeds, a cold heart, or a judgmental attitude and felt the love of God erase my mistakes – it's flooded my insides with warm healing, like a soaking bath that heals every sore muscle. He's so good to me!

It's the losses, the eye-opening experiences and the mistakes that have caused me growth. Yes, I had to know the word and the character of God (that he provides, heals and forgives) – so that's a huge foundation. But growth, real strength, and something I can pass on to my children and grandchildren? Those things have been seeded, watered and sprouted by pain and suffering.

And yet...so many I've heard and known have suffered unbearable pain in this world that has nearly killed them.

I don't believe pain is meant to kill us. In fact, God says he works ALL things together for GOOD. He also says to count it all joy when we fall into trials and temptations, knowing that patience is being weaved into our hearts and souls.

I don't know where you are at the moment. Maybe your strength is completely used up, you're as weak as you've ever been, and you're seriously about to give up on life and people and peace. Find someone to talk to, listen to their stories of strength, lay down everything at his feet, and then just sit still.

Strength may come slowly as you wait, or it may come as a burst of energy, as He pours.

Either way, don't look for your strength to endure through endless lessons, readings or social gatherings with others. Establish your foundation by knowing God's character (He is LOVE) and when you're at your very weakest point, expect those seeds to sprout and eventually emerge under the sun. And when you look down you'll see that your roots grew exponentially as well, deep into good soil that will sustain you the rest of your life.

I'm not sure that in our human form we can grow strong and tall any other way, than through the portal of pain.

## UPPER QUADRANT – Waiting in Line – by Marcy Lytle

Do you remember your trips to amusement parks as a kid? I remember them well. It was always the hottest part of the summer, because we wanted to get in one last trip to Six Flags before school started. There was always one particular roller coaster we wanted to ride, the wooden one that was rickety with lots of ups and downs, because it was the most thrilling. And the craziest part of the whole experience was that we went knowing we'd have to stand in line...

in the heat

for a long time

getting sunburned

...but we did it. Gladly, we stood there with our friends and chatted, rubbed on suntan lotion (or not, because we wanted that tan), drank water, and moved up toward the gate we entered to step into the car and go.

That ride then began and it started with this big incline. We knew what was coming and we anticipated it with a gasp, holding on for dear life, as we topped the highest point of the coaster and swoosh! Down we went, as our stomachs lifted and so did our butts off our seats, only we were fastened securely for the shortest, most thrilling, ride of our life. That ride lasted all of 3 minutes...after waiting for an hour or more in line.

We did this every summer, without hesitation, because it was "fun."

I wouldn't do that now, if you paid me.

However, I was thinking this week about the phrase "waiting in line." That's how it feels as we approach our older years. We lost two good friends in the past six weeks, friends that were our age. It stung. It shocked. And it hurt. I saw all of us just waiting in this long line for our turn to ride that coaster to the sky. Only the wait in this line isn't one of merriment or mirth, while I chat with my friends. I've found it to be one of fear and trepidation, hoping it's NOT my turn to ride that coaster...just yet. I've got lots of living to do.

Do you ever think that way?

We've got grandkids to watch grow up, trips to take, life to live and give, and sunsets to enjoy. We are in no way interested in being "next" to step into that car and that incline up to the highest point, even though it's supposed to be the "thrill of a lifetime" to enter those pearly gates and see His face.

I was thinking about this as I went to bed last night, saddened by the news yesterday of another friend's passing. And we're all in this waiting line, from the youngest to the eldest. We know a little 3-year old girl that's recently been diagnosed with cancer. I have a 94-year old father whose time left in line is limited, for sure. And here I stand waiting in line, somewhere between, or before...who knows?



I felt a bit of shame yesterday at my resistance and unwillingness to be excited while waiting, because after all...I'll see the one that saved my soul, died for me, and sustained me and met all of my needs while here on this earth. And yet, I don't want to see him just yet. Not today or tomorrow. And maybe not even when I realize I'm taking my final breath.

I know our Father understands these feelings and fears, and only He knows the time we have on this earth. He told me to pray about everything, give thanks, and rejoice while I'm standing in line. Then peace that passes all understanding will be mine. He offered me peace in the waiting. Not hot-baking sun or exhaustion in the wait...but peace.

So here we all stand, waiting in line, and we have this choice. We can recall those teen years and shake our heads at how dumb it seems now that we stood there and how scary it is now to stand here...or we can take him up on that offer to cast our cares on him and experience peace.

I really want peace in the waiting, and anticipation as I move further up the line. Don't you? It's because that ride, so I read, is the ride of all rides and the thrill of all thrills, whether or not we can see it now through the dark glass through which we peer...

## **Healthy Habits – Cleanliness** – by Marcy Lytle

We were hanging with the littles one night in February, writing things on paper hearts and hanging them on a wire (see the Family Devo in our archives!). We posed the question, “What makes our heart dirty?” The oldest answered, “When we are bullied or we bully others.” And the littlest one replied, “When our skin gets dooouuty (dirty).” We smiled at their answers, and then I started thinking about cleanliness in all areas of our lives and how it promotes good health!

**Make your bed** – I know tons of people that don’t do this one. However, I personally think there are so many healthy reasons to make your bed, and not just to make your room presentable. Making your bed gives you a sense of pride about your room, another sense of accomplishment, and makes your bed inviting when you return to it at night. It’s a healthy happy heart that it creates!

**Cleanse your heart** – It’s a good habit to daily think of things you thought, said or settled way deep in your heart that are making you sad or angry. The only way to clean them out is to let Him take them from us and take care of what concerns us. Imagine placing those frustrations in a big box and handing them to Him. If we carry them, it only causes pain.

**Throw away old junk** – Still have a rotten apple in a fridge drawer? Makeup that’s caked and hard? Pens that don’t work? Shoes you haven’t worn in 10 years? Just start with one tiny place and toss the junk. Seriously, when you’re done with all of the tossing you’ll feel 10 pounds lighter in heart, body and soul, and your house will smell nicer, too.

**Cleanse your mind** – Maybe you have these daily thoughts about yourself that are not nice. You think you’re not good enough, you’re getting too old, you don’t matter to anyone, and you’re always overlooked. Those thoughts make us walk in shame with a slouchy disposition, which is not attractive to anyone – or ourselves! Think on things that are true about yourself – you are loved, you have a purpose, He is good enough, and He sees all and cares. Replace those negative thoughts, one by one.

**Wash your bedding** – When is the last time you washed those comforters? For me, I go way too long, because it’s a pain. But when I do, I’m so glad. It’s like opening a window in the spring and letting fresh air blow across our rooms. Splurge on a bedding scent if you wish, or even purchase a new set of sheets or a throw pillow.

**Cleanse your skin** – Skin care is most important, more than the makeup we put on, over our skin. Dirty skin doesn’t make a dirty heart, at least that’s what we told the 4-year old! But dirty skin can cause a world of woes, from clogged pores to breakouts and more. Establish a good face routine with a cleansing soap, toner and moisturizer, as well as a routine for your feet and hands. Take the time to breathe and function clean...

**Prepare the porch** – It’s March and spring days are coming for sitting outside sipping and snacking. Is your porch a huge mess from the winter neglect? Start now and clean it from top to bottom. Get some lavender spray to keep for your chair pillows (it seems to work to keep squirrels and cats at bay!). Wash down the furniture, sweep and organize. Consider a few new

plants, maybe a succulent array! Place a centerpiece in the middle of your table, make the porch clean AND inviting to you and your family and guests.

I suppose I could go on and on with ideas on places and hidden spaces to clean. It gets quite overwhelming once the winter season is over, when we've sat by the fire, chilled, watched shows, and enjoyed not having to work hard in the yard and elsewhere. But cleanliness, just one little space and place at a time, makes for a smile. It really does. I get these bursts of motivation to clean, and I have to act, because they come and go! But after I've organized or cleaned even a small drawer, I feel like dancing. And after I've laid down my heavy woes, the dancing also ensues.

Maybe next month, we'll look at the health that comes from dancing...

## Life Right Now – Spring Wall – by Bethany Gomez

March means spring is officially here. It also means comfortable, beautiful weather, give or take a few abnormal weather days, bluebonnet season, spring cleaning (if you're into that), spring break if you are a student or teacher (I'm the latter), and new paintings for the collage wall.

Back in December, a little before Christmas, I started a little project. There was this large, blank wall in the living room that needed something on it. My little sister had just given us some of her unused picture frames and I thought to myself, "Why not make a photo collage?" So I set about putting it together. I included several of the picture frames of varying sizes, two paintings on small canvases, a red berry wreath, and a small framed chalk board for a verse to be written on. My plan was to change out the photos occasionally, change the paintings and wreath seasonally, and change the verse whenever God leads.

The paintings on display for the winter season were snowy scenes. I'm well aware that snow in central Texas is almost as rare as a spotted zebra, so I have to get a glimpse of it somehow, even if it doesn't compare to the real stuff. However, lo and behold, we got a dusting of snow last month! I bet you can guess this Texas native was beyond happy to see the white stuff. I'm also well aware that if I lived somewhere with a bunch of snow I would probably feel differently, but as of now that is not the case. I remain in an almost constant state of hopefulness for snow in the winter months here in Texas.

Now that spring is here, guess what I will be painting on the two canvases for the collage wall? You guessed it. Flowers! But not just any flowers, Texas wildflowers, of course. I'm a very proud Texan if you haven't already gathered. I've told God that if ever I were to move out of the state of Texas, He would have to speak very clearly to me to do so, because right now I can't imagine living anywhere else.

I really enjoy painting. I was thinking of how much God must've enjoyed creating the world. I have read the creation story countless times and I have always thought that creating the world was like a chore for God because it said he rested after He was finished. Chores are tiring, right? Now I'm under the impression that it may have still been tiring, but instead of a chore, it was an enjoyable, even fun, task for Him. I think He really enjoyed creating all the fantastic, beautiful things we see today, like the wildflowers I will represent in my spring collage.

Isaiah 43:19 say, "See I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

This verse is the next verse going up on the chalkboard. It is speaking about how God will make a way for His people, us, and that "way" He knew was going to be Jesus.

I was able to listen to some speakers at a conference held last month, and one of them spoke something that resonated with me. She was asking God to show her the way, to give her a sign. As she was driving down the road she saw a literal sign that said, "Jesus is the way maker." She went on to say, "I don't know what *impossible* you are begging God for right now, but Jesus sent me to give you a sign. You have a way maker. Surrender to God and He will make a way."

It all comes down to asking myself, "Do I trust the Way Maker?" I do! Even though I may lose my way at times or things distract me from Him, I trust that God is always working and working for my good...and all of that goodness is going up on my wall this spring!

## **Created for Life - March 1920 to March 2020 – by Ginny Hurley**

My husband and I have facilitated a home connect group for many years. Our age group ranges from three weeks old, to a couple who celebrated their 67<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary with us. We love the multi-generational mix and connection! The younger ones truly listen and participate with the older ones, and the older ones can't wait for the teenagers and littles to pray for them. Each week we share life with one another: communicate, pray, and then do whatever we feel that God is saying for the time. My personal favorite is when we laugh and celebrate someone or some special occasion or holiday.

This week we are having a 1920's party to celebrate Valentines and the new decade of 2020. We usually have a sock hop and dress up for 1950's, but this year is different. As I began to research food, values, styles, games, and various historical topics, I realized how similar the 1920's were to our present day. I had no idea! I laughed as I looked up certain topics. They named their sandwiches, drank sodas, and loved marshmallows! Prohibition, gangsters, flappers, women's suffrage, child worker laws, the automobile, new scientific ideas from Darwin, and creation were hot topics throughout the land. My study revealed that huge changes came because of urban development and the move away from rural areas and farming. Opportunities opened up for many youngsters and teenagers to continue schooling and even go to college. Overnight it had moved from the horse to the automobile!

It was a fun time, a time of freedom and adventure. Women began to risk stepping out into careers, even moving into areas that had mainly been for men only. Some of these things were positive, giving people freedom to be who they were intended to be. Some of these opened the door to all kinds of evil. Families were no longer the main connection as young people began to hang out with friends, party, and date in cars. Men and women were created to have choices and keeping them bound in slavery and dishonor is wrong. Therefore, with this sudden ability to do whatever they wanted, many chose the very things that would rob them of their true identity. At the same time, great revivals were taking place around the world, and many were waking up to true freedom in Christ. When darkness descends on a people, the Light always rises to shine brightly with hope.

Of course, we know that this decadent time did not end well. All the money that had been accumulated was wiped out in a single day. People were devastated and many lost everything.

Right now, in 2020, we are in a similar time. Many have lost their way. We watch a Super Bowl on television with our families and stare with open mouths at the sad display in front of our children. Yet, just as we feel heartbroken for this generation, a new song is heard throughout our nations. God is here and He is awakening His people like never before in history. His loving kindness is quickening in thousands of young and old. He has not forgotten or given up on us! Our Redeemer is ready to show up in a big way. Things hidden for ages are being revealed and the Bridegroom is calling His Bride. The harvest is vast and many are flocking to His voice, the True Lover of their hearts.

I can't wait to celebrate this great season! Something within is crying out for more! Even the earth is groaning for something coming. And He is here! Jesus has come to

set us free and to open His storehouse of blessings galore! These times, they are  
*a'changin'!* Grief is turned into dancing! I am so glad!



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Because of Them** – by Marcy Lytle

So you know that thing where you put something down and then you can't remember where you put it and you search and you huff and puff and blow the house down in search of the missing item? It's like a word on the tip of your tongue, you know where you put it, but it's just out of your memory's reach?

*I basically live my life like that.*

I love things nice and neat and clean, but that would require me to put things exactly where they are supposed to go every. single. time. My brain doesn't work that way. I live a very delicately balanced life teetering between order and chaos. Like today, am I going to get furious with a colleague and rage clean every inch of my house to avoid sending a strongly worded email on the merits of not talking over me in a meeting? Again. Or am I going to rearrange the dirty dishes in the sink just so we can use the faucet without my having to wash them so I can binge watch the newest season of the *Blacklist* (that we couldn't patiently wait for like grown ups, so we just bought it)? It's a toss up.

My poor husband. He is very much a "there is a place for everything" kind of fellow. You always put your keys in the same spot every day, every time, so you don't empty trash cans and freezers and move furniture looking for them, just to find them sitting on the window sill in the bathroom. (I will neither confirm nor deny that this situation has occurred...or that there have been repeats). Now, after 14 years, he has somewhat adapted to my hippie dippy, happy-go-lucky style of life. Or at least they don't send him screaming into the night any more. As long as I don't "misplace" *his* things, we're good. And I've tried really, really hard to put my keys on the hook he put up for me every time I walk in the door. Although, at this present moment, I think they may be sitting on the kitchen table. Or maybe by the coffee maker. I should probably check on that.

As much as my *scatterbrained-iness* drives my husband nuts, he's learned to see it as endearing. Well, most of the time. Not because it's less annoying to him, but because he manages to see beauty in my mess. He sees that even though I might not remember where I left my glasses, I can find every lost shoe, kiss every scraped knee and hold every broken heart. He notices that even though the laundry might not get done (like ever) that I will stick up for the underdog, fight for the broken and make space for anyone. And this man will remind me of who I am and that I'm seen when I forget. He will see me at the very moment I desperately need to know I'm not invisible. He has and is continuing to learn how to love all of me and not just the easy to love stuff. He keeps a going list of things I mention (and probably promptly forget because I'm trying to remember where I last saw my credit card) so that when he wants to surprise me with a little something, he knows exactly what I don't even remember I wanted.

I constantly work to make sure he feels valued, too. When I talk about him or we're together with friends, I love to brag on him. How big his heart is and how much he loves to give to anyone who needs it. How he would watch Christmas movies over and over again all year if I would let him. The way he works to teach his son the things he wasn't taught...that tears and feelings aren't something to be ashamed of. That kindness is strength. He teaches his daughter that brave is beautiful and that society doesn't get to decide who she is or what beauty



looks like. I love to fill his cup and give others a small peek into what makes him so special to me. And I remind us both why we never give up on each other.

Even on days when he can't see the light shining into his darkness and days that relief is not within reach, *those* are the days I let him know I see him. I see his pain and his struggle to fight his way out. I let him know that I see him, not his disease. And that I will hold on to hope for him until he can find it again.

It's not always easy and it's most definitely not usually pretty. We have both created and cleaned up our messes. We have been both blissfully happy and on the edge of throwing in the towel. But we keep showing up and keep loving each other, not despite our flaws, but because of them. And I think that's what any healthy-ish relationship is:

- Two imperfect people who don't give up, on themselves, or their partner.
- Two that know love covers a multitude of imperfections.
- Two that keep loving both the chaos and the calm, both in each other and ourselves.

Because He first loved us.

*"There is hardly a more gracious gift that we can offer somebody than to accept them fully, to love them almost despite themselves." Elizabeth Gilbert*

## DATE NIGHT FUN – Coming up Green – by Marcy Lytle

St Patrick's Day is this month, green blades of grass are emerging (maybe), and new growth is anticipated everywhere! I love the color green, and since grass is green – it's a color we see all over the earth where life is present! I thought it would be so fun to incorporate this color into our date night ideas for the month of March. Here's how:

1. **Green Apples and Turtles:** There's this amazing salad I recently saw and here's how you make it – party sized bag of snickers, 8-10 green apples, whipped topping – that's huge so you can downsize if you wish. Cut the snickers into bite sized pieces, as well as the apples, and add to a bowl with 2-3 cups of the topping. Stir and serve immediately! This would be great for a double date with another couple – and have this as your dinner! Then watch this cool Netflix show all about turtles! It's called *Turtle: The Incredible Journey*. Finally, hand out sketch paper and green pencils and have each one try their hand and drawing a turtle. The winner gets a turtle candy to take home!  
**Celtic Dance and Music** – There are Irish dancing tutorials on YouTube – seriously! And they're so fun – so clear your floor and dance some more! Download Celtic instrumentals and listen together, as you sip on green juice you've made together in the blender! See recipe here. If you want, you can even check out a book on Ireland and dream about a vacation there... And see the photo to the left? Who says you have to only enjoy apple cider in the fall?  
<https://www.justataste.com/blender-green-juice-drink-recipe/>
2. **Green Enchiladas and Tortilla Soup** – Go out for dinner to your favorite Mexican food restaurant and share both of these meals together. Make sure to squeeze green lime juice over the soup! Or you could make both of these at home. Scour your city and find a fun place to play pool on that green felt table, and get a little competition going for fun! Sounds like a nice date night, to me! Here's a super easy and tasty tortilla soup to make at home: 2 cans each of cream style corn, Rotel diced and chicken broth, 4 boiled diced chicken breasts, 1 tsp cumin, ½ bunch chopped cilantro, S&P to taste. You just place all in a pot and simmer 20 minutes and enjoy! Serve with avocado, cheese, and sour cream – with broken chips on top!
3. **Greenbacks, Anyone?** - Give each other \$20 each in one dollar bills – those green slivers of paper that add up to big bucks. Stop first at the dollar store and purchase two things for each to wear or put on (lipstick, scarf, socks, deodorant, fake flower, hair clip, mask or headband – a green one maybe!). Stop at a drive-thru and each spend \$5 more on one item from the menu and share. (Bring water bottles with you so that you don't have to purchase drinks.) Eat in the car and people watch, observing if anyone is wearing green! You've each got \$13 left. Stop at an indoor arcade and spend \$5 each playing 2-3 games – that's all – then leave laughing for joy. With the \$8 each that's left, stop for a decadent dessert at a quiet coffee shop or restaurant, and smile.
4. **Herbs in a Box** – Gather materials or purchase one already made, but create an herb box. Or just a tiny one for the porch. Go together to your local nursery and ask which herbs will grow well in this season, get the dirt, and plant them together. Wash up and head out on a walk through your neighborhood and point out signs of new growth. Find

a park bench and settle down for a few minutes to enjoy a few green jelly beans or Jr Mints you've packed to take with you.

<https://www.hometalk.com/1344762/diy-herb-planter-box-25>

## **After 40 Years – A Pain the Ear** – by Marcy Lytle

We all have expectations of our spouses. We expect him to do his share, work hard, help with the house, make romantic gestures, sweep us away on vacations, and all that jazz that we watched on television and movies, and heard about prior to marriage. And then when we're married, we're both working, we're tired, we have kids, life is hard, and all those wonderful expectations are sometimes unmet...never to be resurrected again...or maybe they never were met in the first place.

*But what about expectations of the emotional kind?* For example, we want him to know what we're thinking without us having to ask him. Sometimes, it would be nice if he'd just understand our need for him to just listen without saying anything or offering advice. And a big expectation is that he will always be our best friend, the one most interested, and our biggest fan. But just like we aren't always his biggest fan (but rather his biggest critic), neither is he. At least we *both* succumb to life and forget to be "perfect" as expected.

I had a simple check-up for my ears because they felt a bit clogged, and he knew it. I went to the appointment and never heard from him all day, to ask what the doctor said or how I was doing. I knew in my heart that he cared about me, but for some reason it annoyed me that he didn't even ask when I talked to him a couple of times in the afternoon. Sure, I could have just told him (which would have been mature and right) but I decided to play that game I learned early on in marriage...to test him...and see just how long it would take for him to say something (no one ever wins at that game!)

After all, if he really cared, he'd ask, wouldn't he?

He didn't ask, and when he arrived home, he confessed that it was a busy day and he didn't feel so well, as his stomach hurt. (I knew then why he didn't ask...but I still held on...) He sat by me on the sofa as we watched a show and realized I was a bit indifferent and asked me what was wrong. So I spilled the beans...

"You haven't even asked me what the doctor said," I said with a disappointing and unattractive face.

All day I knew I had a choice to say nothing, just tell him how it went, and go on my way unoffended. In fact, I just read a book about being unoffendable, but I just didn't feel like doing the right thing. I felt self-absorbed, selfish, and sad as I had a pity party of the most ridiculous kind. Seriously, what a petty thing to even be writing about...

We all do it. We let ourselves become accusatory, we allow our minds to wander, and we fall into the pity pit and start to wallow like a pig enjoying every piece of dirt we're slapping around on ourselves and others.

The moment I lost myself was in doubting the character of my husband. He has proven to me for decades that he loves me, as imperfect as his love is. Neither of us is perfect, and that's totally why we rely on the Outside source for our affirmation and love above each other's. I

knew for certain that he cared about my ear (it was just a bit of inflammation and nothing more) and I wish I'd just chosen to tell him when he got home, and had let it go.

Thankfully, after I confessed my expectation and he told me he'd been feeling bad, I did let it go. I didn't pout or treat him badly all evening, like I would have done...say...30 years ago.

Isn't it silly what I did? I even think it is. But we've both gotten offended at each other for much less and much more. There are so many factors (like tiredness, how our day has gone, how we're feeling about ourselves, etc.) that play into our response when an expectation is unmet. But there's only one factor that's huge and has to be present with the other one fails...or when we perceive them to fail and they haven't, really. And that's forgiveness.

We are both human. We both forget. We both get busy. We both get tired. We both love each other.

This story isn't meant to downplay unmet expectations of fidelity and honor, as those are a whole other kind of hurt that requires counseling. This story is to confess that sometimes we are just thinking about ourselves and what we need, when what we need is to lighten up and enjoy the good.

Life's too short and marriage is too fun to ruin it all because of a little pair in the ear...



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Best of the Mess – Bandwagons and Coattails** - by Marcy Lytle

Our writer for this column is pregnant and needs a rest this month – totally understandable! So I've snagged her column to encourage you young moms that read. I'm happy to do so, because being a mom of littles is the most rewarding yet taxing job there is – and not many accolades come your way! Before I write further, I'm applauding you for being a mom, praying for you that your kids will sleep at night, and smiling at you for being a hero to your family!

We recently visited with a young couple, as they visited and shared with us at our Oscar Party! They are one of our favorite couples, and they have a young daughter, three years old. As we watched the show, I observed both of them try to keep their daughter occupied, train her well by sitting her in time out until she was “ready to change her attitude,” and love on her and smile when she danced around or said something cute. *Family life, right?* They also had to fix her a plate, clean up her messes, take her to the bathroom, etc. and that activity NEVER ceases for parents.

We were chatting with them about friends and getting together with other couples with kids, and as I listened, I remembered the hardships of having good friendships when our kids were little. Getting together with other couples and trying to visit is like setting a romantic table in the middle of a lion's den – the roars and the chaos that ensues is unbearable! You end up going home, wondering why you tried that! I also recall a period of time where we just quit going to “gatherings” like church picnics, and large “fun” days at the park – because one of us ended up on the playground watching our kids while the other one got to visit. And the one at the playground was not in such a good mood when we left, because there was no point in going!

I don't really miss those young days of sleepless nights, constant pottyng and cleaning and serving and doing, because they're tiring and I've never forgotten it! I also don't miss the competition of trying to keep up with what everyone else is doing and trying to make sure my kid was getting the best, in a world where bandwagon parenting reigns.

Here are a few things I recall and still observe today, and then I'll give you my spin on it, now that decades have passed.

- Those moms don't ever let their kids sleep in their bed, but you do and you enjoy it.
- Those parents allow no television except on weekends, and you love watching a movie with your kids.
- Those kids say “yes ma'am” to every question, and your kids just give mean stares.
- Those moms only shop at thrift stores, and you despise the stench and rather love all things new.
- Those parents only serve carrots and celery to their children, and you love to take your kids to McDonalds!
- Those kids' rooms are spotless, decorated so perfectly, and your kids' rooms – well, no comment.

There are probably at least a dozen encounters and observations you parents make per week where your kids don't measure up, your parenting skills are called into question in your own minds, and those kids make your kids look like heathens.

If there's anything I've noticed is that what works for YOUR family is what's best and right for YOUR family. Oh, it's fine to pick up a new habit IF it suits you. But never be part of the crowd that joins in some sort of practice with your kids due to pressure, feeling less-than, or being afraid to be different.

I didn't breast feed my kids and I got comments and looks. However, breast feeding didn't work (I didn't like it!) for me, and my kids turned out just fine. We never had a "play room" that many moms said were a *must* in their houses, and our kids never suffered from that "lack." My son ate chicken and fries until he was in his 20's and he's healthy as a horse.

My point is that others and what they do or don't do is never to be your standard or measuring stick. You have your kiddos and your family and your life – apart from the lives of those in your circle. Enjoy your friendships and conversations, but don't get sucked into the competitive parenting mode. It will not be a good example to your kids, and it will only give you ulcers.

See something good you'd like to try with your kids, because it sounds awesome? Go ahead. See something that sounds absurd and only makes you nervous? Skip it.

Life's too short to ride in bandwagons and on coattails. Let your kids see you parent and love them in ways that are special and unique to your family, and enjoy your life together...with oreos or celery...whatever...or a little of both.

Just be sure you brush their teeth before they hit the hay...that's probably good advice on any given day!



Spring is near, winter is winding down. This year, for the first time I can remember, I'm sorry to see winter go. The prospect of 100 degree heat, typical of our summers, is a dreaded thought. This has been a good winter in my book. I've only had to cover my babied succulents about three times, and the number of sunny yet cool days has been amazing. As far as the rainy ones....well, it's hard for a plant lover to complain about rain.

Like it or not, everything moves forward, including the seasons, and, sooner or later, it will be hot again. But there's always a bright side. For me, one facet of that is swimming—something I rarely did for years until last summer when it suddenly became a near obsession. The thought of immersion in cool, clear, clean, miraculous liquid where gravity loses its grip took on a new appeal. I longed for it...I imagined having a pool—I even put a critical eye to the back yard to see if I could somehow create a little swimming hole, but there is just no place for it.

I haven't been able to spend much time in the prayer garden, and I feel it. Even though there were many perfect days for working outside, other things demanded attention. The tasks of raking, pulling weeds, pruning and clipping, and other garden-tending tasks occupy my hands but seem to open my mind and heart to receive from God. I often looked longingly out the window, but had to go the other direction.

Things are coming into focus even as I write this...sometimes it's good to be pulled away from the things my heart longs for, from the things I really want to do, because, quite honestly, even those things can become stale. Going the other direction, a direction not so much chosen as required, reminds me that I'm not living for myself. My life is interrupted by demands. My life is interrupted by circumstances. My life is interrupted by weather, events, sickness, tragedy, celebrations, barking dogs and a myriad of things; but, most of all, my life is interrupted by the lives of others.

I'll have more time in the prayer garden soon, where I connect with God in grounded earthiness. Time away has sharpened my desire and brought renewed appreciation for the work. More importantly, I'm more settled in the fact that God is involved in every facet of my life, whether it's the joys or woes of the season, or the interruptions of Life that surely come from his hand.

## **Moving Forward - What Are You Looking At? – by Pam Charro**

In Numbers 9, God's people were bitten by venomous snakes because of their unbelief, and many of them died. But when they repented and Moses prayed for them, the Lord had Moses make a pole with a snake on it, and anyone who was bitten by a snake and looked at the snake on the pole did not die. God made a way to survive the poison.

In John 3, Jesus was compared to the snake on the pole.

It has taken me many years to know how to look at him. I wasn't always filled with joy trying to find him, partly because I didn't always understand how much joy he felt toward me. But he has not seemed to mind the process nearly as much as I have; he has been gentle and patient and has rewarded my desire to see his face and to know him as the healer he truly is.

### *Who is he?*

He is faithful, he is loving, he is our strong tower and our foundation rock.  
He is altogether holy and beautiful.  
He is humble and sacrificial and relentless in his pursuit of us.  
He is our perfect Father and the lover of our souls.  
He has been willing to go to the lowest place so that we can be with him in the highest place.  
He is joyful and positive and full of life.  
He judges perfectly and always makes a way where there is no way.  
He is our hero.

And he is everything any of us truly, deeply long for. He made us so he can know us so he can satisfy us, and all we have to do is say yes to him.

This is what I look at when the snakes bite. When I'm tempted to feel hopeless and defeated.

I look at who he is.

*Waymaker, miracle worker, promise keeper, light in the darkness  
My God, that is who you are - Sinach*

## Simple Truths - Purpose in the Pain – by Erica Simmons

In last month's article, I shared situations from my past that have led to me creating a false image of who I am. They led me to believe I was unworthy, *less than*. Each of these situations happened in my life prior to my understanding of a true relationship with God, before I knew how to find purpose in pain. This is what the enemy wants. He wants to use our pain to cause to become angry with God and blame Him for our pain and suffering. *Does that mean I cannot now find purpose in that pain?* Not only do I say no, I say that I have already. I see it in the way that I deal with the people I interact with on a daily basis. There is in me this strong overwhelming need to make sure every person I interact with KNOWS that they are important and are valued. I know that desire was born out of the experiences I shared last month, the purpose in that pain that I endured as a young child.

Because I have learned to find purpose in my pain, God often provides me the opportunity to use my experiences to help others. A perfect example is my position on our church prayer team. It just so happened that the Sunday I was writing this article, I was on the rotation. A young woman came up and shared that she had to end a relationship that she felt was not good for her. She also shared how she wanted to be able to continue to be in the young man's life as a support and a friend. No one was in a better position to tell her the dangers of this way of thinking than I was. I looked her in the eye and told her that way of thinking was the reason I ended up being a single mother with twins. Talk about purpose in pain! I will continue to touch base with her and support her, to provide her support and prayer in way I did not receive.

The enemy wants to use our pain and suffering to steal, kill and destroy the natural relationship we are to have with our Heavenly Father. It is imperative that we recognize this and immediately press into the God and seek His truth. We should also know that some, if not most, purposes might not become apparent for many years to come. Or in the case of my experiences that made me feel unworthy, the purpose can become part of our character later to be discovered how it ties back to our pain.

We are not going to live this life without making decisions that do not align with the word of God. Some of these decisions lead to pain and suffering. We can take comfort that even in the times when there is pain and suffering we cause by not submitting to the will of God in our lives, Romans 8:28 shows us He will still allow us to find purpose in that pain.

We will not live this life without the choices of others impacting us or causing pain that can have long term ramifications. That's okay **IF** we allow Him to show us the purpose that can come from the pain. He said He will prune us and in doing so there will times we will have to endure pain and suffering. He does not cause our pain and suffering, but He does allow it, and He can show us the purpose that can be gained from the pain. Instead of leaving us alone to endure and struggle alone, He has provided a way for our pain and suffering to strengthen us. If we trust Him, if we keep our hearts open to hear Him, he will guide us through the pain. And at the end of our journey, we will discover that who we are would not have been possible without the pain.

In order to do this, find the purpose in our pain, we have to make a choice. We have to decide if God's word is true. If we choose to believe His word we joyfully take our pain and suffering to Him and we lay it at the foot of the cross. If we choose not to believe, then we take control and try to deal with it our own way. I do not know about you, but there has NOTHING that I have ever handled on my own that has turned out right.

God knows the pain and suffering was temporary when Jesus died on the cross. He wants to give us the same assurance in His word. *Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning.* We need to know the weeping is not the endgame. The endgame is joy. It is embracing the purpose in the pain.

Because I know that what I endure can be used as I serve on the prayer team; every morning that I am to serve, I pray to God that anyone who comes to receive prayer will be someone meant to come to me. In so many instances these connections come via something that I have at some point gone through. In those times, I have leaned on God to help me endure and the lessons I have learned have been the basis for those I've had the honor to pray for: purpose in the pain.

## **Real Stories – I'm Living Again – by Pam Throckmorton**

I lost my precious Momma in February of 2015 and immediately my world turned upside down. My husband and I had lived in Kansas for 11 years at the time of her passing and made a decision to move back to Texas, my birthplace.

Uprooting, moving, another great loss and life's circumstances caused extreme stress in my life and by the fall of 2017, I had reached my highest weight ever. I felt my health was diminishing and without God's help my life was sliding down a slippery slope.

With all the extra weight I carried and health issues I'd been diagnosed with, I began to lose the ability to envision the life I'd once known. Even being a half-full glass kind of gal, I was overwhelmed and felt incapable of making the choices necessary to turn my life around. I had tried many diets, but miserably failed at those attempts. I'm sure many of you reading my story have found yourselves pinned against the wall with a similar situation in your life!

### **DO NOT GIVE UP!**

On January 4th 2018, I prayed a short prayer and invited God to help me make the lifestyle changes necessary to achieve my goals. I began to make healthier eating choices. I became more physically active, not going to a gym or any strenuous exercise—just walking daily. I looked to God when discouragement and frustration tried to creep in. I allowed HIM to guide me on this journey.

Currently I'm down about 75 pounds, but more importantly I have my life back. My mobility has greatly improved and my health issues are diminishing. Vitality, Joy, and Peace are the NEW Me!

### **LIVING MY BEST LIFE**

God has brought people into my life on this journey, and they encourage me on to victory. Some have shared amazing health supplements with me to decrease body fat and increase lean muscle and invested in me.

I am truly thankful for ALL God has taught me on this path to wholeness!

**I'M LIVING AGAIN.**



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME - Don't Pray – by Marcy Lytle**

We just read a one-page devotion about all the things we do not need to pray about, yet we spend and waste our time doing so! It was an interesting read and made me remember a story I heard years ago about a man that said God told him to leave his wife. It wasn't due to infidelity or any divorce-worthy cause, but just that he prayed and God told him to go. I was shocked and saddened to hear such a misuse of prayer and misunderstanding of the privilege and honor it is to pray. And what a misrepresentation of who God is!

Prayer is to be done according to His will, not ours, and when we start praying and considering and even "hearing" answers that are completely contrary to who God is, we're in a heap of trouble, a drowning sea, and a storm that just might kill.

### ***So just what are these things we sometimes pray about that we need to discard?***

Don't pray about being kind. If there's a person that bugs the heck out of us, we are wasting our time if we're praying about ways we can shun them or get rid of them. A better way to pray would be for God to change our hearts toward them, and heal whatever is ailing them...

Don't pray for answers to sinful desires. Some folks put out fleeces (God if you'll do this...I'll do that) and while those may work on rare occasions – they're dangerous. Often we use them get our way, which is contrary to His way. Praying for a "sign" that we're supposed to move forward with a relationship that is less than godly is a waste of His time and ours.

Don't pray for provision if you're not willing to steward it. Yikes. We pray for a new home, a big car, and kiddos and a family...and then we want God to provide all the funds to pay for and take care of them, while we sit and do nothing. We're supposed to work, steward what we have, give thanks, and not hoard or buy what we can't afford. It's that simple.

Don't pray without position. There's a reason the Lord's Prayer begins with "Our Father in heaven..." Positioning ourselves as his children, acknowledging his position where he can see all and know all is HUGE in prayer. When we fail to do this, we often spend our time begging and pleading and wondering and worrying while we pray. And we only end up exhausted.

Don't pray with formulas. Prayer is not a magic potion where if we say the right combo of words, snap our fingers and open our eyes – there the answer appears like a genie out of a bottle – ready to grant us three wishes. Prayer is all about relationship, and relationship only happens when we read his Word that tells us who he is, and then prayer becomes powerful. And quite enjoyable...

Don't pray and refuse to listen. Often, our prayers are full of wailing and wanting, chatting and commanding God to act on our behalf or in the lives of others. If we do all the talking and never listen to his voice, we've missed out on the answer already! He does speak to us through his creation, through the voices of those that love Him, through his word, and in love and peace. Listen, next time you pray.

Don't pray with honoring lips and removed hearts. Ouch. This is when we speak lofty words of praise because others are listening, or we think we pray "so well," but we're completely hating or angry with the person in the other room. Make peace with that person, repent for your own wrongdoing, then get back to praying. And start with thanksgiving for his forgiveness.

Sometimes, we don't even need to pray at all. We just need to acknowledge God and trust. That, often, is the biggest and most effective way to pray and find peace that passes all understanding.



## **FRESH THYME – Fooled and Frozen – by Marcy Lytle**

We opened the blinds in our bedroom and looked out back and were shocked. It was mid-January and there were profuse blooms on our rose bushes that had already gone through a freeze back in late fall and had been unattended totally...and yet they bloomed. Of course, we grabbed some snips and cut them and placed them in a vase and they were stunning.

All of our area began responding to the unusually warm temperatures we were having in the winter and began budding and blooming and growing. Somehow, these plants didn't realize the season was winter and that there were probably going to be freezing temperatures before spring actually arrived. They didn't care, they felt the sun and its warmth and there they were!

Fast forward a few weeks into early February and it surprised all of us (because it's a RARE treat) by snowing and freezing one night after an almost 80-degree high the day before. Yes, it's why we Austinites are keeping it weird – partly at least – because of our crazy weather. Those crazy plants were now going to be covered under a blanket of that wet, cold, freezing stuff and it was going to dampen and kill the beauty that had already emerged.

Was nature fooled? Are roses and blades of grass just stupid? Didn't God make the earth so that it knows when to emerge its blooms safely, after the danger of all freezes has passed?

Apparently, there's something to be learned from observing the beauty of these roses that bloomed when no one was looking or expecting...

I noted a few things:

- They felt the warmth of the sun
- They were planted and solid
- They didn't know or care about the future
- They just grew

Don't you wish you were like those roses? Don't you wish you could just respond to His great love daily and dig deep and bloom where you are, without planning and worrying about the "What if a freeze happens and I die" question?

Roses were made to be beautiful and stunning. They also grow thorns (what's up with that?) But they were NOT GIVEN the spirit of fear of blooming in the dead of winter, like so many of us are.

- Maybe you are afraid of what's lurking in your future
- Maybe you feel his warmth but you're questioning his timing
- Maybe you're unsure if your roots run deep
- Maybe you just need to grow

We both stared at the roses we placed in the vase that day and I even let them stay the way they were growing on the stem – sideways – because they looked pretty that way. Their color

was maybe even more vibrant than they are in the spring. And the reason we saw them was because of their untimely appearance that drew us to notice.

Spring is coming, and that's when things are "supposed" to bloom as we care and tend and plant and water. But actually, we don't have to worry about blooming at the wrong time, or losing our leaves in the heat of the summer, or if we have the prettiest color in the garden.

All we have to do is respond to His warmth when we feel it in our souls, and we will grow. Winter, spring, summer or fall...that's all. We, not the roses, were actually the ones fooled and frozen in our tracks when the beauty took us by surprise...

## **FRESH THYME – Watering Hole - by Marcy Lytle**

I woke up recently with “watering hole” on my mind. Sometimes, early morning thoughts lead to early morning writing, so I decided to just google those two words. That phrase means “a place where people gather socially.” For example, a certain bar may be a watering hole in a city because folks enjoy the drinks and the conversation there. Maybe a farmer’s market or a coffee shop is a watering hole because it’s pleasant, friends go with us, and we end up staying a while to enjoy something tasty or warm.

For me, I think the watering holes in my city where I enjoy gathering might be the lawn downtown where summer symphony concerts are played and people gather on blankets with picnic food in hand, the park in my city where families show up to fly kites on a windy spring day, or downtown SOCO – a street lined with eateries and shops and vendors.

People gather where they can be fed, free, and feel...all the feels.

A watering hole provides drink for the thirsty, conversation for the lonely, and goods for the needy...whether that be friendships or actual wares for sale.

We were out with another couple on a date recently and saw a group of people playing a game that looked like Bocce Ball, but upon closer inspection, we saw that it was a different game altogether. One of the players saw us stopping and watching and he walked over to us and began explaining the game. It was a French game called Petanque and it’s played with metallic balls on hard dirt, in public parks. He went on to extend an invitation to join in the game, because that was part of the game – to invite people to come and play.

What a great idea!

This game is coming to our city, he explained, and I could tell that it’s going to be a watering hole wherever it’s set up – because it provides those components! Those who are thirsty for a thrill can play the game to compete. Others might just want the friendships and conversation that take place while waiting their turn. And still others might enjoy just sitting and watching while snacking and smiling, at the fun others are having. We enjoyed standing there and doing just that.

I’m not sure why I awoke with this phrase on my mind, except now that I’ve looked it up and thought about it, it sounds so pleasant a peaceful – a watering hole.

It’s not a black hole, where we vanish away from sight. It’s not a sink hole where we fall and hurt ourselves. But rather, it’s a watering hole where we go to be refreshed ourselves or...we create to refresh others.

I’m going to think more about what watering holes I enjoy and why, and I’m going to try and visit those more, so that I stay refreshed. And I’m hoping that I can be part of creating a watering hole for others so that they are fed, they can come freely, and feel all the feels of HIS love.

Watering hole. What pictures or feelings does that phrase evoke in you?



## **FRESH THYME - The Cast** – by Marcy Lytle

Did you fish as a kid? I did. I went fishing with my dad and he taught me how to cast the line out over the seaweed against the shore, away from the hanging branches from the tree, out to the deep where the fish would bite. I learned to cast pretty well, but sometimes I got my line hung up and Dad had to help me – and sometimes even cut my line – and start all over. If he hadn't been there to help, I would have remained stuck!

I was stuck recently, in my prayer life. I would sit down to pray and my mind would fill up with all the people I knew that had suffered loss or were ill. I begged and cried and pleaded with God to help and help them, and then I prayed that he would help me with my fears as I worried about them...and my own family and concerns! It was like that fishing line, I was all caught up and tangled, and wasn't reeling in any answers...or peace.

I began to realize that the problem was in my cast. There's this verse that tells us to cast all our cares over on Him, because He cares for us. However, as I was casting them, I was also carrying them. This does NOT make for a peaceful life. I was taking on their pain as if it were my own. In other words, when I heard about a friend losing her husband, I grieved so much that I was angry with God for taking him. When I heard about a little girl with an illness, I was so hurt and thought it wasn't fair, and worried and wondered if we're all sitting ducks for disease and death. I was carrying everyone else's burdens plus my own, and after I prayed I was tired and frustrated.

In casting a fishing line, there's this learning process that has to take place, the bait has to be hooked just right, and the reeling in has to be slow and easy. Fishing is not a fast process, and if we think it is, we will be bored and go home. It's supposed to be one of the most peaceful sports to enjoy that there is. There might be hours without a bite, but the anticipation is always there.

I felt like God told me I had the cast all wrong. When I cast my fears and friends and even foes over on Him, I'm supposed to sit by the banks and wait, while HE sends the provision to each of them in his own time. My job is to cast in prayer, reel in slowly with faith, and sit in rest under the shade tree by the water. I have TROUBLE doing this!

However, I've begun envisioning the cast a little differently now and I realized one huge thing: I'm not meant or made to carry their load, and they're not meant to carry mine...except to Him in prayer. In other words, I cannot and wasn't made to carry the weight of sorrow that others feel in my heart until it weighs me down. I'm to cast and release.

I'm learning that the only way to do that is to wrap my petitions in thanksgiving, visualize the cast, and see in my mind's eye that shade tree with an empty chair waiting for me to rest.

I don't want to stay stuck in the branches or seaweed, while there's provision that awaits us all – out there in the deep. I want to be ready, praying and believing, resting and reassuring, so that when the big fish bites, the baskets are full, and the feast is prepared, I'm there with those that are hungry like me...with more than enough for all.

Worried and fretting when you pray? Join me today in learning to cast a little bit better and wait a little bit longer without fear or dread...



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

April 2020



TIPS



## **The Dressing – Something Dressy – by Marcy Lytle**

Spring is officially here, and most likely we have spring and summer weddings, celebrations, parties, and picnics to attend with others, where a pretty dress might just be the thing we want to wear! Shopping for dresses is time consuming, so we've done the shopping for you, to at least inspire you for a little something dressy for your wardrobe this season! After all, who doesn't love a new dress or two, to make us feel pretty and springy and all things fun?

Floral midi dress – I love the options of fabric for this cute dress from Old Navy! And look at the cute sandals, too! It's sleeveless, for those that love that style. And for those of us that don't, a simple cardigan or even a tshirt under can make this dress perfect for an outdoor event this season!

<https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/product.do?pid=551785022&vid=2&tid=onpl000000&kwid=1&ap=7&qclid=EAlaIqobChMI7NKY5PT75wIVA77ACh1URgEREakYBiABEgKydvD BwE&qclsrc=aw.ds#pdp-page-content>

Printed and belted – I love a dress with a pretty belt! This printed one from Zara is so elegant with the belt added (and you could totally change the belt for a scarf or a different color!) and the sandals to match. Such a pretty dress and length!

<https://www.zara.com/us/en/printed-midi-dress-p09006052.html?v1=42487629&v2=1445651>

Geometric – Did you know that World Market has some pretty dresses? I bought one last season and love it. This geometric black and white design can be so versatile with pops of color, or check out those clear straps on the sandals in the photo! This dress looks comfy AND cute – a great combo!

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/black+and+white+abstract+geometric+mira+kaftan+dress.do?sortby=ourPicks&from=fn>

Flouncy sleeves and slits – I love this pretty yellow floral dress from Target, and it too comes in a choice of patterns! Wouldn't it be great for a wedding or a shower? The high sandals make it stunning for spring! Because it's 100% polyester, it's great for packing for trips, as well!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-short-sleeve-dress-who-what-wear/-/A-78761778?preselect=78412390#ink=sametab>

Linen blend in blue – Check out this dress from Old Navy, especially the view of the back! That elastic in the back makes the dress fitted and yet comfortable. And the linen blue – so pretty! Add a scarf, a light sweater, or simple yet elegant jewelry for your outdoor events this season!

[https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/product.do?pid=551928002&cid=1140468&pcid=15292&vid=1&grid=pds\\_6\\_547\\_1#pdp-page-content](https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/product.do?pid=551928002&cid=1140468&pcid=15292&vid=1&grid=pds_6_547_1#pdp-page-content)

V-neck and stripes – I love the Universal Thread brand at Target! Look at this dress that, paired with a straw bag, makes a beautiful ensemble! Have you seen the straw bags out there? What a pretty dress. I want this one!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-stripped-long-sleeve-v-neck-midi-dress-universal-thread-gray/-/A-79185296?preselect=78306014#lnk=sametab>

Simple Boho vibes – I love this blue, again. Blue skies make me want to wear blue! This is simple, yet so pretty, and would be great for any outing. It can be left alone, or you can add a statement bag, or these pretty leather mules, as pictured! It's from Old Navy.

[https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/product.do?pid=551873022&cid=1078677&pcid=15292&vid=1&grid=pds\\_128\\_543\\_1#pdp-page-content](https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/product.do?pid=551873022&cid=1078677&pcid=15292&vid=1&grid=pds_128_543_1#pdp-page-content)

## **Seven for You - Tidy Up** – by Marcy Lytle

This month we asked our panel of contributing women to share with us their organizing tips for their cars. Interestingly enough, many said they don't really organize their car! A few did, and even more said they'd like to be better at having a tidy car, so below are some ideas from us and from what we'd like to use! Some have routines that work for them, others have gadgets and bags and pouches that work, so well!

Just last Christmas I received these hard pouches that fit snugly between the front seats and the console – that black hole where keys disappear way too often. They are great and even move with you, when you move your seat forward and backward. I like to place my phone and my keys there, or a small pack of Kleenex. They're quite affordable on Amazon!

[https://www.amazon.com/GCARTOUR-Pockets-Leather-Organizer-Non-Slip/dp/B07XCVQVMH/ref=asc\\_df\\_B07XCVQVMH/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=385250076956&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=18070922536107053779&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmld=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9028263&hvtargid=pla-851787653473&psc=1&tag=&ref=&adgrpid=79334632260&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvadid=385250076956&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=18070922536107053779&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmld=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9028263&hvtargid=pla-851787653473](https://www.amazon.com/GCARTOUR-Pockets-Leather-Organizer-Non-Slip/dp/B07XCVQVMH/ref=asc_df_B07XCVQVMH/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=385250076956&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=18070922536107053779&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmld=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9028263&hvtargid=pla-851787653473&psc=1&tag=&ref=&adgrpid=79334632260&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvadid=385250076956&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=18070922536107053779&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmld=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9028263&hvtargid=pla-851787653473)

I keep a zipper bag in my glove compartment with the following items inside it: straw, plastic fork/spoon, small pack of Tylenol, clippers, tape, scissors, bandaids, etc. – then I refill as necessary. It's been a lifesaver! I call it a JIC bag – “just in case!”

My mom gave these to me years ago, and I've loved them ever since! Cylinder Kleenex boxes that fit in your cup holder! Genius!

We have a car gap organizer that fills the space between the seat and console. The main thing I love about it is that it keeps stuff from falling into that crack, which is super handy for me since I used to constantly drop things down in there and then not be able to reach them. It also has the perfect spot to rest your phone, and some other cool features like a coin box and 2 USB ports which comes in handy for charging extra phones. Here's a pic and the link to purchase it on Walmart's website:

<http://www.walmart.com/ip/Car-Gap-Organizer-Center-Console-Organizer-Seat-Side-Pocket-With-Coin-Box-And-2-USB-Charging-Hub-For-Cellphones/404362082>

The organization of my car is completely dependent on a little spaces and cubbyholes the car itself has. I adapt my stuff to fit in those spaces. I use the compartment on the door as my trashcan and I clean it out every week when I fill up my car with gas. The backseat is the home for far too many reusable grocery bags. That's about it.

If you have kiddos, these back seat pouches are great for keeping their stuff off the floor, like books, shoes, snacks, extra clothes, etc.

<https://www.amazon.com/KNGUVTH-Backseat-Organizer-Protectors-Accessories/dp/B07GZP1FMN>

Those little small garbage bags are great for keeping in the door of your car, for a cleanout. When you arrive home just empty every door and floorboard of trash and place in the bag, then in your trash can. I hate carrying a bunch of little pieces of trash, so these bags are great to have on hand. They're great for putting muddy shoes in too, if it rains and everyone's shoes are a mess!

[https://www.amazon.com/Topgalaxy-Z-Handle-Tie-Garbage-Bathroom-Wastebasket/dp/B077SLSZPT/ref=asc\\_df\\_B077SLSZPT/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=242021929341&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=12453632574075375360&hvppone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9028263&hvtargid=pla-397626183591&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/Topgalaxy-Z-Handle-Tie-Garbage-Bathroom-Wastebasket/dp/B077SLSZPT/ref=asc_df_B077SLSZPT/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=242021929341&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=12453632574075375360&hvppone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9028263&hvtargid=pla-397626183591&psc=1)

This trunk or back-of-the-car box is wonderful for corralling balls and sports equipment, or for setting groceries in, so they don't fall over. You can just leave it back there, and nothing rolls around and drives you crazy while you're driving! And there are pockets for everything!

[https://www.amazon.com/Honey-Can-Do-Folding-Trunk-Organizer-Black/dp/B004ZVN78C/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?keywords=organizer+for+car&qid=1583268454&s=home-garden&sr=1-2](https://www.amazon.com/Honey-Can-Do-Folding-Trunk-Organizer-Black/dp/B004ZVN78C/ref=sr_1_2?keywords=organizer+for+car&qid=1583268454&s=home-garden&sr=1-2)

I love the book bags from Barnes & Noble and buy one often, after Christmas, because they go on sale. Each year they come out with a new design. I keep one in the car at all times with books to read, magazines, any mail or other reading material. Or sometimes I just use as a tote bag when I have several things to carry to and from the car! They're cute and work great.

I keep my grocery bags in the "trunk" part of my little SUV and I have started keeping hand sanitizer - hopefully I will remember to use it. I normally have a towel in the car in case something spills.

I use back-of-seat organizers for two reasons, organizing and keeping little feet from marring my seat backs. I use zipper pouches in the glove box and console to contain little things that might get lost. I also use a small tub in the back of the car to hold shopping bags, an umbrella, a tire gauge, a squeegee, and a few things like that I don't want to be without, in case of an emergency situation. I take trash out every time I leave the car. I do struggle to keep the dust and pollen off the dash area!! Clean it today and it's back tomorrow.

My car is small and I am usually alone when I'm driving. The cup holders are small. So, one day I acquired this carry-out box from Starbucks. It can easily hold 2 insulated, travel mugs, or water containers with enough support to keep them from turning over and spilling. It sits in the passenger seat. I also have a small container of anti-bacterial wipes that sits in the small cup holder. It was a sample item that my husband got when re-enrolling for insurance at work. Finally, I once received a gift of a tin of popcorn from Chicago. After the popcorn was finished I cleaned it out and put a plastic bag inside it. It travels with me in case I have some wet or sticky

trash to throw away while in the car. It's only 7 inches tall so it doesn't take up too much leg room. Plus, it's always a fond reminder of the friend who first gave it to me.

My husband gave me a coin sorter box that just sits in the space in front of the shift handle. It's great for finding change to pay for drive-thru food, vacuuming the car, or paying for metered parking!

[https://www.amazon.com/Topseller-Holder-Change-Storage-Wallet/dp/B01MSL9L1Y/ref=asc\\_df\\_B01MSL9L1Y/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=167139376298&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=18016408082813802239&hvpo ne=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcm dl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9028263&hvtargid=pla-313073317900&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/Topseller-Holder-Change-Storage-Wallet/dp/B01MSL9L1Y/ref=asc_df_B01MSL9L1Y/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=167139376298&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=18016408082813802239&hvpo ne=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcm dl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9028263&hvtargid=pla-313073317900&psc=1)

The main area of my car that I keep organized is the middle seat. That's where my grandkids car seats are and the essentials I have for them. I keep books and small toys for them in the door pockets. I have to admit my car is not on the top of my list to keep organized but I do try to keep it clean.

## **Selah's Style – Eli and Wyatt**

Eli - We waiting very impatiently and patiently for him for many years. When we found out we were pregnant we were so excited and scared at the same time. Eli is very sweet, caring, loving, artistic, quite, but funny. He will do anything to help someone is a heartbeat. Over the years, he has built an amazing confidence that has surprised my husband and myself. He's an amazing big brother and is always watching out for little brother at school, parks, and anywhere they go together.

Wyatt – Wyatt, oh Wyatt- he is just as amazing as his big brother, but is so very different and we wouldn't have it any other way. If anyone meets Wyatt, he will make them smile within seconds and he will start a conversation right away. He is so energetic, loving, caring, funny, and LOVES to dance and sing. If a song comes on the radio he knows, he will sing as loud as he can and sing it like no other, even if he doesn't know all the words. Wyatt has had so much confidence since he came into this world, and he is always ready to go and try new things.

Eli and Wyatt love to play with Legos together

Eli reading- Eli enjoying reading books, he is currently reading about a husky dog. His favorite shirt right now is anything from Preston Merch.

Wyatt reading- Wyatt enjoying picking out his "snap" words from books and also at this time his favorite shirt is from Preston Merch

Wyatt Spiderman- Wyatt likes Spiderman a lot and when he has on his shirt, he feels like he's Spiderman. His shirt is from Walmart

Eli strip shirt- this is Eli's favorite long sleeve shirt from Target- it's part of their Cat and Jack collection. He is very proud of himself being able to build this lego by himself

AVFC shirts- These shirts are very special and came all the way from England when their grandma and Yeah Yeah went over the summer. They love hanging out on Eli's bed, since it's the top bunk.

Eli- floss like a boss shirt- He wore this shirt on the first day of school and we went to go get snow cones at Bahama Bucks, his grandma got this shirt from England since he loves doing the Floss dance.

Wyatt dino- This was taken after the first day of Kindergarten at Bahama Bucks. Wyatt loves being silly.

The bond these two boys have is amazing, they butt heads, but what siblings don't? They have not started playing baseball this year and are so excited to see what that holds. My husband and I have gone into their room and have found them sleeping in the same bed all cuddled up together. We are truly blessing with them.

## **In the Kitchen – Something New – by Marcy Lytle**

April is the month for spring, showers and showy flowers! How's that for a rhyme? It's also a great time to try something new in the kitchen, something tasty, and something fun! These are new recipes to me, ones that I really love, so I thought I'd share them with you! If you've never made homemade granola, it's time! And homemade flatbread is to die for! New is good, when life is crazy...so hopefully you can find these ingredients and celebrate and give thanks.

### **Granola**

I've made several recipes of homemade granola before, but this one is seriously SO GOOD, mainly because I love cashews! It's so easy to make. It takes about an hour and a half, because of the stirring, but I made it as I was getting ready for bed, and just kept checking it as time clicked away.

- 3 c rolled oats
- 1 cup slivered almonds
- 1 cup cashews (unsalted)
- $\frac{3}{4}$  shredded sweet coconut
- $\frac{1}{4}$  c plus 2 T dark brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$  c plus 2 T maple syrup
- $\frac{1}{4}$  c veg oil
- $\frac{3}{4}$  tsp salt
- 1 cup raisins

Preheat oven to 250 degrees. In a large bowl combine oats, nuts, coconut and brown sugar. In another bowl, combine syrup, oil, and salt. Combine both mixtures and pour onto 2 sheet pans. Cook for 1 hour 15 minutes, stirring every 15 minutes to achieve an even color. Remove from oven and transfer to bowl and mix in raisins. That's it!

We keep this in a sealed glass jar and eat it daily with breakfast, by the handful or whenever!

### **Everything Spiced Flatbread**

1  $\frac{1}{2}$  c flour

$\frac{3}{4}$  c whole milk yogurt

2 t everything but the bagel seasoning

1 tsp baking powder

1 tsp kosher salt

$\frac{1}{4}$  tsp baking soda

Mix all of the above with a fork. Cover and let rest 20 minutes. With floured hands, pat onto a 10X12 inch rectangle on floured parchment paper. Bake on the parchment on a hot pizza



stone at 475 until the bottom is browned (I don't have a pizza stone so I oiled a baking sheet and got it hot before placing dough on it). Bake about 8 minutes. Top with melted butter and more seasoning!

### **Swiss Chard Dip**

We ate this with the above flatbread, after I sliced it into chips. We enjoyed it as we watched a movie at home. It's a great snack and very filling.

- 1 cup green or red swiss chard, stemmed and finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove
- ¼ tsp coarse salt
- 1 cup Greek yogurt
- 1 T olive oil
- 1 T fresh lemon juice
- 1/8 tsp cayenne pepper
- Flatbread or pita chips

Prepare an ice bath in a bowl and set aside. Bring a saucepan of water to a boil and add chard, cook til tender, about 3 minutes. Drain. Immediately plunge into ice bath to stop the cooking, and drain.

Mash the garlic clove and salt together into a paste. Stir in chard, yogurt, garlic paste, oil, lemon juice, and cayenne in a medium bowl, and serve!

### **Cornbread Pie**

I saw this recipe in our local newspaper and everything about it looked SO GOOD. I didn't have corn, so I used frozen asparagus tips (recently discovered these!) instead. And it took a speck longer in the oven than the recipe says. But it tastes wonderful warm...or even cold...packed in a lunch box!

- 1 8.5oz package cornbread mix (I used Jiffy)
- 2/3 cup whole milk (or buttermilk)
- 1 large egg
- 1 ½ c shredded cheese (I used a mix of pepper jack and Colby)
- 1 cup packed baby spinach, chopped
- 1 cup frozen corn
- 1 15oz can pinto beans rinsed and drained
- 1 med tomato, thinly sliced

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a large bowl, whisk cornbread mix, milk and egg til combined. Stir in 1 cup of the cheese, the spinach, corn and beans. Pour into a well-seasoned cast iron skillet. Arrange tomatoes and remaining ½ cup cheese on top. Bake until puffed and golden brown, about 30 minutes.

### **Brussels and Apple Salad (tasted great with above pie!)**

This salad was so easy and quick to put together. It made a lot! And brussels actually hold up longer than lettuce...so cool! We had this with the cornbread pie, as a side. It's so tasty.

- 3 T olive oil
- 3 T fresh lemon juice
- 1 ½ tsp pure honey
- Salt and pepper
- 1 lb brussels sprouts trimmed and sliced (I bought this pre-done in a package)
- 1 large Gala apple cut into matchsticks
- 1 small shallot (I used red onion – less than ¼ cup)
- ¼ cup toasted hazelnuts (I used walnuts)
- 1 oz Pecorino cheese, shaved (I used Parmesan)

Whisk together oil, lemon juice and honey for the dressing, in a large bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Add the rest, except the cheese. Toss. Fold in the cheese.

## **Tried and True – A Bathroom Redo** – by Marcy Lytle

Every new season, I like to change out a few things in my guest bathroom. For Christmas and through February, it was full of snowmen, pine cones, scented candles and all things woody and cozy. But when March arrived, I wanted to usher in the new season of all things bright, lively and fresh! I wasn't sure what I wanted this time, but I thought about it before I went out to shop...

One way to get inspiration is to browse the internet. I typed in "brown and white bathroom décor" so I could see some images and pick out a few ideas I might like. I noticed that with that background (and I had a sand hue, as well) lots of greenery made the bathroom pop! I also noticed the use of a bunch of cute shelves I'd seen while out shopping. And I made notes before I left the house.

Instead of going with colorful hues of yellows, pinks and blues for spring, I was opting for ONLY green.

Here's what I wanted:

- Wall décor
- Greenery
- Back of toilet plant
- New candle
- Shelf
- Art pieces for the shelf

And I didn't want to spend much! My choice was Kirklands and Ross, as they were both in a shopping center near me!

Above my toilet I had hung a clock that had been there a good while. At Ross (and Marshalls has several, as well) I found a cute triangular shelf to hang there, and browsed for décor. But...I thought and realized I probably had some items at home for the shelves!

For the back of the toilet, just under the new shelf, I wanted a planter box and I found one – so cute. The wooden boxes would look great with my décor.

Moving over to the counter by the sink, I found a cute boxwood type plant in a pot, and a wreath with the same greenery. These were perfect as a duo there!

I always put out a new nightlight, and kept it with the same theme of browns, and added a candle with a honeycomb on the jar, to blend in, as well.

After a bit of rearranging, and discovering three little items perfect for the shelves, I was done.

So pleased now, the bathroom looks completely updated and fresh, and I spent maybe \$75.

It's always helpful to have an idea BEFORE you shop, of what you want to do, and pictures in your head or on your phone, too. This helps give you guidelines. Measurements of heights and spaces are great to take with you as well. And have a budget in mind.

Then just enjoy browsing the discount stores and the home goods stores. Look for sales. Use coupons.

Then decorate away...



HOME

## **PRACTICAL PARENTING – The Game and the Win – by Marcy Lytle**

“Mom, can I play football?”

It’s a question that’s posed in families everywhere, along with kids asking to take gymnastics classes, be on a soccer team, or any other sport that requires lots of time at practices, the purchase of protective gear, and then game after game – where some will be won and some will be lost. And if parents have the money and time, the answer is usually,

“Yes, we can make that happen.”

After that, we parents show up to watch our kids play, knowing full well that injuries happen in the game, players on the other team are going to rough up our kids, and grueling early morning practices just might be the death of us all.

And yet, we still sign up our kids year after year, to play these sports!

Let’s switch topics now and consider the game of life. We definitely want to play, but we often ask God, maybe not verbally but internally or in our thoughts,

“God, can I live a good life?”

And what we mean by that is we want to play in the game, enjoy all the things life has to offer, but we do NOT want the discipline and hard work that comes with day to day living, and we certainly don’t want any defeats or injuries along the way. That’s called pain and suffering, and we want no part of that.

He gives us all this armor we are to wear, like faith, salvation, truth, righteousness, etc. but we find all of that labor intensive and heavy at times, and we’d rather run carefree through life on a jet plane from one thrill to another without having to strap on that belt, or breastplate, or helmet.

And yet, we still sign up our kids year after year, to play sports!

I was thinking on this very thing, about how we think it’s good for our kids to practice and stretch and work hard, and then come home with a few cuts and scrapes – and even losses. It builds character, and makes them into team players, not snotty brats that scream and get what they want all the time.

We even tell them, when they lose a game and come off the field crying, that they played well and we encourage them to get up and try again. We remind them that maybe they’ll get a win next time. And when they win, we congratulate them, but we hope they don’t become proud and then take a fall...

Placing our kids on sports teams and watching them train and fall, and train and win, and work together with others, and even fail and watch others get the position they wanted, and all that comes with playing and we say,

“It’s good for them.”

And yet, when we have the same parallel experiences in life of ups and downs, scrapes and bruises, and huge losses...we shake a fist and say,

“Why, God?”

I’m right up there with those of us that would prefer a cushioned life of bliss and bling and zing – where fun is to be had day after day with no diagnosis, no losses, no threats and no disappointments. That sounds like a great way to live, doesn’t it? No fear, because nothing bad would ever come our way.

And then there’s that verse,

“Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds...”

So, if we as parents think it’s a good thing to sign up our kids for games that we know they won’t always win, and where they are sure to fall and get hurt, because it’s good for them...

Why can’t we trust in God that has placed us on this earth, offered us a full set of armor, and promised to be with us for a SURE win at the end of the game?

I don’t know the answer to that question...

## **I Don't Do Teens – Those Lyrics – by Marcy Lytle**

Teens and music, do we know what they're listening to? Does it even matter? I'm thinking that it does. I know that I'm affected by music in big ways. The lyrics to a good song can completely alter my mood, so when I want to feel encouraged or hopeful, I look up songs that remind me of who God is and how much he loves me. And when I walk in a store and hear lyrics that are demeaning and hateful, those too alter my mood, in a bad way...

How much more, then, does music affect our teens?

Take a look at a few lyrics from top songs currently, ones that our teens are listening to:

*Say the word, on my way  
Yeah babe, yeah babe, yeah babe  
Any night, any day  
Say the word, on my way  
Yeah babe, yeah babe, yeah babe  
In the morning or late  
Say the word, on my way*

(Justin Bieber)

*So come on, come on, come on  
Let's get physical  
Lights out and follow the noise*

(Dua Lipa)

*Now I got her in my room (ah)  
Legs wrapped around my beard  
Got the fastest car, it zoom (skrrt)  
Hope we make it outta here (ah)*

(Travis Scott)

*You're poison I'm ivy  
Together we're perfectly bad  
You're venomous eyes could blink one time  
And keep me attached*

*Make a promise that...*  
(Ally Brooke)

*I'm that bad type  
Make your mama sad type  
Make your girlfriend mad tight  
Might seduce your dad type  
I'm the bad guy, duh*



(Billie Eilish)

Those lyrics above are really pretty mild, compared to others that talk about suicide and all sorts of pain and drugs and abuse, etc.

I never was a parent that kept my kids from listening to secular music. Not all secular music is bad; in fact, many songs are absolutely wonderful – including some songs by the above same artists!

The root of the problem is why our teens choose the lyrics they do, and that's the question and answers that we need. Why does he want to listen to songs about having sex, and why does she hide her room to sway to depressive songs about killing herself? And how do we, as parents, even know what our kids are listening to? Teens listen to music for hours...each day.

Lyrics are ways that we relate, because often lyrics say what we're feeling. So it's quite understandable why we all choose the music and lyrics to which we listen...Music totally affects our behavior, our self-esteem, and our feelings. Music has the power to reinforce positive OR negative behavior in teens.

What can we as parents do, to influence our teens to choose good lyrics?

- We can sit down with them and share playlists (try it). Share one of your songs and let him share one of his and listen, then discuss. What a great parenting activity to try! It might open up a world of conversation and healing.
- We can help them search for artists with good lyrics and messages, in a genre of music they like.
- We can pray. Never discount the power of prayer, asking God to give us insight and wisdom in this area...and provision. Who knows, maybe our teen will write new music!
- We can stay on top of what's popular and what our kids are listening to, instead of hoping "they'll be okay," as we go days without interaction.
- We can set an example by playing only good music aloud in the house, where all can hear – songs that uplift and encourage and speak truth – and let each person in the family take turns choosing.

Often it's said that "Christian" music doesn't compare to the secular skill levels and sounds. There's a lot of bad music out there in all genres, but there's a huge amount of good, as well. Search together, talk and communicate, and share with your kids...while you still have a little more time.

## **An Adage A Day – Prank or Practice? - By Carole Gilbert**

When I think of April, I think of “April showers bring May flowers.” And, of course, one of my favorite holidays is April Fool’s Day.

My last big April fool prank was about thirteen years ago to my son who was away at college. It was his freshman year and this prank crossed the line into bad and sad. I had always done pranks on this day but this one was cruel, I admit. My husband and I didn’t think so at the time, and we didn’t mean for it to be, but after that one I vowed never to do something like that again. It’s taken me lots of practice to not prank on April Fool’s Day. And that leads to this month’s proverb, “Practice makes perfect.”

I had perfected my skills of falling, acting hurt, and keeping a straight face, just long enough to receive the concern of those around me. Then I would come out with the beloved, “April Fools!” I even sent my husband to the grocery store one year for the vegetable red longneck butter tomato squash, or some crazy name like that. I only felt bad when he called saying he couldn’t find it anywhere and neither could the store produce worker!?! I still laugh over that one!

I always heard growing up, “Figure out what you do best, and do your best with it.” “Practice makes perfect.” The more you do something, the better at it you will become. I learned it, I lived it, it’s true, and I love it, so I passed it on to my kids, A LOT!

The proverb, “Practice makes perfect,” originated in the 1500’s. It started in the Latin version of “Uses promptos facit,” or “Use makes perfect.” It was thought to be first said in the English form we know by John Adams and written in *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams* by Gregory Titelman. John Adams wrote on page 31 of his diary from 1761, “I was too incautious, and unartful in my Proceeding, but Practice makes perfect. I should have first taken all the summonses, into my own Hand, or Powers of attorney from the Defendants.” I love how he’s applying this phrase to his work.

Interestingly, when I researched the phrase, “Figure out what you do best and do your best with it,” I came up empty handed. I don’t believe this is original to my family so I’m curious, have you heard this one before? The closest I could find was “Do what you can with all you have, wherever you are,” by Theodore Roosevelt.

Back in February I got the opportunity to keep my granddaughters for a week while my daughter was on a trip. I took my oldest granddaughter to soccer practice. How I longed for those April showers. It had been raining but, of course, it stopped just in time for practice. There we were on a hill, it was cloudy, and 43 degrees! But all that aside, I got to share with her about practice makes perfect. I also told her, “Run like you want to run at the mall!” You moms can relate. The places you want them to run they don’t and the places they aren’t to run, they do. And practice she did. She’s figuring out what she does best and learning it takes practice. Like her mother, like daughter. Even Paul talks of running the race as to win the race in 1 Corinthians 9:24. We can’t all be the winner but if we try our best, we are winners to God, 1 Corinthians 15:57.

I think those girls would've practiced even in the rain. My kids did and there I would sit. We moms are diehards like another profession we know, "Come rain or shine, sleet or snow..." And in case you're wondering about that last big April Fools prank we did to our son those thirteen years ago, it involved my husband having a wreck but being alright. He really didn't have a wreck and why my son didn't think about it being April Fools Day, I don't know. All I know is as we talked the story just kept growing, and unknowing to his dad and I, he was packing his bag to come home. He even had some friends at his dorm helping him. That April Fools disclosure went sour. All my kids were used to me pulling some form of prank or joke, and even expected it. But this one, as they say, was an "epic mom fail." At least Dad was in on it, too.

I ask you, which do you prefer? Prank or practice? I don't recommend you practicing pranks. Take it from me who learned the hard way. Practice instead, running the race as to win the imperishable prize and then pass it on. And through all the showers of your life, let God's light shine.

## **Tiny Living – On the Go – by Leyanne Enterline**

From one end of the country to the next, five states, visiting three times zones in one day, late nights, early mornings, go, go, go! I thought the rock star life would be amazing, but I do not know how one keeps up! After almost a month of travel, we are finally home and I can barely keep my eyes open!

As a family, we decided to go on the road with my husband while he worked. Not on the road with our travel trailer and driving all over, but from airport to airport with each state he traveled to. The lifestyle seemed glamorous at first, but once we lived it firsthand, it was beyond exhausting! I am super grateful for the amazing experiences for sure, but a little over three straight weeks of constant going is more than a little rough!

However...

The glamour, the benefits, and the fun definitely outweighed the exhaustion! We got to travel to many states and see some awesome theaters where my husband works. We even experienced the paparazzi up close and felt like we were a part of this “worldly royalty.” We dined in fancy restaurants and flew on a private jet. We spoke with the rich and famous and admired all of their worldly possessions; all the things that come with a price.

We are beyond lucky that we were able to all travel together and have a wonderful family take care of our pups. And our tiny home was just the same as when we left, not much we really had to have cared for while we were on the go.

As we spoke with the other individuals on the road with us, they told of their families they left to come on this trip and the amount of stress it was on all of them. No rest and eating out constantly left them feeling tired and unhealthy. No time for exercise, or just time to themselves to think or just do what they wanted to do, was hard.

Being constantly on the go has its pros and cons for sure. Luckily for my husband, he can pick and choose the amount of travel he wants to take on, but it definitely makes me think and pray for those that have a constant life on the road.

I’m thankful for our tiny space to come home to, and for the quality family time we get to have when we are on the road together.

Remember, loves grows best in tiny spaces!

## **A Night to Remember – The Walking Dead – by Marcy Lytle**

Little kids like zombies, the walking dead, don't they? There's a popular Disney movie about zombies and how they are ostracized from society, but are befriended by some kids. The movie shows how when differences are embraced...community takes place. Zombies are a popular breed today, from kids to teens, from lighthearted and warm stories to horror and gore. And since Easter is in the month of April, why not talk about the walking dead?

By definition a zombie is a corpse revived through witchcraft. Did you know that? What if we talked to our kiddos about zombies and what Jesus did when he rose from the dead? Was he a zombie, a hero, or a Savior?

**Preparation:** You'll need 10 or so toothpicks for kids to manipulate, and then a snack to eat with those toothpicks at the end of the lesson - maybe olives or grapes or cheese – whatever your kids like.

### **The Easter Story, you can tell to kids again and again:**

Jesus had a group of friends with which he was dining on the night before his crucifixion. A crucifixion is when a criminal is hung on a cross to die. Only Jesus wasn't a criminal. People treated him like one, because he claimed to be the Son of God – and he really was – but they didn't believe it! In this group of friends was Judas, and he squealed on Jesus to the soldiers who then came and took Jesus away.

Have you ever had a friend or sibling tattle on you? Or have you tattled on someone? How did you feel afterwards? Judas told where Jesus was so he could get some money, and he then he felt so bad later that he killed himself. No zombie resurrection for Judas!

*Lay out the toothpicks in a row like friends, then let one kid pick one to jab the other toothpicks and send them into disorder.*

Jesus took his friends into a garden to pray with him, before it was his time to die on the cross. He asked them to pray with him, for strength. However, his friends fell asleep. In Jesus' biggest time of need, his friends left him and forgot to help him.

Have you ever invited friends to a party but they didn't come, or have you ever needed a friend to care about you, but they didn't? It hurt, didn't it? Those sleeping friends of Jesus could have awakened and helped Jesus pray, but instead they stayed asleep...like zombies before their awakening.

*Take one toothpick and place it aside, to depict Jesus praying. Ask the other toothpicks to join, but have them all lay sideways instead, like they're sleeping.*

Jesus was taken away by Roman soldiers and nailed to a cross, because his purpose in coming to earth was to save sinners (those who disobey God) from their sins and offer them eternal life! Dying a selfless death in love was the only way to do this.

Can you imagine the pain Jesus must have felt as he was nailed to the cross for our sins? Do you think he looked like a zombie?

*Take two toothpicks and lay them like a cross, then two more sets and lay beside those, to depict the three crosses on the hill.*

Two thieves were hanging by Jesus, guys that really did something wrong. Jesus had done nothing wrong except love people. Jesus turned to the one that asked for help and forgave him, offering him eternal life. Not a zombie life of a walking dead person, but a beautiful life free of pain and suffering!

Thunder roared, and Jesus died, and was dead for three days. Then up from the dead he arose! It was because Jesus is life and death could not hold him down – and neither can death hold us! We will never be zombies, walking around dead, but we will be living forever with Jesus and all others that believe. All because of Jesus' death and resurrection!

What Jesus did for us rocked the world! No more fear of death, the grave, and that place called hell. Jesus did for us what we couldn't do. Jesus is the Savior of the world – for all have sinned – and we all need a Savior. There are no “real” zombies among us, they're only in the movies, but there are lots of people that will die in their sin unless they believe!

*Scatter the toothpicks around on the table...as if each is lost and has no place to belong.*

Jesus lives! Up from the dead! Not a bloody gory image, but a glorified beautiful Savior that is with us, loves us, and always forgives us and will keep us forever and ever in His hands – safe and secure.

Sin scatters us, makes us feel alone and lost, hurts our hearts and ultimately causes death and separation, but then...Jesus! Because he rose up from the dead, he gathers each one of us in his hands and gives us purpose and life!

*Gather the toothpicks into your hand, then give a toothpick to each person, stating that they belong to Jesus when they believe, and he uses them on this earth to bless Him and bless others.*

Enjoy your snack with each toothpick, giving thanks for Jesus' death and giving us purpose on this earth to live – not as zombies or living among zombies – but as living beings that breathe and show the love of Jesus by our actions and our love for all.



YOU

## **Strengthening Your Core – An Idle Mind** – by Marcy Lytle

Mom often told me that an idle mind is the devil's workshop. I get what she was saying, that if we're not filling our minds with good things, then bad thoughts can enter in and take up residence and cause us harm. However, as I've grown older, I've come to wish I had an idle mind...

Let me explain.

Often our minds become cluttered with so many things like:

- Our to-do list
- Gifts we need to buy and wrap
- Food we need to shop for and prepare
- Friends we need to call
- Parents we need to visit
- Trips we must plan now
- Worries about tomorrow
- Doctor's visits we don't want to make
- Questions we wish He'd answer

I could write a longer list, but you get the picture. An active mind, in my opinion, is a den of chaos! There are some days I'd actually pay for an idle mind!

Isn't it interesting how we can wake up in the morning and within an hour, our minds can be full to running over of ideas and worries and things we must do just in that one day! There's no time for breakfast, definitely no time to squeeze in morning prayer or time with Him, and barely time to brush our teeth – because that's a must – before we run out the door! Our minds are completely stopped up and full, until we sink back into our pillows at night, exhausted from the heaviness of a full mind.

So how in the world can we put our minds in idle phase, empty them out, and allow his peace to seep in?

We can declutter our minds, one item at a time by:

- Delegating that to-do list to friends and family, or crossing something off
- Releasing expectations that we have to attend or buy a gift for every invitation to do so
- Ordering grocery delivery or buying prepared foods, or asking for help
- Setting aside perhaps one hour a week for calls, and letting that responsibility go the rest of the week
- Visiting our parents as we can, can letting go of the guilt when we cannot
- Enjoying spontaneous trips without a schedule – how about that?
- Emptying our worries into his hands and resting at his feet
- Inviting a friend to go with us to the doctor, or cancelling if we're only going out of fear
- Sighing and smiling, knowing he's aware of our questions and will answer in due time



I'm the world's worst at having a full mind. Maybe it's because my mom warned me of an idle one, but most likely it's because I just run like an energizer battery so I won't become bored! However, I know that an idle mind is good for me, because it means I've emptied, poured, trusted, and rested for a while at his feet and breathed.

I hope you can do the same, if your mind is in high gear and revving to go all the time...

## **Life Right Now – Peace in the Middle – by Bethany Gomez**

I'm not musically inclined in any way. I don't even think I have a decent singing voice, however much I think I sound amazing while singing in the car. I can't play any instrument, although I wish I could. I don't even think I could play the triangle. Well, maybe. But I love music. I listen to my worship playlist every morning when I'm getting ready for the day. I'm even listening to music right now as I write.

Music has a way of making me feel less alone when I am at home by myself. God has used songs to speak to me and encourage me. Music has a way of making moments so much more memorable. Certain worship songs have brought me to tears by the way they convey God's immense love for not only me, but everyone on this earth. Worship songs cause me to remember God's promises, and this strengthens my faith. Even still, in times like these, singing and worshipping in the midst of hardships can bring peace and declare to the enemy that no matter what is going on -I will still sing and trust that God is in control.

To be honest, this article was going to be about something else entirely, but I changed it last minute because I didn't feel right talking about anything other than what is occurring in the world right now and how it is affecting me.

Since I am a teacher, I am a little worried about my school shutting down to help slow the spread of this virus. This could cause a financial loss for me since I am an hourly employee. There are just so many unknowns happening in all our lives. Even as a believer I am not immune to fear and worry, but as a believer I trust that God will provide for not only my needs but the needs of others that are struggling more than I am.

I pray that God's perfect love will cast out fear. That he will protect the most vulnerable.

I will continue to trust, pray and sing to God.

With that, here are a few songs that are seeing me through right now:

"Peace Be Still" by The Belonging featuring Lauren Daigle

"Highs and Lows" by Hillsong Young and Free

"Not Afraid" by Mosaic MSC

"Raise A Hallelujah" by Bethel

In this time of social distancing, where we feel helpless because we are limited to going out to help, let us not distance ourselves from sharing encouragement via phone calls, text messages, video chat, and even sending of cards. And let us not forget the power of sharing and listening to uplifting music that will hopefully bring peace in the middle of the storms of life.

Psalm 59:16

*But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love;*

*for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.*

## **The Upper Quadrant – Eyes Shut** – by Marcy Lytle

I was praying for my dad this morning and trying to picture giving my concerns about him to God, as I prayed. I often think about placing my cares in a safety deposit box, locking it and handing Him the key. Or I visualize that verse about casting our cares on Him, like a real fisherman, casting my cares out to the far places in the water and letting them go...

However, this morning I decided to be quiet and still as I just listened and “saw” in my mind’s eye. You see, my mind is usually super active as I spill out all of the worries about getting older, watching my dad decline, and concerns about my kids, and the pain I see others suffering, and so on... I often pour out all of those things in a big pile, morning after morning, because by evening I’ve usually picked them all up once again to carry. Not a great habit, I confess.

Sitting still in His presence is hard for me, as I sit and listen. I want to speak. I want to explain. And I want to plead.

So here I sat, as I just thought of those on my list, and here’s what I saw:

- I saw my dad cradled in the palm of His hand.
- I saw myself and my husband lying down on God’s heart.
- I saw my kids soaring in a hot air balloon with fire fueling their ride.
- I saw God hovering over my extended family tending to everything that concerned them.

The point of sitting still and saying nothing is to listen to His voice and to be able to see with our mind’s eye how He’s got it all there under His watchful eye.

I thought of creation and how the Word says He hovered over the face of the earth, in the darkness, as He began to create light, design animals, fill the seas, and more. He never stops creating light in the darkness, and order out of chaos. He is who He is, from the beginning of time and forever and ever.

I know that I’m going to need to sit quietly morning after morning and be still and watch in my mind’s eye as He shows me how he’s present and moving and working and powerful. I know that I’m weak and that during the day I will once again flirt with worry and care, and end up tired and exhausted as the sun sets. He knows I’m weak, but He’s so strong...

And just like the sun rises each morning and will do so until the end of time, He is faithful to awaken me and call me to sit alone with Him, eyes shut and heart wide open, as He shows me how He’s at work creating order, sending light, and making all things GOOD.

## **YOU – Healthy Habits – Dance Away – by Marcy Lytle**

I wasn't allowed to boy/girl dance growing up, but I was allowed to dance on a team of girls in high school. I love dancing! I love moving to the music, because it feels like I'm having fun while getting in exercise, as well! However, I feel like many of us don't dance unless we're on a dance floor at a wedding, because we just don't think of it! This month, I want you to think of dancing as cardio, and something you can do at home, without having to sign up for a class!

First, here are a few benefits of dancing, and how it's good for your health:

It can improve mental health, because it's something that's fun and happy

It can increase stamina, as we dance the day away...

It's a cardio workout, for sure.

So, maybe you haven't thought of this, but you can totally dance when you're at home, super busy, or out with your kids, or wherever...to get into the habit of dancing for fun AND good health:

1. Put on music while you clean the house, and dance and skip from room to room.
2. Put on music when you and your husband are bored, and dance together – any sort of moves – for at least 30 minutes.
3. Put on music when the kids are bored, and have a family jam session while showing off your latest moves. You're sure to laugh, which is also good for your health!
4. Put on music and pretend your large area rug or den floor is your performance space, and spin and leap and dance and move like no one is watching!
5. Put on music while you sit at your computer and twist, reach, clap and shout for a 15 minute break.
6. Put on music while you're folding towels and putting away clothes, and actually skip and dance to the closet/bathroom and back.
7. Put on music when you're out on a date, park way out in the lot, and dance as the sun sets...
8. Put on music while you're relaxing and just move your legs to the beat, for a good while.
9. Put on music by searching you tube for dance videos and just do what you can!
10. Put on music when you're the lowest of the low, and dance until your mood is breathless and bold.

I seriously love to dance on my area rug. Sometimes I do it alone, and sometimes I convince him to dance with me. We often watch YouTube videos, just play a Spotify list, or just pick three songs that we love and we move – together and separately – until we're laughing and a little bit tired.

Dancing is definitely a workout and a mood lifter, and it's something we can all do, whether we're "good" at it or not. It's just moving like we're happy and we know it!

## **Created for Life - His Embrace is Our Calling – by Ginny Hurley**

Right now, as I sit in my backyard listening to the tinkling of our water fountain and the trilling of the birds that have recently returned from journeys south, I am in awe of God's goodness and patience with me. I am convicted of the busyness of life and the constant moving about that happens everyday when I get up. I realize the value of quietness, a soaking of heaven's breath, which truly changes the way I think. Loved ones come to mind, and as I pray for them, I'm released from worry, doubt, and vain imagination. Focus is clearer and the idea of a problem just fades in this atmosphere.

His love has me. He has me.

My thoughts, my heart, and my body were given long ago to Someone bigger than me, the One who holds my hand every minute and brings joy to my spirit in every situation. In the twinkling of an eye, He is with me as I sit outside and listen for Him. Knowing that even as I enter the house, He remains with me, and that fact is most endearing to me. His presence draws me and makes me hungry for more.

I am entrenched in the love of a good Father and I recognize that my part in the relationship is to steward all that He has given me. So from the place of friendship and honor, my desire is to carry His heart to every place. Stewarding is not about money, although it can be. I see it as a lifestyle, a way of waking up everyday with a heart of generosity and passion, sacrifice and honor. It's a way of going about my day with an expectancy of Him moving. Believing that He truly did create me for something I can't necessarily see brings me peace and stabilizes my mind when I want to compare or look at all the wonderful things others are doing that I am not.

It is impossible for Him to leave me or forget about my personal life, the things I care about. His word is true and He will never forsake me no matter what. That is a fact that remains! Nothing can change it! His perfect love has been poured out for everyone forever. Our response is YES! The One who heals our wounds and binds up our broken hearts calls us to trust Him. The Lion of Judah is roaring right now. He is ready to bring justice and hope to our nation and the world. The Lamb has paid the price, and He is our only true Champion.

As I gaze on His beauty, I am captivated with the way He loves me. I am caught up in a vision of His magnificence and I never want to leave. His embrace is our calling. It's as simple as that. Resting in the quietness of His love, He carries us to the place of His heart, right in the center. Circumstances and trials seem to disappear. My worries have vanished in the essence of His presence. There is no place I would rather be!



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Stop Apologizing – by Bekah Holland**

You know, sometimes, I wonder how I got here. And by sometimes, I mean right now. And by here, I mean writing this article. About marriage? Really?

Let's be honest. I'm not a shiny, sparkly newlywed who is floating in on a dopamine rush imagining this exciting new journey with this beautiful human who looked very handsome in a tux. I'm also not tried and true, stood the test of time, finally not doing everyone else's laundry, sitting on the back porch watching the sun go down place in my marriage either. My husband and I are somewhere in the middle.

We're essentially the couple equivalent of the awkward teenage phase. This summer we'll celebrate 14 years of wedded (sometimes) bliss. So, all the newness has worn off. We've seen each other at our very best I'm-out-in-public-and-I-need-to-appear-fabulous selves. We've also seen each other in whatever level is approximately six miles below rock bottom. Both as individuals and together. So thinking about writing something that makes it sound like I have a clue what I'm doing makes me feel like a fraud.

Just in case anyone hasn't actually read any of my stories about messes and mistakes, I'll sum it up for you....I've had plenty of "don't do this" moments. I've done and said some incredibly stupid things that not only hurt my husband, but also hurt me. I think as women, we are taught to make ourselves smaller, more quiet, gentle and invisible to make room for everyone else. I'm no exception. But as I've gotten older, and my marriage more solid, I've realized that my husband didn't marry a woman who just put her head down, apologized for other people's transgressions and silenced her own dreams to make room for the dreams of others.

The woman he married was bright, witty and ready to challenge anyone who tried to tell her she didn't deserve a seat at the table. That woman was brave, sensitive and compassionate, full of enough light to touch those around her. But somehow, I lost sight of her. I thought that to be a wife and mother, I needed to be quiet and be less. I thought I needed to silence myself and my hopes and dreams. It was what I heard around me. It was what I saw in churches who used the "women should be silent" in blatantly wrong contexts, but used it nonetheless.

I spent much of my early married life trying to shrink down to some version of myself that fit in the tiny space I thought was allowed for me. Small enough to stay out of the way, quiet enough to not be noticed, gentle enough to stay under the radar. Why? I have no idea. Actually, I have some idea, but what I know is that there was never one moment in time that my partner wanted this kind of life for me. He always managed to see me for who I really was and who I was meant to be, past all the limitations I weighed myself down with. He saw my ability and my strength and reminded me that my voice not only matters, but is necessary. And not just in theory. That while our kids and the people in our circles deserve to experience the me I was created to be, but that I deserve it more. And not the tiny version I've been. But the me that takes up space, and speaks her truth. The me that snorts when she laughs and doesn't hide her fears and dreams. The me that chooses kindness over promotion and love over all else.

So maybe that's how I got here, writing about marriage. I definitely didn't get here by doing it all right and having it all together. Maybe I got here by trying to make the next right choice and take the next hard step. Maybe I got here by continuing to throw off the weight of who I thought

I was supposed to be and fight to be more of who I was created by God to be. And if I trust that God is perfection and he makes no mistakes, then I have to trust that I'm not one. That he created me to be brave and kind and strong and gentle and that I don't have to fit in a box, but that He designed me to break out of it. And just in case you don't know me, I still don't have it all together or much of anything figured out. I mostly just wing it every day, and try to do better than I did yesterday. Sometimes that works, and sometimes my husband has to remind me to stop apologizing for merely existing. Sometimes I stand strong and fight and then go home and cry on the kitchen floor. Sometimes I do that backwards. But I'm learning.

It's not because I'm figuring this all out on my own. It's because I'm doing this life beside a person who, despite his own battle, won't stop fighting for me to live my best life and stop apologizing for living it.

All through the Bible we see how God created us with community in mind...from the very beginning to the very end. No one, not even Jesus, was an island. Those folks all grew and moved and lived and changed the world through relationship, and we will too.

I don't always know what I'm doing (obviously) and I don't have some how-to formula for a better marriage (most definitely not). But maybe, just maybe, my husband and I are figuring out how to do this thing, we can walk together, pushing each other forward and learning with each bump and bruise and even from our dumpster fire mistakes. Maybe together we really can be better.

*"If you feel something calling you to dance or write or paint or sing, please refuse to worry about whether you're good enough. Just do it. Be generous. Offer a gift to the world that no one else can offer: YOURSELF." Glennon Doyle*



## **Date Night Fun – A Little Comedy** – by Marcy Lytle

It's the month for paying taxes, filing them, reporting our income, gathering paperwork and more – and I know so many dread April 15 and sigh when it's over...or if they have to file an extension...they cry! And thankfully, this crazy year there's an extension for all. But why not make April date night a time to laugh and smile at all things funny! I'm not one to laugh easily, but when I do it's often over silly or sarcastic things and I cannot stop! Once, in a funeral of a person I didn't know well, I could see just the tip of their nose from where I was sitting (as they were laying in the casket). For some reason, I got so overcome with laughter, I had to leave...

Okay, that's weird. But here are some funny dates to take this month when life is not so funny:

**Joke's on You** – Head to Barnes and Noble online and buy a joke book, or a Reader's Digest (there are lots of jokes in there). Read them aloud, as you sip on a drink and enjoy a snack. In the kitchen, make pancakes together, with "decorations" from your pantry like chocolate chips, strawberries, syrup and more – to make funny faces on the cakes before you eat them. Squirt a little whipping cream into each other's mouths and laugh out loud.

**Comedy Central** – Check out some comedies on Netflix and stay home to watch a couple, while you make some funny drinks and flavored popcorn. See a few recipes over on the TIPS page under "In the Kitchen." *Late Night*, starring Emma Thompson, is funny and great movie – if you haven't seen it.

**Tickle Your Fancy** – this means something fascinates you and you want to try it! Browse YouTube for dance tutorials, or DIY projects that are unique and use things you have at home. Whatever you fancy, now's the time to search it out and try it, in your yard or in your car or bathroom – try an up-do or a re-do! Do these things TOGETHER – and get tickled doing them!

**Laugh with Friends** – We are all in isolation, but pick a time to gather with friends on FB or via text or emails and spend an hour sending each other jokes, relaying funny stories, or making each other smile. Have each couple all make the same drink/snack to enjoy while you're connecting for laughs and love.

**Amusement Park** – I know, we can't go to the real amusement parks, but we can park our car and enjoy amusements! Pack up your car with all the things – a picnic, puzzle books, games, etc. – and head to a park! Get out of the house, but still away from others, and spend a few hours sitting on the hood of your car, resting in the car, and opening up the back for your meal – and make a whole day of it!

Purpose to make the best of your time together, not apart and reading or working in your own corners all day, but together laughing and loving and rediscovering the love you both have for Him and each other.

## **After 40 Years – Road Rage** – by Marcy Lytle

Traveling with your spouse, especially navigating on a road trip, can be trying on a marriage! Believe me, there have been trips we've been on where the map app steered us wrong and we ended up lost – only to start blaming each other for “not listening” or to ask, “What did you do?” And those comments and questions never ended well, as we pulled over and argued about what when wrong with his driving and my navigation.

We had a big talk about this, once. I expressed how I feel when I'm guiding him according to the app and he remarks as if I've steered him wrong. He expressed how he's just releasing his frustration not at me, but at the situation. We talked and talked, and we finally are doing better mapping and driving and actually having fun!

Here's what I've learned and he's learned, and how we now know what's triggering frustration and how to avoid it:

- We plan ahead...together...before we go. This helps so much, because he sees and I do too, exactly where we're going.
- We pull over. This is a life saver! When we're turned around or miss an exit or become confused, there's this place called a parking lot where we whip into, we look at the map, then go again. Genius.
- We've become more kind. If he veers off the path to see something unplanned, I go with the flow (this is hard for me!) If I'm waiting on the phone because service is bad, or I've accidentally typed in something incorrectly, he waits and pauses and smiles.
- We've worked on patience. When we're in a parking lot and twisting around turns, our app navigator often starts talking and then switches directions abruptly. We just laugh and say, “Oh, she's getting her bearings...just wait a minute.”
- We quit thinking the worst of the other one. This is huge! If I'm a bit snappy, he lets me know and I stop and think about why. Maybe I'm tired and we need to pull over and rest a bit. We really aren't out to make the other one have a bad time! Sometimes we just need rest, a breather, or that thing called grace...

Traveling with our spouses can be one of the best times of refueling EVER, as we escape the routine and the work, and enjoy the views and the ride. But only if we learn how the other one works and thinks, and we communicate. We spent years ruining a perfectly good few hours of sightseeing by arguing over navigation!

This last trip – there wasn't an argument at all! And yes, we made wrong turns, got tired, and missed exits. But somehow, after all these years of talking it out and realizing how we make the other one feel when we growl...we grew up and enjoyed ourselves.

How about that?



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Rooted in Love – Mamas Unite** - By Kaelin Scott

Being a stay-at-home mama sometimes feels like being a zookeeper. Constantly cleaning up messes, animal-like growling noises (coming from me, not the kids), always wiping somebody's nose or bottom, and feeling filthy by the end of the day - even though I haven't gone anywhere. Face-to-face interaction with people other than my family is often lacking for several days straight. I feel like a lazy slob, but there's no real point in getting dressed most of the time. And I can't exercise or go for a walk without a monkey – or, you know, a child – hanging off some limb of mine. My life is a cyclical pattern of cooking, cleaning, coloring, changing diapers, getting snacks, and trying to make a dent in the overwhelming clutter. *It's hard work, and it's tiring.*

But I've also been on the flipside of the coin, and I know that life as a working mom is no walk in the park either. Your days start early, too early, and it's always a mad rush to make it out the door in time. You spend all day away from your family, surrounded by people with demands for what your day should look like. Squeezing time into your busy day to pump for your nursing baby is stressful and sometimes infeasible, but you do it anyway, oftentimes sacrificing your own lunchtime to make sure it gets done. By the time you pick up your kids and get home, you've got to make dinner, clean up the kitchen, prep lunches for the next day, bathe everyone, and then it's bedtime. And you feel like you barely even got to see your kids amid all the preparing and necessary tasks. You live for the weekend when you'll get to spend time together, but then Saturday rolls around and you've got a mountain of chores to catch up on. *It can feel like you're trying to stay above water, struggling to catch your breath.*

Whether you work, stay home, or do a combination of the two, being a mom is never easy. It's a wonderful, amazing journey, but it can be exhausting and frustrating. That's why we all need each other! Instead of criticizing or judging each other's parenting styles, all of us mamas need to stick together...to support each other, love each other, and remind each other just how beautiful and valuable each of us are.

Next time you see a woman at the grocery store with a wailing toddler in the cart and a fussy baby on her hip, instead of thinking "if that were my kid" or feeling glad it's not you, ask her if she could use an extra hand. If your friend has had a long week and you know she could use some time alone, offer to take her kids to the park with you for a couple hours. Or simply just be there to talk, or cry, or LISTEN. Pray for your mama friends. And remember that we all have struggles no one sees, and none of our lives are perfect. Enjoy your family and the time you have with them, and soak up the memories as much as you can. The days may be long, but the years are short. One day these little munchkins won't need us the way they do now, and we're going to miss all the sleepless nights and restless days.

Motherhood is a beautiful gift, especially when we focus on the positive and build each other up. Friendship is important at any season of life, and that includes mamas.

*Find a friend, be a friend, and remember that you always have a friend in Jesus.*

## FIRMLY PLANTED – THE TREES IN MY GARDEN – BY DINA CAVAZOS

---

In the beginning...

There were no trees. Well, practically. There were two: one fairly small cedar elm and a half-dead chinkapin oak planted too close together by the previous owner. My south-facing backyard got the full benefit of the sun going across the big sky all day long. The sun was relentless, and the one tiny bit of shade from the cedar elm made no difference.

This “beginning” was before the idea of a prayer garden was even planted in my soul. This beginning was a blank slate—a bare backyard waiting for its destiny. At the time, all I wanted was **shade**. It couldn’t come fast enough, but you know how trees grow....slowly. There is no instant shade tree.

After a couple of years I decided to cut down the chinkapin because it wasn’t doing well. Even if it recovered, it was planted too close to the healthy cedar elm, so both would suffer. I had no patio and the small elm was off to the side. I was desperate. An ad for cheap trees a few miles away lured me to drive over and take a look. A limited selection of pathetic looking specimens didn’t look very promising, but the price was right for my small budget. I saw a stick with a tiny leaf labeled “Chinese pistache.” With a price of only \$20, I claimed it because I had read it was a good choice for our area. Trying to make the most of its future shade, I studied the backyard for the most strategic place to plant it. My helper planted it. Then I thought, “*Why did I do that? That was the wrong spot!*” I paid him (again) to move it a few yards over. Then I realized it was in the right spot the first time. Crazy! Too bad and oh well.

During that same low-budget, take-what-I-can-get tree hunting trip I also bought a few small stick-plants that were simply labeled crape myrtle (no variety) for \$5 each. This was risky because there are so many kinds—you just don’t know what you’re going to end up with. I have one of those still growing, to gargantuan heights with lavender flowers. By chance, I planted it in a good spot for its size and I really like it, but it’s not what I would have chosen had I known better.

A couple of more years passed and the prayer garden seed sprouted in my soul. Shade and privacy were required for a useable, prayerful setting. I considered ways to camouflage the view of roofs and create the edges of my sanctuary. If money and city codes were no object, I would have built a beautiful privacy fence with tall metal structures to cover with vines. My imagination ran wild, but trees and shrubs were my best option. After much research and thought, I planted tough native wax myrtles because they grow fast. Over time, I added a tall narrow conifer and a Blue Ice Arizona cypress (bluish color and supposedly not too wide). A viburnum, anacacho orchid, Texas mountain laurel, a Texas redbud that I really didn’t have room for (I gave in to their early spring beauty), one tall Natchez crape myrtle in the corner, and, finally, a Monterey oak pretty much maxed out the space for trees.

It’s been nine years since I first obeyed an inner calling to create a backyard prayer garden. The trees in my garden have been prayed over—prayed over to grow fast, to be healed when sick, and to be the right choice for what God wants the garden to be. These trees define my garden—

not only in terms of their visual and functional effects, but the work that results from their various peculiarities. Once planted, they become a permanent part of the landscape and impact everything else.

The trees in my garden remind me of major decisions and landmarks in my life. Choices and events have largely determined my life path and now form the structure I've built my life around...because that's what was there. As with my trees, I would make some different choices had I known what I know now. We say that a lot...*if only I knew then what I know now*. But I made the best decisions I could at the time, knowing what I knew at the time.

Some decisions are made in ignorance, in poverty, in sickness, in desperation or out of necessity...the imperfect mess that follows seems to be the norm rather than the exception. But messiness and imperfection are perfect opportunities for God to reveal his faithfulness and love. He has woven my mess-ups into the big picture and made them an integral part of the scenery. Like the Chinese pistache "stick" I took a chance on—it's now a beautiful shady tree in the summer. Over and beyond my stumbling efforts, he knows a heart that loves him and I believe he values this above all.

*This is great news....for me, for you, and for my garden.*

## **Moving Forward – Ask Him – by Pam Charro**

Isn't God amazing? We are so blessed by all that he provides, from friendships and family to income and shelter, easily accessible food and medical care, fun experiences, health, the list goes on and on!

But if you're like me, you can probably think of at least a few areas you would like to see improvement in your life. If you aren't asking him, why aren't you? He is very interested and wants to hear from you. Don't believe the lie that he just wants you to let him decide what is good for you. That's not even a relationship!

Years ago, I sat down and wrote a list of 31 things I wanted to see him do in my life (no, I wasn't thinking of Baskin-Robbins at the time, it just happened to be all of the items I could come up with). Within a year or two, I was able to check off all 31 requests. Would he have been on trial if I hadn't received all 31 things? No, of course not! But it was a great opportunity for me to see him as the loving and generous father that he is, and he showed off for me!

And last year, I took a brief hiatus from much socializing because I had gone through a difficult season and was focused on being alone with God and healing my heart. But in January I started asking for lots of friendships and to be socially busy with all kinds of new friends. In only two months, I have already met dozens of new people that I enjoy quality time with and I'm having so much fun again! I also asked for either a new job or for my work situation to improve, and he has already answered that prayer as well. I enjoy my job now and can see how blessed I, along with many others, am because he put me there. Life is so much better than it was just a few short months ago, but I'm not sure how much would have improved if I hadn't asked for the change.

I know we have all heard stories about how God has graciously blessed others, but he wants all of us to have those stories about our own lives! He loves to give us the desires of our hearts. Life is so exciting because we can know and trust that he hears our prayers, he cares about what we think and want, and, with him, all things are possible!

## Simple Truths – Captivity – by Erica Simmons

Over the last several months, I have been on a reading binge. In the midst of it I read a two book series that had a profound impact on me. Even as I write this story, the tears start to flow. Nothing I have ever read has impacted me so profoundly; and for the sake of transparency, I will confess it has thrown me into a season of my life that I have never experienced and it has not been an easy one. It for this reason I am compelled to write this article this month. I will start by sharing a brief synopsis of the story.

*The story is about Claire. Claire was from a loving and close family. When Claire was 14 years old she was abducted and held captive for 10 years. I don't have to (nor will I share) what she endured, because you already know. I will share that early on Claire fought her captor and many times tried to escape. On her last attempt, her captor did not punish her for the attempt, but showed up the next day with a young woman and took her life in front of Claire. You see, Claire had come to the conclusion there was nothing she would not endure to get away, but the burden of being the cause of someone else's death and the fear of more deaths was enough to make her stop her attempts to escape. Her captor then used this fear, even going so far as to include her family over the years, to keep her obedient. As time went by, her captor brought someone else home and Claire was given more freedom. It was during these moments over the years she would find a random man and spend the night with him. But instead of telling him directly who she was, she left her real name and the address to her parents' home. During one of these encounters she met Connor Parks, a police detective. Although there was an immediate connection and attraction he only held her for the night. When Connor awoke the next morning she was gone, but she again left her real name and her parents' address. Needless to say, he was determined to find her, but before he could do so, Claire found out her captor had taken another girl and was determined not to have her suffer the same fate - and therefore escapes with the young girl.*

I will be the first to say that this synopsis is dry and not all that inspiring, and would not be one that I would use if writing a review of the book. The synopsis is utilitarian for this article, and the book is written powerfully and beautifully. Even though I have shared some key points, if you are a reader of good books - I don't want to give everything away. *Now back to the article.* As I finished reading the book, the next morning as I was getting ready for work I was struck by an overwhelming wave of emotions. I just stood there and sobbed uncontrollably and deeply for reasons unknown. As I was sitting at work with this heavy burden on my heart, I opened my email and wrote the following paragraph. One that I knew I was going to use to write this article.

*The enemy wants to strip away our innocence in the most horrific way possible. He wants to trap us and he uses fear to terrorize us and keep us his prisoner. He wants to blind us to the truth about our freedom. He wants to break us in ways that destroy our will. He wants to strip away our identity, but we are in Christ. He wants to take our name and give a new name, names like 'shame' and 'unworthy.' He wants to brutalize us. His hate is so complete and so deep he wants to make us believe there is no way to overcome it, to escape it. There is only one thing that will defeat it. That one thing is God's love. God's love is stronger, it is our strength, and it waits for us to surrender all of our brokenness. It patiently waits for us to give it all to Him.*



This amazingly simple and yet powerful truth overwhelmed me to the point of tears, and Claire's fictitious story depicts it perfectly. Not everyone's story is as dramatic and traumatic as Claire's and not every attempt of the enemy is successful, but his game plan is the same. The enemy wants to tear us away from God's love, he wants to take away our true identity, and he tries to do that with fear. If successful, he tries to make us believe that God could not possibly love us because of what we have done.

### **Separating us from God's love**

In the book, Claire was from a loving and close family and her captor used deceit to abduct her away from that loving family. Earlier this week, in our church life group we were reading and discussing Psalm 139 when a group member shared her attempt to share the word with a young woman who had been abused and hurt by her family. She asked that if our God KNEW she was going to suffer how can we consider Him a loving God? This is an example of how the enemy works to rip us away from God's love. This hurt this young lady that suffered and served to separate her from God's love.

### **Taking away our name**

In Claire's life, and in so many abducted women's cases, once she was taken she was given a new name. In Claire's case it was Lyn. The significance of that name becomes apparent later in the book and it also explains why her captor did not kill her once she was too old. Like Claire, our name identifies who we are and taking that identity is paramount in cases of abducted women so that they start to disassociate with that name and learn to live their new life. Our identity is more than our flesh and blood and our earthly family. We have an identity in Christ and the enemy does not want us to settle into that identity, so he comes like a thief in the night to attempt to steal it and give us a new name; *unworthy*. The author does such a great job of showing how the abuse, abduction and suffering paint a new picture of who the captive "think" they are.

### **Instilling fear**

We all suffer with the *not good enough* syndrome. My son Jordan is now taking courses online. He is in his third course and the first two classes he completed, he received an A. He called me from work one day so excited about the grade he had received on the draft of his final project for his second class. He told me how teachers used to tell him that he could be doing so much better in classes if he gave more effort. He then shared with me how afraid he was they were wrong. He stated that if he did not try but failed, he always had the excuse of he was not trying hard. Even in this simple example, we can see how fear can keep us from trying. This fear is what kept Claire in captivity long after her chains were no longer holding her. *What fear are we letting hold us back?*

### **No one will love us**

This is our biggest fear and the enemy's greatest lie. Again, I applaud the author for her in-depth dive into the aftermath of being abducted, after the captive has escaped or been rescued. She did a great job depicting this in Claire's story. She describes how Claire felt – that she would be rejected or judged because of what she had gone through. The scenes in the book are heartbreaking. This is the precipice that we shamefully spend too much time standing on these days. This is the reason for my

current season. With the boys now graduated, and a lifetime of days, weeks, months and years ahead of me, I think about and ask, "How do I want to fill those days?" As I finish this article, I am no closer to deciding than I was months ago when I first tried to face it and went into a freefall of reading, in my efforts to fill my time and not think about it.

Captivity is not an all or nothing venture, meaning we can freely live parts of our lives in the freedom afforded it to us when Christ died on the cross and live parts of our lives in captivity from the enemy's lies. I am there in the area I just shared. I am right now afraid to face it. I know that and now you do, as well.

I will leave you with this: In the story, Claire escaped for two reasons. One was her connection to Connor and the desire to keep him safe, and two was her determination to keep someone else from enduring what she endured. The same things happen for us. We experience a connection with our God that is greater than the fear we have for ourselves and we want to pursue it, which breaks our bonds of captivity. That can also be the same when we meet someone who is struggling and we have the courage to share our own struggle, and that too brings freedom.

Maybe that is what sharing part of my struggle will do for me and for someone else who reads this story...you.

Books by Lisa Reagan

Finding Claire Fletcher

Losing Leah Holloway

The story of Claire's healing continues in the second book.

## **Unearthly Thing - A Practical Guide** – by Angela Dolbear

### **...for surviving (and thriving through) most everything in life...including the COVID-19 Quarantine**

I could feel it rising up. Thick, dark and foul fear, bubbling and boiling over in the pit of my stomach. The more I listened to the national news, the more this fear crawled up my spine and started to take root in my mind. A deadly world-wide virus forcing people to shelter themselves in their homes for weeks, in hopes of not contracting or spreading the virus.

I could stop watching the news, but I believe it wise to stay informed, especially to learn about areas and people who need prayer.

But wait. This fear is not at home in me, a daughter of the Most High God. Nope. Nada.

Fear is a lie. I recognize this effective lie that originates from the father of lies. I became acquainted with his tactics while researching and writing my latest novel, [A Tormentor's Tale](#) (unintended shameless plug...but it really is a great story about spiritual warfare) which reveals the strategies of demons and the ways in which God's people can thwart their invisible flaming missiles.

*Be anxious for nothing...* I say to myself as I head down stairs away from the television, to retrieve nothing in particular, repeating one of my favorite verses from God's Word in my mind.

Yes! The fear dissipates like smoke from a blown-out birthday cake candle. My mind clears. I begin to pray for those closest to me, and for myself, and for this virus to be gone. Such power in God's words.

So what is a realistic and pragmatic way to cope in this situation? I can't be leaving the room and running up and down the stairs all day. I have work to do, a new novel to work on, new songs that need their lyrics completed, and a Sunday morning worship set to prepare. I can't be suffocated or burdened with fear.

Ah, yes...this:

### ***A Practical Guide for surviving (and thriving through) most everything in life:***

1. **Read (and memorize) God's Word** – Read a good Scripture-based devotional, first thing in the morning. The home page on my computer boots to [Greg Laurie's devotional](#), the pastor of my old church back in Southern California. It is there before I open Gmail, or anything else. I read it while sipping a freshly brewed cup of low acid coffee before proceeding with the day. I also have a daily verse from a Bible app that pops up on my cell phone every day. So many times these verses perfectly addressed my needs at the moment, and fortified my soul.
2. **Prayer** – I have discovered over the past 20+ years as a believer in Christ that prayer is as important as food and water to not only exist, but to thrive and flourish.
3. **Seek First the Kingdom of God** – Of course this point stems from the first point of staying in God's Word, but it is a crazy powerful attitude to adopt. If my reaction to all things is to seek God's will before and above everything else, knowing for certain that He will handle everything, then I am on solid ground, firm in my faith, and then I am able and willing to help others.

4. **Gratitude** – “...In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” A sure-fire way to eradicate anxiety and fear is to start thanking God specifically for all the good He has done, is doing, and will do. After about three *Thank You Father's*, not only is the torch of fear going out, but an attitude of gratitude is growing, so then I can't help but...
5. **REJOICE!** – Again I say, rejoice! And tell others about God, and what He has done for you.
6. **Rinse and repeat** – The gates of Hell shall NOT prevail. Nope. Never.

Remember, we fight from victory – the victory that was completed for us on Christ's Cross. So breathe – and read, pray, and the rest will follow.

*Grace, and peace beyond comprehension to you.*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – Always Something**

We were headed to a wedding and had a flat, and we missed the ceremony

Always something

We had an hour to mow the yard and the mower wouldn't start – it had water in the tank

Always something

I was hoping to visit her in the hospital this weekend, but I was called into work

Always something

I was planning to clean my house today but I came down with a nasty cold

Always something

Have you heard yourself or someone else comment with these two words? I say them often, in response to an interruption or a snafu that occurs when good plans are made. I'm always planning and hoping for a good time or a fun outing, but there are times with downpours spoil outside plans, a machine breaks, our bodies suffer, or work calls. There's definitely "always something."

However, recently I realized that I only use those two words in reference to bad interruptions and disappointments. Aren't there equally times when something always happens to surprise us, in the best of ways? I think so, but we just have to purpose to notice. So in purposing to notice, I'm going to list below twice as many good interruptions as I did bad ones above!

They were going to build a new home, when an unexpected gift of cash fell into their hands

Always something

They were driving up to the window to pay, when they were told the car behind already paid

Always something

We showed up to dinner with friends, when they said they were paying the bill

Always something

We were running so late and there it was – a parking spot right up front

Always something

I was feeling a bit down when I heard a "ding" and an encouraging text popped up from her

Always something

I was afraid of tomorrow and tomorrow came, and it was awesome

Always something

He was feeling so sick the morning of a flight home, but by evening was fine

Always something

She was wondering how she'd pay for kids' new clothes when a friend shared a huge box with her

Always something

I'm a firm believer that discovery is in the eye of the looker, and sometimes I'm only looking for the interruptions that disappoint. When I start to look for the surprises that bless, I start to see them everywhere in every day, from sunrise to sunset. And I'm thinking that if I look often enough, pretty soon those other interruptions will fade behind the clouds and my only focus will be the sun...

## **FRESH THYME – For Now – by Marcy Lytle**

I get it. I want it too. It would be great if there was a cure-all for every ailment in life.

For example, apple cider vinegar is known to cure lots of things. So is drinking lemon with water. Taking vitamins or supplements can ensure better health. What about those green smoothies with “all” the nutrients blended in? It seems we are a society on the hunt for a pill, a drink, a diet, a form of exercise, or just some answer to cure all of our woes!

If there was just one secret that is yet to be revealed that would enable us all to be thin, healthy, live a long and prosperous life, we’d all pay big bucks to get it! And we even want that one leader to fix America so it can be what it once was...and even better. My husband just found out recently that drinking pomegranate juice daily lowers blood pressure. But that doesn’t mean he can otherwise eat junk and sit on the sofa.

I was thinking about this the other day because I have fearful thoughts that just swoop by my mind’s window daily that I wish would just disappear for good. I want them to be gone and never show up, and I’m constantly searching for the root, fighting them with scripture, praying and asking others to pray, etc. for them to disappear for good. And all of those efforts are good, but I’m wondering...

Is my search for a once and for all cure-all a futile one?

Let’s look at alcoholism. I know so many former alcoholics who cannot take a sip. They have to be on guard daily, to avoid slipping back into the addiction. Even though they’ve been “cured” or “sober” for years, it’s a daily grind of making good choices.

I think one of my biggest frustrations has been that I cannot find a reason or a once-and-for-all cure for my negative thoughts. They just surface at random times, and I then have this choice. I can let them sit there and take root, or I can use the tools I’ve been given to fight them.

I know God can do anything and he does sometimes offer a cure-all for illnesses and problems in this life. He can do it, I know he can! But more often than not, he seems to offer us lots of good advice in the big book of his Word about a daily relationship with him.

When I thought longer on this and decided to stop the search for the answer to end my fearful thoughts, somehow I settled near a little oasis in the desert. Think with me about someone traveling through the desert constantly frustrated that it’s dry and long and hot, trying to figure out why the desert exists. He might miss the ponds and the pop-up shade trees and the occasional showers because of his exhaustion of demanding to know the answer why.

I don’t want to miss God’s daily presence each morning that calms those fears that surface. And if he erases them with a magic wand I might not even seek him at all. No, he’s not a mean God that keeps pins in our sides to make us seek him, but he is a wise God that knows that all we need in life comes from time in his presence. Transformation, and transfer, takes place.



I'm still thinking on this one. There's not really a cure-all in life for our ailments, but rather there are healthy choices we must choose to make daily, in order to feel good and prosper. And even when we do all the "right things" storms still blow in that snap off the roof of our cozy little houses into which we've settled in, away from the world. And we then have to rebuild, reconnect and smile again at the goodness of God in the storm, in the still, in the desert and in the real...

Frustrated at your own thorn that pricks you way too often? Don't keep searching for a way to end it or the answer to why it's there in the first place. Just seek Him, and sit in his presence, and see if the pain of the thorn doesn't subside.

I have no answers to every question in life, as far as a routine or a method or a pill. I can even get anxious listening to everyone else tell me what they do that works for them and how I ought to do it, as well.

But I do know that God is good, he's my father, and he is my provider of all good things. Every good and perfect gift comes from above. And he has lots of these good gifts in every sunrise and every sunset, and in every cloud and raindrop of each day...if I choose to notice.

Yes, I had a few fearful thoughts this morning and I tried to dismiss them, and they've subsided for now. I just looked up and started giving thanks. Tomorrow I may read a verse. And the next day I may sit with a friend and glean from her garden.

But for now, I've quit asking why. And that, my friend, feels good.

## **FRESH THYME – Just a Mention – by Marcy Lytle**

I recently saw a Facebook post by a friend that was so excited because her sister's farm was mentioned in an article. Another friend posted how they got on the news and wanted us all to watch! Still others have posted often how their name was honored in some way, or an elderly parent that served in the military had their name mentioned in a ceremony. Apparently, having our names mentioned is a big thing.

What about those awards ceremonies where our kids' names are called to receive a certificate of honor? We will sit through an hour long session just to hear the one second of our kid's name called out loud and to see his smiling face beam as his eyes search to see if we're looking and applauding. Mentioning names is a big deal.

I've noticed how the name of Jesus' gets mentioned a lot...in movies...as a curse word. It's interesting isn't it, how other names for false gods are never used in cursing, but the name of our Lord Jesus is. I still cringe when an actor says, "Jesus Christ!" as he slams down his fist in anger. What a horrid misuse of a holy name.

So just what is the importance and the correct and wonderful way to use the name of Jesus Christ, the Savior of our Souls?

There are so many mentions of his name, that it's a great thing to be reminded of the power, authority and beauty of His name:

1. Acts 4:12 says there is no other name by which we can be saved other than the name of Jesus
2. Philippians 2 reminds us that every knee will bow at the name of Jesus and confess his name
3. John 14 tells us to ask in the name of Jesus and our Father will hear and answer us.
4. Isaiah 9:6 calls our Lord the wonderful counselor, the prince of peace, and the mighty God!
5. Matthew 28 eases our souls as we read that all authority has been given to Jesus, on this earth.
6. Jeremiah 10:6 says there is no one else like our Lord, no one compares to him.
7. Acts 3:6 shows us that by his name, the lame can walk.
8. Proverbs 18:10 says that the name of the Lord is a strong tower.
9. John 11:25 says he is the resurrection and the life and we only have to believe in his name to have both!
10. Revelation 22 says that Jesus is the bright morning star.

There is great power, beauty, healing, and peace when we just mention the name of Jesus.

When we mention the name of someone in a ceremony or a meeting or a service, we are calling attention to their deeds or their character, so that those listening can hear and give honor.

Often, a crowd stands with thunderous applause when just the name of the next guest is mentioned, even before that person appears on the stage.

I want to be found among the masses that applaud, worship, shout and praise the name of Jesus while he's with us, in us, and among us, at work to do all of those things mentioned above. I want to be seen standing in recognition of his grace and mercy and love. And I want to always have his name on the tip of my lips, ready to pray, bless and not curse...ever.

Jesus. Just the mention of his name...



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

May 2020



TIPS

## **The Dressing – Yes to Clothes!** – by Marcy Lytle

I was sharing with a friend last month how I'd ordered on line a few spring tops, and her question was, "Where are you going to wear them?" So true, it's been a different way of life lately, as we stay home and go very few places. I was amused by how many jokes flooded Facebook about staying in pajamas all day. I decided to ask my friends on Facebook if they truly stayed in pajamas all day while staying home during crisis. I'd say almost every one of them said no, that they eventually got dressed.

So...I too got dressed. I enjoy getting dressed, even if I'm working at home or going out, or doing nothing. And I still love to shop, although it's been on line as of late.

Here are a few places I found some fun things on line, should you still be looking...

**Old Navy.** I ordered this midi length skirt (which comes in several colors). It has elastic in the waist, cute pockets, and I'm excited to wear it. Ordering on line can be tricky, so skirts are often safe – if they're not fitted and they have elastic. (the skirt)

Did you know the midi length is back?

This belt is that woven style, a classic. I love the brown leather for summer.

**The Loft Outlet.** This store has had some incredible deals. Honestly, this isn't one of my favorite stores. But I found some really cute spring tops on sale 50% off and then there was a code for another 30% off as well! Tops with pretty sleeves and a flowy bodice are often safe bets, when shopping on line. Look at the fabric, so you'll know how they wash, as well. And read reviews! (the three tops)

Love this puffed sleeve and floral print, so popular this spring.

<https://outlet.loft.com/paisley-bubble-sleeve-top/520567?skuld=29020904&defaultColor=3304&catid=cat3950030&selectedColor=3304>

Bright colors appeal to me, so this pretty gold/yellow hue reminds me of sunflowers!

<https://outlet.loft.com/cinched-sleeve-tee/526865?skuld=29000241&defaultColor=3102&catid=cat3950030&selectedColor=3102>

How can we ever have enough white tops? They go with everything, and they lose their whiteness so quickly, so I snapped this one up quickly. Love the length of the sleeves and the top itself.

**World Market.** The bags, jewelry, and sometimes the clothes are so unique and fun. Often, they run sales, and their inventory is always interesting. I like interesting!

Check out this cute bag for spring.  
<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/natural+jute+backpack+with+leather+straps.do?sortby=ourPicks&from=fn>

How about this necklace?

<https://www.worldmarket.com/category/jewelry-clothing/necklaces.do?c=116733.117237&tabName=productTab&productType=Pendant+Necklaces&pp=26&sortby=ourPicksAscend&cx=0>

And this dress!

**Ann Taylor.** This is another store I hadn't shopped at that often, only browsed a few times. But they too had some really cute tops for spring! I have plenty of jeans, capris and skirts, so I opted for more on the top!

Check out these fun blouses.

I love the sleeves and neck on this pretty textured tee. There are lots of color options!

<https://factory.anntaylor.com/pointelle-tee/522510?skuld=29134953&defaultColor=9687&catid=cat3960032&selectedColor=5333>

The angel tee – the sleeve length – in black – a favorite classic and staple even in spring/summer!

<https://factory.anntaylor.com/angel-sleeve-top/523804?skuld=29457328&defaultColor=2222&catid=cat3960032&selectedColor=2222>

What have you ordered on line, or will you? Will you go back to shopping in stores in person, or not? I hope we get to do both!

#### **Seven 4 You – Mom’s Advice – by Marcy Lytle**

Mother’s Day is this month, a time to celebrate our moms, celebrate being a mom, or just to give thanks for moms in our lives everywhere. I know that I have many women that I consider to be like a mom to me, now that my mom is gone. Moms always have advice to offer, some good and some bad! However, we thought it would be fun to hear from our panel of women what they have learned from their own moms...so enjoy!

My mom had three daughters, so hair was a big deal! She was adamant that it was kept clean and out of our faces at all times, at home, school and definitely church. When we got a little older and started bathing ourselves, she didn’t think we got it clean enough, and I’m sure she was right because I’ve seen the same thing happen with my grandchildren when bathing themselves! Boys and girls, alike. So she told us,

*Scrub your scalp from front to back then the sides, twice.  
If you get your scalp clean your hair will also be squeaky clean.*

I still do it her way to this day and I’ve passed the advice on to my grandchildren.

---

My mama taught me about working hard. She instilled her love for art, crafts, and sewing in me and taught me about helping others. But the most important thing she gave me was the knowledge and love for Jesus and how to know Him personally through prayer. Mama died and never got to see me grow up or see how important her words about Jesus were in my life. One day we’ll hug in heaven and know it was Jesus who got us both there.

---

My Mother at 99 years of age has taught me many things by her actions. The first thing that stands out in my mind took place in or around 1963 when Mom had a beauty salon in our basement. We had a black housekeeper who was also our nanny, and my Mother came upstairs to eat lunch one day. Velma and I were eating at the kitchen table, Mom pulled up a chair and Velma got up and moved. My Mom asked where she was going and mentioned she hadn’t finished her lunch. Velma stated that she knew she wasn’t allowed to eat with Mom at the table. But my mom said, “Whoever told you that was wrong! You are part of this family now, so please sit back down with us.” That made my heart smile as I loved Miss Velma so much.

---

After a 10 hour day on her feet my Mom still went house to house collecting for Unicef. It made an impression on me later in life, because I’m sure at the time I would have preferred to play with my friends instead. She always told me,

*Treat others the way I would want to be treated.*

---



My mom taught me many things, but the things I seem to remember most are the things she taught by example. She was kind, and worked hard to keep her house clean and her family deliciously fed. She loved to cook, was a great seamstress, but mostly loved Jesus with all her heart. When Dad went to preach somewhere she was there with us in tow, prepared to gather us girls to sing before he preached. When I think of Mom, I still feel a special love in my heart for her that is extra special and different than I have had for anyone else, ever. Mom wasn't perfect. Secretly, she often felt inferior, but accepted challenges that made her uncomfortable as she was required. Lastly, she was a great MeMaw. She had a good relationship with her grandkids. I hope to be the same!

---

My mom had lots of funny sayings and those have stuck with all of us kids. But one of our favorites was her short prayer that she offered when asked to pray before a meal. Mom didn't want to let her food get cold, she knew it was the attitude of the heart that mattered, and she would grin a little when she finished praying. I loved the simplicity of the prayer, and it has helped me in my own prayers. I don't have to use a bunch of words. I can just speak, be thankful and love. Her prayer was simply,

*Father, we're grateful.*

---

Things my mom taught me (we had a sometimes complicated relationship):

1. She was a hard worker. She always worked outside the home as far back as I can remember. Mainly because my dad wasn't such a hard worker....
  2. She was very gracious and taught me how to set a table and put meals together. This is something I really enjoy doing for my family.
  3. She accepted Christ when I was about 14, so I am very thankful for that! Because of her transformation, I too became a Christian. That should have been #1. I guess I am going thru my list chronologically. I wish we had had a closer relationship but we did the best we could do.
- 

Mom and I had a tough relationship in some ways. My mom didn't have very many friends at all, so she leaned on me for emotional strength in her marriage and personally. I didn't like that. She also often had a "rejection spirit," one where she thought so little of herself that she somewhat pushed others away. She often asked when she visited my house, "Do you mind if I use your bathroom?" I never understood that, and it irritated me. I also didn't like being her emotional crutch. I loved Mom fiercely, but those two things have made me purpose to find my strength in God alone and to have many friends, other than my kids. I think this has helped me navigate motherhood as my kids have left home...

## **Selah's Style – Princess Sky – by Marcy Lytle**

Skylar is a fun-loving five year old who goes by the nickname Sky. Sky's true passion is baking and cooking. She loves to create her own recipes or "experiments" as she would call it. Sky is creative and enjoys making crafts, coloring, and painting. She loves all the colors of the rainbow and anything unicorn or Disney princess related. She is the sweetest little princess.

Skylar definitely has her own sense of style and will mix and match any outfit. Sky will dress up at home in her princess costumes or fancy dresses and put on a fashion show. Her favorite place to shop is Target; she would shop everyday if she could. Sky is just as smart as she is cute. She loves being with people and truly enjoys when she is able to spend time with her grandparents, cousins, and friends. This five year old is sure to capture your heart with her smile and kindness.

**A dress with sparkly gold shoes is a must. Dress is from The Children's Place.**

**This picture was taken after Sky's first ever haircut this year. This is one of the many different shirts Sky has from Target.**

**Sky loves dressing up, peach picking in style. Dress is from The Children's Place.**

**This dress is Sky's all-time favorite because it is rainbow colors. Dress is from Target.**

## **In the Kitchen – One Thing Frozen – by Marcy Lytle**

When the grocery hauls were becoming harder, I was told to stock up on frozen items, as fresh would become scarce. I didn't really find that to be true, but I did buy a few frozen items I don't normally purchase. And they turned out to be nice things to have in a pinch, when I wasn't sure what to create for dinner. So, below are some recipes that use at least one thing frozen...and it was fun!

### **Hopping John**

Have you had this dish before? It's basically black-eyed peas over rice with a lot of color added in, and it's a favorite of ours. I decided to buy frozen black eyed peas instead of the usual canned peas. It turns out, the frozen ones take more time to cook, but they taste so fresh!

Ingredients:

- Cooked rice
- Chopped onion
- Chopped red bell pepper
- Thinly sliced celery
- Minced garlic
- Black eyed peas, cooked
- Chopped tomato
- Chopped green onion

In a large skillet over med-hi heat, add olive oil and add onion, bell pepper, celery – saute for about 7 minutes, then add the garlic and cook 30 seconds more. Add the cooked rice and stir. (Make sure your rice is already seasoned as you like it). Add the cooked black eyed peas, and serve the mixture into bowls. Top with the chopped tomato and green onion! We enjoyed this with a side of naan bread.

### **Spring Pasta**

This is a tasty dish and so pretty for this time of year. Tastes so fresh, too!

- 1 lb corkscrew pasta
- Olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic finely chopped
- ½ c Italian style breadcrumbs
- 3 zucchini thinly sliced
- 4 ears corn (I had frozen corn)
- 6 oz Swiss cheese shredded
- Finely chopped basil

In a large pot of boiling salted water, cook pasta and drain – reserving 1 cup of the pasta water. Meanwhile in a small skillet, heat oil and add half the garlic til golden, about 30 seconds. Stir in the breadcrumbs and remove from heat.

In the reserved pasta pot, heat olive oil and add remaining garlic and cook 30 seconds, add zucchini and frozen corn, and cook til tender and starting to brown. Stir in the reserved 1 cup of pasta water. Add 1 cup of the cheese and toss, season with S and P. Stir in remaining cheese and basil into the breadcrumb mixture and sprinkle on top! You're done!

### **Mango Sorbet**

This was literally SO EASY and SO TASTY, I want to make it over and over again!

- 1 pkg (16 oz) frozen mango chunks, slightly thawed (you can use any bag of frozen fruit)
- ½ cup lemonade (or passion fruit juice, your choice)
- 2 T sugar

Place all ingredients in a blender; cover, and process til smooth. Cover and freeze for about 3 hours, then enjoy.

### **Sausage and Sides**

- Sausage link, sliced
- Frozen okra
- Wheat bread (fresh or homemade)
- Potatoes, chopped small
- Onions, sliced
- BBQ sauce (I prefer Stubbs)
- Canola oil for frying

In one skillet, I added some oil and fried the potatoes and onions (seasoned) and removed. I then added the sausage (sliced) and cooked, as well as wheat bread on the side to toast. I removed the toast and added some BBQ sauce to cover the sausage.

Meanwhile, in another skillet, I added oil and let it get hot (this is key – one okra should sizzle when dropped in), then added the okra and cooked until browned. Drain it, salt it - and it's done.

We served this up on our plates, and the flavor combos were awesome!

## **Tried and True – Words on Walls – by Marcy Lytle**

I'm not a big lover of the whole farmhouse décor, but I do like some pieces of it. I also enjoy part of the industrial look and mid-century modern. I'd say I like a mix of a lot of types of décor. And I have noticed the trend of hanging words on our walls! Phrases, sayings, or just one word all displayed in fancy fonts adorn bedrooms and family rooms, and kitchens and more! I recently added a few words of my own to my walls, and I've asked a few friends to share as well:

**In the bathroom:** I decided to change out a small piece of art seasonally, or perhaps even monthly. But the one I've chosen right now has a single balloon with the phrase "Let it go" written – to read when my guests enter. There's no pun intended, but there could be, if we wanted a laugh. It's just a gentle reminder to let worries go, floating up to the sky to Him, the keeper and healer and protector of all things precious to our lives.

**In the kitchen:** "Choose happy" caught my eye and I hung this piece of art right above my rolling cutting board cart, where I could see it each morning when I rise. I need this reminder, and so do a lot of us, because our default is grumpy.

**Above your photos:** It's fun to hang family photos, but with added words, it creates a warm feeling for each one when they view them! Check out this trio holding the kiddos, with "God gave me you" printed above. The kids and the parents are reminded of God's blessings.

**On your mantel:** Often it's nice to set a grouping on the mantel, with one being word art. Calming words, truth, and reminders are great – especially in different seasons or for holidays! Isn't this "Be at Peace" so pretty for a cozy room? Or "Grateful" speaks volumes, especially during the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving.

**Pillow talk:** Just one pillow for your sofa or on a bench can speak volumes, sometimes funny sayings! I read recently that the "Let's Stay Home" pillows have lost their appeal for sure! But we love our "I Love Us" pillow, and "I Can't People Today" is just plain honest!

**Those letter boards:** Have you seen the letter boards where you can switch out and create your own sayings? I have one hanging in my kitchen, and this one is above a coffee bar station in a young mom's house. So cute!

**Cross stitch:** Did you know this art form is making a comeback? Stitching simple words or images and framing them makes for a super sweet wall! Memorable occasions or family images are the best.

**Front and Center:** Maybe you have an entire saying you'd like to present in your home, and it can sit on your mantel, surrounded by other décor. We recently saw this one at a holiday festival.

**Written on Paint:** The actual words don't have to be framed...they can be part of the wall! I love these ideas where it looks as if someone took a pen and wrote a note to the family!

**Family sentiment:** If there's a phrase, a mantra, or a verse that's special to your family, hanging it on the wall can bring peace and comfort to the parents and the kiddos, as well! Or if there's one word you want to speak life to your relationships, let it sit where you can read it daily. This little "LOVE" triangle was on clearance at Kirklands!

Being at home gives us time to create, redecorate and think...and then present lots of words of wisdom in our homes! We read them when we come and go. And we never forget them and the joy and comfort that came...from words on the walls. You don't have to spend big bucks. You can totally make your own with some wood, metal, markers and paint!



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Fears and Family** –by Three Moms

We have new contributors to this column – three moms that have nine kids between them! They range in ages 1-10 and these moms have plenty of stories and encouragements and frustrations to share! Each month, they will tackle a question that hopefully most moms of young children struggle with, and share some hope and insight into what's working/not working for them. Hope you enjoy!

This month the question is how to handle the fears of the pandemic as a mom, what those fears are, and how to keep the fear from being part of the kids' emotions, as well. It's something everyone has faced since the world turned completely upside down and all the kiddos are home. Who would have believed schools would be closed, masks would be mandatory, and a new war would be waging – against a powerful virus?

**“The conversations about the virus have been a big one at our house.”** When the news first came out was the worst because my husband was traveling and it made me nervous. I sounded worried and panicked on the phone, as I was totally in prep mode as a mom – being protective over my kids! That night before bed, my oldest wanted Dad to come home so he wouldn't be sick. Hearing my fear caused him to fear. I realized then that our conversations about the virus needed to be in private and not in front of the kids. We could manage our convos with the kids better, after we talked alone. If I walk in panic or fear, they do, too.

The kids were excited at first about not going to school. But my daughter, age 7, was super sad about missing friends and not being able to have her birthday party. She had been planning it for months, but friends drove by and surprised her - which she loved!

**“It's been hardest on me as Mom.”** Because of pay cuts, we can't buy all the things I want to give them, or have the fun I want to share. However, our kids are troopers. We just do life. We talk about the Lord. I have to limit social media and news. – I spend a lot of time praying, we pray together as a family, then we stay away from all the updates – *we have normalcy* – and take one day at a time. I want them to know the hope of Christ in every area of life, not just the pandemic – but in finances, too!

**“What if one of us gets the virus?”** This has been my most troubling thought or fear. My oldest, age 10, had stomach issues and I was completely panicked. I was convinced she had COVID-19 and was beating myself up for letting her ride in the car as we delivered a meal to a grieving family. I thought perhaps she contracted it when the family came outside to greet us. She is fine, thankfully, but I totally worried for a couple of hours. I tried to stay calm in front of her, but ended up talking to my husband and my mom. This was a huge help in calming me down. It's important to phone a friend or family member – *sometimes it helps just hearing another voice* from one that is rooted in faith, to help us out of our funk.

**“I'm enjoying the innocence and joy through my girls' eyes.”** My girls are 3 and 1, and so we don't have discussions about hardships. However, our oldest does understand that a lot of places are closed. She gets discouraged that she can't go to church or see a friend. She knows the term “corona virus” but she doesn't comprehend what it is. And the biggest



difference both girls have realized is that during this pandemic, Mommy and Daddy are home more often! One day I will have to explain hard things...but not now.

### Fun things:

We've most enjoyed our mini white boards –we all 5 have one – and we take the **Three Marker Challenge!** We write a bunch of objects on paper, like giraffe, shoe, bed, etc. and put these in a jar. Then we pick one out to draw. We have a bucket of markers and we have to close our eyes, and draw out only three colors. This has been our favorite family activity! We have to draw things in colors we didn't choose and they come out funky and fun. We all love to draw!

We had a whole **watch party event** for *Trolls, World Tour*. We printed out coloring pages, made a concession stand, got dressed up for the "red carpet," attempted to dye our hair and made troll hair, made a microphone, and had a dance party! (It's a good movie!) It was so nice to focus on something fun – not school, work, or the news. Music and dancing just did something for all of our spirits!

We try to **make a list** of things we are thankful for, every day. Sometimes it's as simple as a backpack or a rock my girls find on our walk.

## **I Don't Do Teens – Bully Society** – by Marcy Lytle

We recently watched the series *Anne with an E* on Netflix, the updated version of *Anne of Green Gables*. Anne is a young teenager when she arrives to live with her new guardians. Almost every show of the series shows us some sort of meanness her peers participate in. They make fun of Anne's hair, they think she's a poor orphan and call her ugly, and all sorts of things. However, there are a few things that enable Anne to get back up, stop crying, and rise above the insulting words and actions around her.

While our kiddos are out of school and home, it might be just the right time to instill in them some confidence and love and help, for when they face the bullies again...

**Speak the truth.** When Anne arrived home after school and repeated the words spoken to her about her looks, Matthew often spoke truth back to her. Hearing the one who guarded her speak words of truth then quieted the lies from the kids. When our kids are teased, we can speak the truth to them above the lies.

**Be a refuge.** We can let our kids run into our arms sobbing, until their hearts aren't breaking and they can speak. We can offer comfort and hugs, until the crying stops and communication can take place again. Anne sobbed often, and her once unemotional guardians learned the value of hugging her tight.

**Encourage self-confidence.** Anne is different from the other kids in many ways. She's tall and skinny, has freckles, and red hair which she despises. She's a dreamer, a romantic, a user of big words, and she gets teased for ALL of it. However, Marilla and Matthew encourage Anne to be herself and be happy with how she's made and her disposition.

**Model kindness.** If our kids see us bully other parents on the field, on the phone, or make horrible demeaning comments about leaders in our community and nation, they will see that it's normal life to criticize and wish harm upon another. We have to stop that kind of behavior from entering our homes, so that it then doesn't exit our homes in the form our own teens.

**Cover them.** If bullies are out of hand and causing harm to our kids, we can listen, offer advice on what they can do, or go to authorities. And most of all we can go to the One, the Father of all Fathers, the Protector of our Children – Jesus. He knows how to comfort, direct, and guide us in making decisions concerning our teens. Even if it's just a prayer of thanks around the table, as Anne's family was sure to offer, this trains them to look up.

Prayer is mentioned very often in these teen articles. I'm a firm believer that we often discount its effectiveness because circumstances don't change, in our eyes, when we pray. The Lord's Prayer starts out with Our Father...and that's the way he loves to hear from us...because he cares for our children even more than we do. And he cares for us, too.

We live in a bully society. It's everywhere our kids look, but it doesn't have to be in our homes.



## **An Adage A Day- The Changing of the Shoes- by Carole Gilbert**

One Sunday, during Sunday school, our lesson asked a question about our trust in products, "Has your trust in a product or brand been affirmed or eroded?" I thought about this and how it applies to so many things. My body getting older is one of those things. I guess my trust in my body is being eroded. I've walked with a slight limp for almost a year now still hoping to get over this foot injury, this "thorn in my flesh" as Paul called his in 2 Corinthians 12:7. All the responses in our Sunday school class that morning were nothing short of outstanding. My favorite part of the discussion was about shoes, especially "if the shoe fits, wear it." If you have found shoes or a brand of shoes that work well for you, and you have trust in them, then those are the ones you should buy and wear.

Of course, this proverb, "When the shoe fits, wear it," does mean something else when used in its correct version. Beginning in the late 18th century, it meant that when something is applied to you truthfully, you are to own up to it, like a description or a comment. In our discussion this meaning applied also because we were talking about how well we trust God and his Word and how well we demonstrate it honestly to others. We will most certainly tell everyone when we find a brand of shoes we like, but do we tell others about God? One friend elaborated on this proverb in her style, saying, "If the shoe fits, and is comfortable, buy it in every color." I like her style!

We've just finished the season of our all-weather winter footwear and are changing those for our summer sandals or maybe you prefer a shoeless schedule like me. When I started to write this article, I looked for a picture but decided to hold a little contest on Facebook and the pictures I received of those "knee-high to a grasshopper" little ones in their parents' shoes were so cute it made choosing one really hard. Each picture was a story itself and a precious story at that! When we think of all those little feet and how they got into those big shoes, it makes us smile. It makes us wonder what they were thinking when they stepped into those shoes. What little girl doesn't want to dress up like Mommy and what boy like Daddy. I really thank everyone who participated!

All the pictures captured my heart but the one I chose was a little boy standing in what looks like his daddy's old work shoes. He didn't have to walk a mile in his daddy's shoes to know Daddy is someone he wants to follow in his footsteps. He already wants to step right in. And when this little guy changes from his baby shoes to his big boy shoes, he'll probably have the same character his daddy demonstrates. There's a lot to be said about the shoes we wear.

It's funny how much of our lives are described simply by our feet and what we put on them. A favorite song of mine states, "These boots are made for walking, and that's just what they'll do." Remember this song by Nancy Sinatra? We use it as a saying for inspiration or encouragement to stand firm or as a lesson to someone as the next line says, "One of these days these boots are gonna walk all over you."

We have so many descriptions about our lives that we are walking through from idioms, adages, sayings and proverbs. We learn that we must stand on our own two feet and that's after we land on our own feet to recover from having two left feet. We get up and put one foot in front of the other, starting with our best foot forward and we work to get one foot in the door. We keep our feet on the ground and remain steadfast. We don't drag our feet. We dig in our heels and put our foot down knowing our own weakness can be our "Achilles' heel." And towards others, "We don't judge someone until we walk a mile in their shoes."

Then, when we have everything complete that we set out to do, from head to toe, we kick off our shoes and put our feet up to relax. That's where I'm at right now with this older body of mine and my "thorn in my side" and I'm loving every minute. After all, it's almost summertime y'all!

## **Tiny Living - All We Can Do – by Leyanne Enterline**

Tiny living during the world crisis has been a bit interesting, to say the least. There have been many positives along with the negatives. We had been on the road so much that it had been nice to be back in our tiny space.

Since the stay-at-home order has been in place, we have had plenty of time to reorganize, declutter and get some yard work done! The boys have made it their goal to go fishing every day, so we've been able to get outside as much as we can. This has been nice, since the weather has warmed up! We are trying to keep getting that vitamin D!

The boys' school has not changed much, as we were still doing lessons while we were on the road. And since all get-together classes have been put off for now, we have continued with our schooling as if we were on the road! I have the boys document their thoughts on the quarantine, as hopefully they'll never experience anything like this again. It will be neat to look back on it and see all that God brought us through!

The biggest downside to our quarantine has been that both Brian and I have lost our jobs for the time being. We know we will get them back eventually, but we have absolutely no idea when that time will come. We have frantically been applying at different places, but with so many layoffs it's hard to find someone that is hiring! I think it has slowed down even at our local grocery stores, because we have not received a call back from them either...

*Literally, all we can do is trust in God.*

With no income coming in, we are beginning to get a bit stressed. We are beyond grateful to have our health, though! We are praying that staying at home works to get everybody healthy and back to normal again. It definitely makes me think of all the things we took for granted! Even toilet paper! In no way, in a tiny trailer, can we be hoarders, so it's been difficult when people are frantically buying up things. We don't have the space or the money now to stock pile. Praise the Lord, I had actually bought a larger package of toilet paper than normal (because that's all I could even get!) so we are good for a tiny bit longer.

We are praying so hard for healing of our people and our land quickly. We pray that we all learn something through all of this and become closer as families and friends. Definitely, we can't take life (or toilet paper) for granted.

Remember. Love grows best in tiny spaces!

## **A Night to Remember – Let the World Know – by Marcy Lytle**

There's verse in the little book in the bible called Habakkuk, chapter 2, verse 14, that says this:

*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory  
of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*

A few verses later in chapter 3, verse 1, it reads:

*LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD.*

What if, this month of May, we as families across the nations placed reminders in our windows of the knowledge of God and his fame – in our own families? And what if those who drive or walk by see our photos and our words and come to faith in Jesus, as well? What if the lonely smile, the fearful lift their heads, and those who are sad become joyful?

Let's do this!

**Preparation:** You'll need paper plates, construction paper, paper napkins, computer paper, tissue paper,...all kinds of paper! You'll also need markers, crayons and paint – something to boldly draw and boldly write!

Ask each member of the family to think of an attribute of God that they love. You can choose from the ones listed below, or think of your own, and how to display it in your windows. Here are a few examples:

Paper plate – Someone could draw a big sunflower using the plate. Color it brown and gold, and make a happy face in the center. Across the arc at the top of the plate in bold marker write "Jesus loves you."

Construction paper – Perhaps someone could take blue and green and other colors of paper and make a sky, grass, a sun and then draw a dog. They could write, "The Lord is Good to all!"

Tissue paper – Let little ones squish them into balls and glue onto paper, or older kids make tissue paper flowers, and place this creation under an eave on the front porch in a vase or affixed to a plant that says "Trust in the Lord."

Computer paper – Let one with great penmanship write in their best handwriting an entire verse, and then color in a few of the loops and circles to make it pretty. The verse could be "Be Kind to One Another."

Paper napkins – If you have a decorative paper napkin, let a creative one in your bunch design a place setting and affix it to a large piece of cardboard to set up against a wall on your front porch. They can glue on a paper plate, fold the napkin (and make a ring), draw a fork, spoon, and knife and glue on a paper cup. Underneath they could write, "In everything give thanks!"

There are endless possibilities to share the love of Jesus with the small world we've become now in our own neighborhoods...through our creative arts shared in the windows of our homes

to those who look and see. Just make sure the markers go on the paper and not on the kids' faces...or maybe allow both!

And if we're sitting by the window studying, working, praying or reading, we can look up and wave and smile, as the neighbor looks our way...





YOU

## **Strengthening Your Core - Plugged In** – by Marcy Lytle

I hope, if anything, we have learned the need for community and connection while we have been on lockdown. I woke up thinking about this, this morning, after noticing a few practical things at home like:

*If my phone isn't plugged in well to the outlet, it won't charge.* That device cannot sit on its own for much more than a day before the battery runs down and my connection with my family and friends is gone. The charging time is necessary in order for the connection time.

While we've been on lockdown and issued stay at home orders, I've missed face to face connections with real people. So yesterday, we rode to a few friends' houses just to wave from the curb while they stood safe distance away. It was SO NICE to see their smiles and their faces, even though I could have seen that on the phone. There's nothing like real connection. Their almost 2-year old smiled nonstop as we waved and talked to her.

*If nightlights stay in the drawers and aren't plugged in, their purpose is nil.* They're supposed to light up the darkness so we don't stumble over things and fall in the night. But if they're not in the socket, why are they even in our houses?

We have several pretty nightlights we leave plugged in, in our guest bathroom. This is not only for ambience and décor, but to illuminate this one room in the house that has no windows. It's the same with our stories, our tales of how we came into the "light" – if the light's not shining, we need to open the drawer and plug in!

*If my iron (yes, I still iron and LOVE it – favorite chore) isn't plugged into the outlet, there's no heat.* I can use the iron all day and the wrinkles won't budge, because the heat source was never activated. How dumb would it be to waste hours moving the iron back and forth, to only end up where I started – a wrinkled mess!

Electricity is needed for that iron to work, the cord has to be plugged in, the button pushed...before results can be seen and wrinkle places can be made smooth again.

I have worried some about the aftermath of this pandemic. Will people want to plug in again with connections, or will they forever be afraid of face to face and hide behind masks and walls? Will churches fill up again, or will people be content to tune in at their convenience and switch services if they don't care for this message or that one? Will folks want to gather for family picnics and games, or find that it's too much interaction and stress?

I for one want to stay plugged in to sources that instigate a charge, provide illumination and smooth out crooked spots. The pandemic caused panic and maybe rightfully so. It has caused us to stop all connections in favor of staving off the spread of viruses. But to stop all connections with all people would be a sad result, indeed.

What are your thoughts? Are you staying plugged in to sources that provide you energy, light and power? We have to. We have to stay plugged into truth, love, and faith. Otherwise, we die.



## MAY MARVELS

May you love like Jesus loves

May you dance like David danced

May you obey like Noah obeyed

May you wait like Job waited

May you honor as Esther honored

May you have a different spirit like Ruth

May you be as strong as Samson

May you believe like Abram believed

May you judge as Deborah judged

May you pray like Daniel prayed

May you prophesy as Elijah prophesied

May you have visions like Ezekiel had

May you see the Lord as Isaiah saw Him

May you weep for God's people as Jeremiah wept

May you surrender as Mary surrendered

May you follow as Peter followed

May you yield as Hannah yielded

May you encounter Him as Paul encountered Him

May you encourage like Barnabas encouraged

May you dance like Miriam danced

May you sing like the angels sing

May you worship like Mary Magdalene worshiped

May you receive His love like John received His love

May you forgive like Stephen forgave

May you share like the widow shared with Elisha

May you be as wise as Solomon

May you be as understanding as Abigail

May you fear the Lord as Jehoshaphat feared Him

May you build the Kingdom as Nehemiah built

May You run to Him for Himself alone!

AND

May you BE the individual God called you from the beginning  
of time to BE



## **Life in a Nutshell - Self Sabbathing** by Jill Pepper Montz

My life can be nuts. And that is no lie, folks. Being a single mom to an extremely social and active twelve-year-old girl comes with a very full, multicolored, and often overlapping calendar of events. Add to that I manage my family's retail stores, called the Pecan Shed, and well you can see where the "nuts" reference fits.

My typical day starts around 5:30am and I usually don't get to stop until well after 8 or 9pm. My SUV is my office/breakroom/storage unit/dressing room/therapy couch. Most days you can probably find enough crumbs and dropped fries under my car seats to make at least a Happy Meal. This time of year, with Texas weather being more difficult to predict than the next lottery numbers, I have everything from parkas and gloves to sunscreen and flip flops and at least 5 folding/stadium chairs.

I rarely have a free evening. Usually the chaos really ramps up after 5pm when it's time to rush from one practice, lesson, or game to the next. Throw in a service organization meeting or a volunteer opportunity here or there and perhaps a church event and that is my life.

Are you as tired as I am? Are you nodding your head as you read? Well, sister, let me just say you are in good company. Just about every mom (and a whole lot of dads) I know is doing all this and maybe more. We are living in a world where the messages seem to be...

- A full calendar means a productive life.
- White space is for unmotivated people.
- Busy kids are the best kids.
- Your kid might miss out or be left behind if he/she doesn't do it all.
- And oh by the way, make sure you are eating well balanced meals, drinking all your water, and working out for at least 30 minutes a day. (Does that Happy Meal count as balanced? It does come with either apple slices or a go-gurt!)

Then one day I heard the words Corona Virus and COVID-19. To be honest, at first, I was too busy to even give it much thought. I chuckled at a few memes on Facebook, made sure I had some basic essentials, but for the most part my life was not altered all that much. Then, in the span of barely a week, life went from normal to me wondering if I was dreaming or in some kind of bad movie.

Schools were cancelled until further notice and I was informed I would be my daughter's "home school teacher." All sporting events and gatherings of any kind were cancelled. We were asked to practice "social distancing" and "voluntary self-quarantining" and then eventually we were told to "shelter in place." All phrases which were new to my vocabulary and way of living.

My once full calendar was now black with marked out events. My retail stores were like ghost towns. My daughter was home. We had no plans. We had nowhere to go...no one to invite over...no alarms to set...no things to pack in the car...no uniforms to wash...no gifts to buy...no nothing (see that double negative...I do *not* make a good teacher!)

All of a sudden I was at a loss as to what to do next. My life used to be a blur of activities and now the days seemed to move at a snail's pace. I found myself antsy and looking for "projects" to fill my time. I cleaned all my closets. Then I painted rooms, doors, and accent walls, cleaned out my garage, weeded my flower beds, and by then it was only Thursday.

I still had an entire weekend (and who knew how much longer) to fill. How was I going to occupy my days, my time, my child, my nerves, my fears, my worries? And then my Bible app gave me the answer.

*Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for Sabbath." Mark 2:27*

God was showing me how these days could be used to practice something I hadn't observed in years or maybe ever in my life...Sabbath. Not only do I not observe Sabbath, but I rarely even think about it. And God was reminding me He created Sabbath for me (and you too). He knows I need to rest and spend time seeking a relationship with Him, so He set forth a special day to do so. But somewhere along the way I stopped taking a day of rest...I stopped taking even an hour to rest...not even a cat nap. I was far from practicing Sabbath.

COVID-19 forced me to Sabbath. It forced me to rest...to slow down...to be quiet enough that I could hear that "still small voice" speak to me. While the world was asking me to be 6 feet away from everyone else, God was asking me to cling to him. I didn't just "shelter in place"...I sheltered in God, His Word, and His wisdom.

When the day comes, where the restrictions on us are lifted, I don't know what life will be like. I'm not sure what the new normal will be. What I do hope is I continue to find ways to incorporate Sabbath in my life. It might not be for an entire week, weekend, or even a full day, but hopefully I will be intentional in carving out time in my life to Sabbath on a regular basis. After all, God made it just for me (and you too)!



## Life Right Now – Holding Fast – by Bethany Gomez

Where do I even begin? A lot has changed in such a short amount of time, not only in the world around me, but in my personal life. More to come on that a little later, but we cannot forget that last month the world was shaken from its normal everyday living when COVID-19 began to spread across it like wildfire. There was so much information about it and I couldn't look away. I know I spent way too much time scrolling, reading articles, and watching videos. There was new information popping up every minute, it seemed. I would like to say that the only reason I spent so much time on my phone was because I didn't want to miss anything important, while that is true the other truth was, I just didn't have any self-control. I had to seek forgiveness.

I thought I would share a (my) little quarantine questionnaire:

- Did I feel guilty for getting sucked into the barrage of news and focusing on what everyone else was doing instead of living in the moment? Yes.
- Should I have looked to God for more information and wisdom about all this instead of what the world was saying? Yes.
- Did God condemn me for not keeping my focus solely on Him and not just during this time, but in times past? No, He did not and does not bring condemnation, but He is always slowly convicting me to turn my attention on Him.
- Did I allow a little bit of fear to creep in (mainly fear for others and all the negative ramifications that this will have on a lot of people for many years to come)? Yes.
- Did I pray about all this? Yes, and God's peace came.
- Did I think almost on a daily basis, "It seems like we are living in some kind of Sci-Fi movie and no one can predict the ending?" Yes.
- Did I use all my extra quarantine time wisely? No.
- Did I give myself some grace? It was a struggle at first, but yes.
- Did I organize something in my house? Yes, my closet.
- Did I feel motivated every day during this quarantine to accomplish something? No.
- Did I stay in my pajamas and not brush my hair for at least 3 out of the 7 days of the week? Yes.
- Did I stick to my commitment of taking a little run every day? No, I had to tell myself it is okay to rest.
- Do I feel thankful that I am still getting paid during my school shut down? Yes, 100%. God always provides.
- Do I miss my job and students? Maybe, not so much the job aspect, but I do miss my students, yes.
- Did I learn how to use Zoom? For the most part, yes, and I have been a part of two Zoom prayer meetings with several amazing women of God so far.
- Did I start reading any book(s)? Yes, a book series called the *Chronicles of Narnia* by the beloved author C.S. Lewis. If you haven't read them, you should.
- Did I love all the creativity coming from everyone being cooped up with their families for weeks on end? Yes.
- Am I going to stop this questionnaire anytime soon? Yes.
- Last but not least, am I thankful that God is in control? YES, God is a good, good father no matter what.

All that to say, this introvert in quarantine is doing good even with all the changes going on in my personal life as well that I had alluded to early.

The weekend before everything started to change due to the novel coronavirus sweeping across the world, my sister got a call from my dad letting us know that they were moving back. (Insert a look of shock on my face.) If you have not been following this article for about 10 months or so, then here is a real quick back story.

Last summer my parents got involved with a foster agency in Brenham, which is about two hours away. They committed to being foster parents there for one year. I was skeptical at first, but since they felt led by God to do this I supported them and trusted God to take care of them and us as well.

I cannot go into too much detail about why my parents were unable to finish their one year commitment, but let's just say it had to do with not only their safety but for the safety of one of their foster daughters and her 2 year old daughter.

The weekend before the shelter-in-place order went into effect, on that Tuesday in April, my parents along with their foster daughter and her daughter that I just mentioned (who they want to remain with them during this transition to another foster agency here in Round Rock), came for an extended visit, but in all reality they were moving back. They had loaded up most of their stuff in a moving truck and put it all into a storage unit down the street.

What I thought was going to be just my sister and I stuck in quarantine together turned out to be much different than what I was expecting. While it was comforting having my parents with us during this time, it was yet another big change happening at the same time other changes were happening. And to be honest, I felt overwhelmed. That feeling soon vanished with the fact that God was answering some of our prayers almost immediately. My dad got his old job back that same week they came back for their extended visit. They found an apartment nearby that they can move into while my dad gets their home (AKA our home currently) foster approved and then my sister and I will simply do a switcheroo with them when that is all finished.

Hopefully by the time you are reading this, we are finishing up our shelter in place orders, but who knows. Only God knows! And that is so comforting because He desires good for me and for us all even in the moments where we do not understand what is going on, even in the midst of storms. He also forgives me when I forget to put my trust in Him.

One last thing... Last month we celebrated Easter. Even though this Easter was different from any other, I never want to forget what Jesus did on the cross for me, for us. He made the ultimate sacrifice by dying on the cross and rising on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day to defeat death on our behalf. This brings me an everlasting hope. I am so, so thankful that God loves me this much.

Romans 5:8

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:

while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

So whatever is going on, I will hold fast to this. I will hold fast to His love.

## **Healthy Habits – What Comforts You? – by Marcy Lytle**

Being comforted and feeling safe and warm and all things fuzzy inside is a big part of feeling healthy. I've seen on the news lately where they have a specialist give words of wisdom on how to keep our minds healthy during this time of hibernating in our usually busy world. All sorts of thoughts and fears attack us and certainly rock the boat and destroy our comfort level, sending many of us into a sea of despair floating too rapidly downstream...

However, during any sort of storm we often take comfort in things that are not good to take comfort in! Let's look at a few of those things and offer some substitutions:

**Food.** While we all love comfort food, too much of it concentrated over time, without a balance of the healthy stuff leads us to feeling sluggish and overweight and depressed. Once the comfort of the taste and the smell are gone, we feel bad that we ate that huge bowl of ice cream or mashed potatoes, and then we feel guilty. We can ask for an accountability partner, or just make sure we only buy a minimal amount so that we cannot overeat.

**Reading.** I love to read and escape and get away into another story other than my own story at the moment. Reading is wonderful! However, when we choose to read rather than connect with our family, reading can become hazardous for the health of those we love. We cannot tune out others in favor of a good story. Instead, we can set allotted time for reading per day, and then close the book and put it away. Setting a timer, keeping a log of chapters read per day, can get us back on track with connection instead of rejection.

**Television.** Movies are great - especially on a stormy night – with a big bowl of popcorn on our laps. I think they're one of the best relaxation things to do! But we know that we need to be careful what we watch, and if we spend half the day on the sofa instead of moving, this comfort can become an unhealthy "inactivity" that causes us health issues down the road. And overeating can occur, as well. So it's helpful to dole out proportions and schedule movie times, just like we did when we actually went to the theater!

**Reading and praying.** How could we ever do too much of reading God's word and praying? I believe some do. Both are necessary, effective, and good and result in good things. However, sometimes we can become a recluse, overbearing and finger pointing, if we're not careful. Words of judgment can come out of our mouths against our leaders, our city, and even at our family – if we think too highly of our religious order of things. We can balance our prayers to God with our demonstrations of love for our family through serving and playing and giving.

**Exercise.** People that frequented the gyms or trails or were actively involved in sports can now find themselves obsessing over long walks, demanding time to themselves to exercise at home, and forcing their self-image routines onto kids and family time. Exercise is fantastic and healthy, but if our motivation is solely to look good to feed our vanity – and not mostly for health – it becomes evident to those around us. And we become unpleasant. Instead, we can exercise when it's a good fit for the family activities, we can ask the family to join us and tone down our intensive workouts, and we can practice a lot more breathing and smiling and laughing...all good for the soul.

All of the above things are wonderful. I love them all. But obsessing, to find our own comfort level at the expense of putting others aside, makes those things edge over into the destructive side of life. If balance is an issue that we struggle with, we can pray and ask God to show us how to consider others, relax and trust, and enjoy all things in moderation and fun.

## **Moving Forward - Leaning In** – by Pam Charro

These are interesting and challenging times, for sure. I am, by nature, a very outgoing and sociable person and it's been difficult lately to not be able to gather with my friends. I think it's been especially hard to not be able to go to church; while I am so very grateful for technology, worshipping online just isn't the same. It's easy for me to start feeling spiritually disconnected during this time.

Yet I'm also sensing an increase of grace available to us right now. To me, it seems God understands that we are weakened as a body and he is leaning in even closer than normal so that we will rely on him in such a challenging time. While it can be tempting to eat and sleep myself into a coma, watch movies until my brain cells all die, or talk on the phone with loved ones all day long because I finally have all of this extra time, this type of "powering through" will not give me peaceful sleep at the end of the day.

In 1 Kings 19, Elijah was exhausted, overwhelmed, and afraid for his life. God showed up for him in his trial, but he was not in the noise. In the same way, I believe he is waiting for us to go into our prayer closets so he can gently whisper his peaceful assurance to us. We don't know how long this time of uncertainty will last and the only way we can endure the weeks and months ahead is to limit the distractions and be still in his presence.

Take courage my heart  
Stay steadfast my soul  
He's in the waiting  
He's in the waiting  
Hold onto your hope  
As your triumph unfolds  
He's never failing  
He's never failing  
-- Kristene DeMarco

He is so ready to be everything we need if we can just be still. He cares; and he is leaning in to be near.



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Take Grace – by Bekah Holland**

I hope that when you read this, the world is a little less scary and filled with a lot more hugs. However, while I'm writing this, I've been home with my family for 4 weeks, 2 days, 7 hours and counting. That's 32 days for my fellow math challenged folks.

Let me start by saying I am incredibly blessed and privileged to have a job that allows both my husband and me to work from home without a big upset. We are healthy, our kids are healthy, we have a home and food and haven't run out of toilet paper....yet. And I am grateful. That said, I don't know about anyone else, but I have been spending much more time on social media and following news outlets, searching for information, making sure we are not only taking care of ourselves, but also trying to safe guard those around us who need some extra protecting. It's been an overload of information, horror stories, desperation and real fear from people all over the world.

But what came next surprised me. It shouldn't have, I guess, but it did. People started posting some helpful suggestions. Which is a great idea, right? I mean, we need to find some good in the middle of the blah. Now while I was looking for anything that might brighten my outlook, (like the penguins on field trips while the aquariums and zoos are closed), I started running across article after article whose authors suggest readers use this opportunity to create beautiful art projects with our children, all while peacefully interacting together. And that we should take this bless-ed chance to learn a new language, and teach our children to bake bread from scratch, grinding our own flour, maybe write the next great American novel, sing kumbaya in a circle of love and harmony. Okay, I made that last one up, but you catch my drift.

Now, please please please...if you are an amazing hippie hearted soul, whose love language is baking and you homeschool your children in real life and this togetherness brings you joy....you are a magical unicorn, and I hope you embrace this and treasure every moment. In case anyone is wondering, I'm not a magical unicorn. I'm more of a one horned goat, tripping over my own feet, ramming my head into walls and whining loudly. Now don't get me wrong, I have basically been training my whole life to have a job where leggings are my daily uniform. I am awesome at that! But the rest of this is much more challenging. Like finding ways to navigate my work calendar and meetings while my husband and I share an office and us finding a healthy way to vent our frustrations. And I'm feeding these people approximately 17 meals a day as I juggle conference calls while helping my kids navigate online learning (a very big shout-out to all educators-you are the real MVPs. You all deserve a billion dollar raise. Jesus loves you. The end.).

Almost every day since early March has resulted in my crying in the kitchen. It's overwhelming, the sheer magnitude of a global pandemic, on top of trying to manage a life without freedom outside of the confines of our house. Trying to ensure my kids feel safe, and seen, and encouraged and help them navigate self-learning, and try to help with this new math, for the love of everything good and holy? It's just a lot. Too much, actually. So I decided to be real. Or real-ish.

You don't want to see my unmade bed or room-sized version of a junk drawer, or the dishes that don't get done every day. But those things are my reality. My husband and I didn't have time before to get everything done, so with all the extra stuff piled on our plates right now, my house did not magically become pristine and organized. We don't make gourmet meals (ever)

or even remember to take the laundry out of the wash before having to re-wash it again. And again. True story. I could go on.

However, in the middle of one of my epic kitchen meltdowns, my husband gave me a gentle reminder, which, bless his heart, he probably wanted to shake me, but held me close instead. He reminded me that we are in survival mode here. There aren't some grand set of parameters that make me a success or failure as a wife or a mom, or a human for that matter.

### **He reminded me about grace.**

We all need a little grace. Our kids are safe and loved, even when they have their own meltdowns and turn into awful gremlin versions of themselves. We are always fed, even if it's cereal for 5 meals a day. And I don't just need to offer grace to my family. I need to offer it to myself as well. God didn't offer his redemption and grace just to others, He offered it to me. Freely. I need to be generous with myself because He loves me bigger than my biggest storm. Thankfully, I have a partner who loves me enough to see where I'm struggling and remind me that I'm gracefully broken, and gracefully loved and gracefully forgiven.

I needed to be reminded that this isn't a contest. I'm not vying for the #1 WIFE/MOM/HUMAN spot. And I most definitely don't need to continue competing with this small pretty picture I see from others around me. Because most people don't want to show you the mess. No one wants to post a picture of their kitchen table doubling as a laundry table and dishes sitting on the counter because there isn't any more room in the sink, or the Cheezits wrappers shoved under their kid's bed. We think those things make us look "less than" to the ladies in our book club, or their mother in law, or Karen from PTA. No one wants to tell the story about the fight they had with their spouse because all this togetherness is A LOT!

### **We think if we can't do it all, we aren't enough.**

And yes, there are people who manage to have it all together and cleaning is your love language, ya'll keep on keeping on (although you should know I will always picture in my mind that you have a closet like Monica on *Friends* where you shove all the things that don't have a home...don't tell me it's not true...I refuse to hear you). That's awesome for you! I have stuff that makes me great at life too (but it's definitely not that). We all have strengths and weaknesses. That's okay. It's not, no matter what social media says, a competition.

Find things that bring light to you and your people during the tough times. If those things are learning Mandarin or cleaning the baseboards, rock on with your bad selves. If watching a movie with takeout for the 8<sup>th</sup> time that week is more your speed, keep up the good work. If hiding in your closet with leftover Easter candy, praying that no one finds you, that's okay too. You aren't alone. You aren't failing. There is an offer of grace right where you are. So take it, hold it, and write a reminder on your hand if you tend to forget. You are enough. You win by still showing up for your partner, for your family, your people and for yourself.

*"Every time you fall down, at the bottom of every hole is grace.*

*Grace waits in broken places. Grace waits at the bottom of things.*

*Grace loves you when you are at your darkest worst, and wraps you in the best light.*

*Grace seeps through the broken places and seeps into the lowest places, a balm for wounds."*



Ann Voskamp

## **Date Night Fun – May Flowers – by Marcy Lytle**

I'm writing this article in April, with no idea if we will be venturing away from our homes come May or not. Or will we still be sheltering in place? It's all madness, isn't it? Last month, we provided laughing for our date night ideas, and this month we're thinking flowers – those beauties that bloom in May – might be a great focus for connection with him!

**Flowers to draw:** Pinterest has so many draw tutorials for flowers! How fun it would be to find a field of flowers, your own flower garden, or even flowers on line and both sit down to sketch and then color in the flowers – and then frame them – to hang somewhere in your house. Maybe on the back patio! Try baking some simple scones to enjoy while you draw!

<https://www.pinterest.com/hmary/how-to-draw-flowers/>

<https://laurenslatest.com/simple-scone-recipe/>

**Flowers to eat:** Remember those nice edible arrangements people order and deliver to friends? Why not make one of your own? Take the fruit you have, shape it by cutting with knives, skewer it and then arrange it in a pretty jar. Then eat it! Add cheese and crackers, and you've got yourself a picnic! Check out this video for a great idea to get started.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhLrI2bN9vE>

**Flowers to plant:** Order seeds and start a flower garden in pots or in your yard. Order together, short ones and tall ones, draw out a sketch of where you'll plant each (read the planting directions for spacing and sunlight) and enjoy this creative activity together! Enjoy this YouTube video before you start, for inspiration.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgbbSI24r10>

**Flowers to arrange:** Have you ever learned to arrange flowers “properly?” Now's the time! Or if you already know, teach him and make it a LIVE video – how fun would that be? Or vice-versa if he knows how and you don't!. If you have flowers or shrubs or branches you can trim and use, go for it. If not, make some flowers and then arrange them! I love these ideas – click here!

<https://www.bhg.com/gardening/flowers/garden-fresh-flower-arrangements-from-your-backyard-281474979506333/>

**Flowers to give:** Virtual flowers. There IS such a thing! If you have an evening set aside for giving back, consider sending virtual flowers to a few friends with a note of encouragement. Each of you picks another couple to brighten their day.

[http://www.iflowers.com/vir/vir\\_newgallery\\_date.asp](http://www.iflowers.com/vir/vir_newgallery_date.asp)

Maybe you can think of other flower “dates” to pursue and experience with him. You could even create a garage scavenger hunt to find 7 things each and then arrange them in a pretty presentation to each other! How fun would that be?

April showers bring May flowers...enjoy.

## **Over 40 Years – Solutions – by Marcy Lytle**

Last month I talked about road rage, when traveling with your spouse in a car over miles and miles. It can get testy for sure. And now, after being confined to our houses for weeks and weeks, working 24/7 together, there have been new issues that have popped up – both good and bad. I'm sure we've all encountered them with our kids, elderly parents, and yes...our spouses.

I found myself some days just connected at the hip to him, because in this scary life right now, I don't want to be separated. It's bad enough being separated from our kids, so I don't want to let my husband out of my sight! I took my laptop and rode with him, since he still had to inspect properties. I made sure he wore his mask, stood 6 feet away, and wiped his hands when he got back in the truck. These rides also provided me a way to get out of the house for much needed mental health!

However, I was invading his space somewhat...commenting on his driving, asking him why he did certain things, voicing my hunger at inopportune times, and more. And we found ourselves bickering a bit!

Back at home, I often felt listless and stir crazy. I'm NOT a homebody, as so many are. I talked to many friends that didn't mind being stuck at home at all. They found it satisfying to putter around and do projects and hang out, and chill. I don't mind that part of the day, but I want busyness, schedules, and lists of things to do!

So here we sat, a few weeks in, and I realized that in order to be pleasant to my husband that I was not seeing all day long and night, I needed to get myself back on track for ME – and for HIM – and for US. We both still had work to do on the weekdays, but it was the nights and weekends that really got to me and caused me to sigh, fidget and pick...

I finally made lists. I've done it for a couple weekends in a row now, and it's saved my sanity and I'm sure made my husband pleased as well. Because it restored some order to my life!

I made a list for nighttime activities we could choose from: car dates, puzzles, shows, games, small projects, long walks, back patio visits, etc. – a mixture of in the house and out.

However, the weekend schedules were and still are my favorite. My usual activity was to schedule weekend fun on Friday mornings after reading our local news with all of the events/happenings around town. However, that section now only had movies to watch and takeout places to visit. I was so over movies!

Here's what one weekend's schedule looked like:

### **FRIDAY**

EXERCISE (we picked Jazzercise from YouTube)

PICNIC ON THE FLOOR (used fun dishes and finger food)

MOVIE (binged watched *Anne with an E*)

### **SATURDAY**

FEARLESS BOOK/MAX LUCADO – TEXT GROUP (encouraged our friends after reading the chapter)

DELIVER PAPER TOWELS AND GIFT CARDS (to our kids who were moving, but we couldn't help!)

MAIL PACKAGE AMAZON (dropoff facility still open)

LUNCH OUT EAST SIDE SOCIAL? AND GET FOOD (a coffee shop that offered fresh bread and deli meat)

DRAFTHOUS.COM MOVIE – EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN (didn't watch this, more *Anne with an E*)

### **SUNDAY**

WASH AND PAINT ROCKS (for our garden – gonna be so cute)

CHURCH ONLINE (staying connected and fed and challenged)

LUNCH (that deli ham and bread from yesterday)

MUELLER FARMERS MARKET - GET SUCCULENTS. (never got to this)

DRIVE BY CURBSIDE WAVES (great to see friends – just texted before we came)

AMUSEMENT PARK/SKETCH/MUSIC/EAT (no time – our schedule was too full!)

EXTRAS: CLEAN PHOTOS/EMAILS, GO THROUGH PHOTOS, UPLOAD VACAY PHOTOS

Just this simple solution of making a schedule brought me so much order to the chaos, contentment to my connection with my husband, and peace to my mind. And...we argued less because he's not struggling with staying at home – but I am. So his other half now is happy and amused once again...



ENCOURAGEMENT

## Rooted in Love - Laundry Worship – by Kaelin Scott

What's the one chore that you dread more than all the others? Which one do you look forward to least of all? For a long time, I detested doing the dishes because we lived in a house with no dishwasher, and I had to wash every single thing by hand. It was a pain. (First world problems, right?) But when we moved and got a dishwasher, it wasn't so bad. And since it's essentially a daily chore, my dislike for doing dishes gradually faded away. Instead, I loathed folding laundry. Especially once I had two kids. It's crazy how babies are so tiny yet produce so much laundry. Between spit-up and blowouts, they go through several outfits a day – and sometimes mama does too. Plus there are all those bibs and tiny little socks that get lost in the washer on a regular basis. And when your husband works on a ranch, he can produce some pretty dirty clothes as well.

I do laundry on a weekly basis, and for a long time it was my least favorite day of the week. But then I remembered what it says in Colossians 3:23-24:

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord,  
not for human masters, since you know that you will receive  
an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.  
It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*

It was like a lightbulb going on inside my head! Yes, I'm washing and folding and putting away mountains of clothes for my family every week. But more importantly, I'm doing it for Jesus. And if I'm doing it for Him, then I should do it well and with a joyful attitude. If I'm working for Jesus, I should do it with a smile and be thankful for the work.

I stopped looking at laundry day as a chore and started seeing it as an opportunity to worship, and now it's one of my favorite times during the week. Sometimes I turn on worship music while I fold the clothes, and my kids join in singing and dancing around the room. Other times, I simply pray and listen for God's gentle whispers while I work. And I've found that the more I listen, the more He speaks. Several times, in the middle of folding a pair of footie pajamas, I've had to stop, close my eyes, and bow my head. I've even been moved to tears during this special time with the Lord. By inviting Him to join me during these moments, I've invited myself to experience divine joy and peace.

When I changed my attitude about doing laundry, I unknowingly changed the outcome. I no longer look at it as something I *have* to do, but see it as a chance to experience God. No, it doesn't magically make the clothes any cleaner or my folding any neater, but it brings me something so much greater. It does help that my son is out of the spit-up/blowout phase, and my daughter is getting old enough to help put some of her own clothes away. But the miracle is not the efficiency with which the chore gets done; the real miracle is the heart behind it.

Chores don't have to make us cringe. They can be a growing experience, filled with joy and pleasure, if we look at them the right way. I challenge you today to do your least favorite chore or task as if you are doing it for Jesus alone. Invite Him to work alongside you and spend time with Him while you tackle whatever job it may be. You might be surprised at how your attitude changes and maybe you'll hear those gentle whispers, too. True joy is found in the midst of ordinary circumstances, including those tasks you may not love but have to get done. Folding laundry, washing dishes, changing diapers, cooking dinner, vacuuming floors, scrubbing toilets – whatever the job may be, there are two ways to go about it. You can approach it with dread

and a grouchy attitude, or you can do it in love and make it an act of worship. The second way is much more satisfying, I promise!

*Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without a fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.*

Philippians 2:14-16



Suddenly, life as we've known it has changed. The change was so sudden and extreme that you know exactly what I'm talking about without me having to explain. It's difficult to find words right now that convey the intensity of this moment. In God's great eternal time-table, this moment, whether it lasts two months, two years, or two hundred years, may be a turning point for many of us, and, hopefully, for the world at large. I have hope—fearsome hope—that this is true for me, and for all those who seek the things above, and not below.

Suddenly, my world-view has expanded and the world has contracted, all at the same time. More than ever, it's clear that the "the world" is shaky ground and the warning not to fix my eyes on it hits home. I can't see or understand everything God is doing, but I recognize the signs of the times. I pray into it, agreeing with God's unfolding unfathomable plan while, at the same time, asking for mercy for all those affected and for the groaning lost world. I pray for big-time mercy now and courage for the future.

For several months, even before this *suddenly* came, I've had nagging thoughts about wasting time, about habits I'd slipped into, about giving in to distractions too often. I love God's gentleness, but I also love his relentless fierce love that doesn't let me get away with slack. Suddenly, he's given me a perfect opportunity to, once again, realign myself. *Go deeper, Lord...help me not to be lulled by the comforts and pleasures of the day when things go back to normal. Let this be my new normal, acutely aware that "suddenly" can happen anytime.* This inner transformation is a constant work, but sometimes it's the removal of a splinter, sometimes it's major surgery, and it takes courage to face major surgery.

It is written that the Day would come. Many of us have longed for it and prayed for it. Is it true that a day is as a thousand years to God? It seems that way sometimes, and so it could be another thousand years. But what if it comes *suddenly*? No one can know, and so I need courage to face the "suddenlys" to come, whether they pertain to the day of Christ's return, or to the afflictions that serve to draw me closer. In some ways, I want things to go back to "normal", and some things will—I'll eat at a restaurant, see my family and friends, shop for frivolous things—but with a new awareness. I won't be content with "normal" because this first-time-ever major surgery that's happening is changing me. If I'm reading right, there is more to come; but, I'm praying for, receiving, and taking courage. The Lord our God is with us always, and in everything.

*John 16:33 "I have spoken these things to you in order that you may have peace in Me. You have affliction in the world, but take-courage— I have overcome the world".*

## **Moving Forward - Leaning In** – by Pam Charro

These are interesting and challenging times, for sure. I am, by nature, a very outgoing and sociable person and it's been difficult lately to not be able to gather with my friends. I think it's been especially hard to not be able to go to church. While I am so very grateful for technology, worshipping online just isn't the same. It's easy for me to start feeling spiritually disconnected during this time.

Yet I'm also sensing an increase of grace available to us right now. To me, it seems God understands that we are weakened as a body and he is leaning in even closer than normal so that we will rely on him in such a challenging time. While it can be tempting to eat and sleep myself into a coma, watch movies until my brain cells all die, or talk on the phone with loved ones all day long because I finally have all of this extra time, this type of "powering through" will not give me peaceful sleep at the end of the day.

In 1 Kings 19, Elijah was exhausted, overwhelmed, and afraid for his life. God showed up for him in his trial, but he was not in the noise. In the same way, I believe he is waiting for us to go into our prayer closets so he can gently whisper his peaceful assurance to us. We don't know how long this time of uncertainty will last and the only way we can endure the weeks and months ahead is to limit the distractions and be still in his presence.

Take courage my heart  
Stay steadfast my soul  
He's in the waiting  
He's in the waiting  
Hold onto your hope  
As your triumph unfolds  
He's never failing  
He's never failing  
-- Kristene DeMarco

He is so ready to be everything we need if we can just be still. He cares; and he is leaning in to be near.

## **Simple Truth - Greater is He** – by Erica Simmons

As a Christian I have always found tremendous peace in the fact that no matter what happens, all I have to do is choose to let go of all my problems to my Savior who died on the cross for me to have that peace that passes all understanding. I don't always make that choice immediately but I do usually make it relatively quickly. During those times, I often think of the sentiment of religion being the opiate of the masses, using my faith, trusting in it takes away the pain that so often comes with living life on this side of heaven. I am not ashamed of it and everyone (and I mean everyone) has the same choice, but not all choose faith as their option. Recently, I was faced with a deep loss of expectation that I did handle the way I have handled the curve balls life often brings. As a result, I struggled with every facet of my life and I am now just beginning to find the peace that has been my comfort, but the experience taught me some things about myself and my faith.

First, let me confess that for the last four months or so I lived the life of a hypocrite and I don't say that lightly. For years I worked the youth at our church and one of the things that I strived to help them understand is what *hypocrite* truly means. I stressed that being a hypocrite is judging or giving someone advice about something that you are actively and participating in yourself. What it is not is giving some guidance in a situation that you yourself might be struggling with. We all have our stumbling blocks, we know what to do and most times we choose the right thing. But every once in a while we might not; and when we do, we are repentant and truly work to avoid making that choice again.

For me, I purposely chose not to follow the advice that I have for years given to someone who has come to me for advice when struggling with a difficult season in their life. When I finally shared this with my life group members, one of them asked me if I was angry with God and my answer was, "No." I was not angry with God during this time. I often talked to Him and acknowledged the moments where I felt He was talking to me. I have since realized that I was in a season of mourning and grief over something that was deeply fundamental to me and having things not turn out the way I wanted was very painful for me. Even though I know my Heavenly Father wanted me to trust Him with my pain, I did not for a long time. However, He continued to meet me where I was.

Second confession...I systematically cut off people in my life that I knew would bring me comfort through God's word. I did not want to let go of my grief and in doing so I engaged in the single greatest moment of escapism in my life. I knew it and I did not care. I did not care that it was

impacting how I went about doing my job. I just did the minimum to get by and came home and lost myself in the one thing that made me happy, reading. In so doing, I was not Erica, hurting and struggling to deal with the loss of expectations. I was whatever character I was reading at the time, strong, smart and overcoming all the obstacles to achieve the final goal. As the next character I knew I would not fail, because the heroine never fails in their story. Luckily, I have a few heroines in my life, who although were being pushed away by me, knew how to pray and continue to surround me in prayers.

During this season, I was putting myself in a truly vulnerable position. There is a verse that talks about the enemy roaming around looking for those he can devour (1 Peter 5:8) and I did that to myself. I was the sheep that voluntarily separated myself from the herd. I chose to lick my wounds alone instead of trusting the God who has always proven to be faithful. Because of this choice, I made it so much easier for the enemy to target and attack me, but I also learned an irrefutable truth: *greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world.*

Even after weeks and months of closing myself off from my God, I learned that my faith is not something I establish daily; it is a knowledge that is so IN me that it cannot be diminished in seasons of famine, even if it was a self-induced famine. I know this because in the times of my greatest vulnerability I never once was tempted by my greatest stumbling block. The chains that my Father broke in my life over a year ago were truly broken. The astounding thing is that this deliverance was the basis of the lost expectations that sent me down the tunnels of despair in the first place.

One of the hardest things about hearing from God is not applying **our expectations** to His message. The good news is that through it all, God knew my heart to know and understand Him in this situation even when it looked even to me that I just wanted to wallow in my pain. I guess my final message would be this...

If we love Him, because we know He loves us, we have to trust that who is IN us is GREATER than who is in this world, and that includes this flesh we wear. God is greater than our own doubts, fears, struggles and pain, He is greater than our own understanding of even ourselves.

## Unearthly Thing - “Does This Lipstick Go with My Fear and Anxiety?” – Angela Dolbear

Red lipstick is one of my favorite things. It makes me feel dressed up, and put together.

Even during the current climate of social-distancing, with sparse other cosmetics applied to my face, I will go through the steps of applying red lipstick (see the quick “How To” guide at the end of this article). The pop of powerful color on my face suggests confidence. Even when I don’t feel it...like now.

I have so many tubes in varying shades of orange-red, true red, blue-based red, and even oxblood red. There is always a tube of red lipstick (and a matching red lip liner) in my handbag.

Today’s lippie is more of a coral red. It is the beginning of spring, and the color is vibrant, like the new leaves just sprouting on trees around my home in Nashville, TN. It matches the season perfectly.

The lipstick is a new sample I was excited to try from [Guerlain](#), one of the oldest cosmetic companies in the business. Very pricey, and very French, but also, very lovely. I feel a little like Audrey Hepburn. Feminine, with a hint of feistiness.

Realistically, the “I can do it!” confidence that comes from wearing red lipstick originally stems from tapping into being who God has made me--a woman who unabashedly lives her love for vintage and retro style. Which in turn starts many conversations where I can bring up my faith! And how lovely it is when God brings me special gifts, like luxurious French lipstick for free.

I wish I was consistently aware of these gifts. But lately, not so much.

I live with chronic anxiety, like a creepy intrusive roommate. It’s a leftover side effect from a stroke I endured 2 years ago, which damaged the speech and language portion of my brain. Not good for a writer, but I can now testify with certainty that God is good, because He is healing me.

Ordinarily, I suppress the lurking disquieted uneasiness anxiety brings, since I know that it is not real. It’s just the chemicals in my brain playing evil scientist. But when a large and looming situation comes along, I am easily overwhelmed. Like now.

I feel it skulking inside me. Just below the surface. Anxiety, dense and arduous. I try to push it away. Shove it down.

At the time of writing this article, the COVID-19 quarantine persists, and will continue another month or more. This forces the anxiety back to the surface, where it tries to confine me in its thick prickly cloak.

News of the virus is everywhere. It has taken the lives of notable country music artists here in Nashville. I pray for it to leave the earth and take as few people with it as possible.

Last month, I wrote about a practical list of things to do in difficult circumstances called “[A Practical Guide for surviving \(and thriving through\) most everything in life](#)”. I read through the list, carefully applying each step like heavily pigmented dark crimson lip color.

The anxiety begins to break up. Its opaque smothering dissipates. It is another special gift from God when He speaks to you through your own writing!

Following the first point on the guide, I opened BibleGateway.com to a verse I heard in church last Sunday. In [Luke 12:22-32](#), where Jesus describes how God provides for us:

*And He said to His disciples, For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.*

Yes! I exclaim to myself. I make a mental note to post these words on my refrigerator, and also in my dressing room, in a fabulously big font, for inspiration and memorization. Jesus continues in the passage to illustrate His point:

*Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!"*

Wow. The Creator of the universe is telling me, and you, we are much more *valuable* to Him than we realize. Just *wow*.

Also, I *love* ravens. They are ominous creatures, with a distinctive call. Actually, I am drawn to most things with a gothic style. When I was 7 years old, I wanted to marry Eddie Munster, of *The Munsters* television show. I liked his house, and his parents were cool. And then Andy Gibb came along, and well, things changed...

I used to suppress my gothic style, especially at church. But God always reminds me to be myself. I am useful to Him when I am my true self. The main character in my first novel, [The Garden Key](#) shares this same experience (write what you know, right?).

Remembering all the times God has used me, especially for the good of others while I was being my original created self helps ease anxiety, because I can confidently say to myself,

*God is good.*

The rest of the verses in Luke 12:25-32 tells me not to worry—again! (I *so* need the repetition). I love when Jesus says, “Consider the lilies...” describing how magnificently He created them, and how much more God will lovingly and exquisitely cover me, His daughter.

Such beautiful words. Worry and anxiety don’t stand a chance against the big love the Father has for us. Such total care, given to us gladly by God.

Last Sunday, while “attending” [online church](#) during the COVID-19 quarantine, my pastor said that anxious fear and faith are incompatible. Fear and faith *cannot* dwell together. *Whoa*.

I have faith in Jesus, my Savior, so I ask myself, why all this fear and anxiety?

I have seen God provide for me so many times. Thanks to Instacart, my household is well stocked with good food during this stay-home mandate to help stop the spread of the virus. God has made it so neither my husband Tim, nor I, with a super compromised immune system due to Scleroderma, need to venture out into the world. We can do our part to stay in, and we are well-provided for. God is good.

I have faith. And I see the evidence of it. So all fear and anxiety needs to go. I will seek God's kingdom (like now, as I write about it) and I will trust Him.

As our Earth proceeds on its journey around the Sun, and large space objects and meteors are hurdling and smashing about in the universe, we are kept safe by our Creator. Meanwhile He also clothes us, and feeds us, and cares for us in so many unimaginable ways. So I have true confidence in my Heavenly Father.

No need for red lipstick to feel confident and worry-free. It's just for fun.

**A Quick how-to have lovely red lips all day** (or at least until you eat something...I have never been able to eat and not need to reapply my lipstick after...):

1. Exfoliate your lips gently. Whenever my lips have been dry, I will lightly brush over them with my toothbrush while brushing my teeth.
2. Apply a lip balm. Just a little. I like [Carmex](#). I dab my lips a little after application, to make sure it soaks in.
3. Apply a good concealer over your lips, and blend into your face. I only use [timeBalm concealer by theBalm cosmetics](#) (I use it under my eyes too – so good!). It's a little pricey, but the company often has half-price sales. Sign-up for emails!
4. Apply red lip liner, with careful attention to your cupid's bow. My favorite lip liner has been discontinued, so I am on the hunt for a viable candidate for replacement while I guard my back-up stock of my fave.
5. Apply your favorite red lipstick, directly with the tube, or use a lip brush. So many to choose from. Drug store brands are good, or go into (or shop online at home) Ulta or Sephora and treat yourself to the quality of a prestige brand like Becca or Urban Decay, or even Lancome (smells lightly of roses, so lady-like!). Again, sign-up for emails to get the heads-up on sales.
6. Hold a tissue (or a paper towel – less lint) up, and press it lightly between your lips. This will prevent lipstick from getting on your teeth.
7. Smile! You look lovely. And know you are loved hugely, by God Himself.

Photo credit

Photo by AustinPro Photo, <https://www.austinprophoto.com/>



FRESH THYME



## **FRESH THYME – A Day or Two – by Marcy Lytle**

A few months back, we had some visitor at our church from a local outreach called Teen Challenge. Our entire congregation was moved to tears as young (and older) men shared their stories of abuse and neglect and sorrow, stories that were difficult to hear and even comprehend. Of course, many were prompted to sign up to support this group...after the service was over.

A couple decades ago, my daughter had learned in school about the starving kids in Africa and she too was moved beyond words with concern about them, as she came home and talked nonstop about the situation. Her younger brother heard her, too. It was quite something to listen to her share with us what she'd learned about little children and their lack and need of the basics of life.

Fast forward a few months from that visit by those men with incredible stories, and life has happened, a pandemic has swept the world, and time has gone by. Those stories are becoming a distant memory and my heart that was stirred to tears is now stirred by other things. No longer are those stories in the forefront of my mind, because other things have moved them back in the recesses...

Fast forward just a few days from my daughter and her reaction to the starving children, we were out shopping for clothes. She piled up more than a dozen outfits to try on, and her younger brother once again observed. He came over to me and whispered in my ear, "I guess she's forgotten all about the starving children in Africa." It was so funny...but not.

My point in relaying those two stories is to note how in a day or two, a week or a month, we forget the stirring that happens in our hearts. It's why we need reminders, notes, calendars, and all sorts of things to remind us of the important. This all made me wonder how long it will be, once this pandemic is passed, before we are all right back to our "normal" life and the fear of being in public will be behind us. Or will it?

I also wondered how long pain or trauma has to last before it makes a lifetime impact on our actions and reactions? If the pandemic was over in two weeks, like we all hoped it would be in the beginning, I'm pretty sure life would have resumed and nothing would have changed. But the longer the isolation and prohibitions, will we be changed forever?

Will be more cautious in the future, giving up our usual shaking of hands?

Will we avoid crowds from now on, keeping our faces covered indefinitely?

I don't have the answer to that, but I do know one thing. Hard times are for learning lessons. And if we don't learn the lessons, we might have more hard times of the same kind. I'm not quoting any scripture here. I'm just noting the obvious. Any parent knows that a one word "No!" doesn't keep a child from doing wrong. It usually takes several reprimands, loss of a privilege, taking away pleasures, and modeling of the right way to act, before a child even wants to consider changing for the good.

I'm curious to see how this plays out, when our nation resumes work fully, takes to the crowded highways once again, and frequents all of the pleasure places we have missed so much.

Will family connection still be a priority, with games and outings and pure clean fun?

Will rest and relaxation now be duly noted as a necessity in order to survive and thrive?

I don't have the answers, and only time will tell. But I really hope we don't load our arms with piles of purchases and forget...and I really hope that the tears that flowed will still flow...as we repent, pray, and look forward to a great reaction of good that lasts...more than a day or two.

## **FRESH THYME – Face the Day – by Marcy Lytle**

Have you ever awakened way too early, like 3am, and you're wide awake and cannot sleep? Once in a while that's not so bad, but waking like that when you've been stuck at home for days is not a good way to start the day. When it happened a few times, due to worry or just circling thoughts about this crazy current world, I was determined to go back to sleep. I did not want to face the day THAT early. If I got on up, by 8am I'd be ready for the day to be end...and it would be just starting!

I'm betting that most of us have not wanted to face many days, as of late.

- We don't want to face another day searching for groceries or toilet paper on line.
- We don't want to face another day of layoffs or pay cuts.
- We don't want to face another day of the news alerting us to the new "order" of things
- We don't want to face another day of increased numbers of cases.
- We don't want to face another day of being overworked, because our job is essential.
- We don't want to face another day of paying bills, when there's no money in the bank.

You get it. There are countless reasons we don't want to face the day, whether we wake up early or sleep in. Just getting up and getting dressed and showing up is an effort, when there are things on our agenda that are unpleasant and hard. And yet...we have to face the day...because the time clock is ticking and it just won't stop.

Early morning will give way to noontime lunch, and the afternoon will soon disappear with the evening sunset. And we can look back and observe whether or not we faced the day well...or we pulled the covers over our heads and pretended that day never happened.

So how in the world DO we face the day, when the day is just not pretty? We read the Word and make ourselves smile, we sing a tune, we dance few steps, and we give thanks.

Psalm 118:24

*This is the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.*

This is a familiar verse, but let's break it apart. This day, whether it's one we like or not, is another day we've been given, another day he has made the sun to rise, so it's gift to us. What we do with that gift is up to us. And he tells us what to do...

We are to rejoice and be glad. Rejoicing and being glad are not just responses we can only offer when life is good and pleasant. These two can be choices we make, even when life is just not faceable (is that a word?).

I'm thinking that if we choose to rejoice and be glad, solely because this is the day – the gift – he's given us, then we can face it with determination and the will to give thanks. Even if our eyes are wide open at 3am.

## **FRESH THYME – Sunrise or Sunset – by Marcy Lytle**

Which do you prefer the most...the sunrise or the sunset? And which do you observe the most?

I observe the sunset way more than I do the sunrise. I'm an early riser, but I never step outside to watch the sun rise. On a few occasions, when we've had an early flight, I've seen the sun rise and it's spectacular. But for the most part, 99% of the time, I see the sunset more than the sunrise. Yet, each display is tremendous viewing!

Sunrise comes right after the darkest part of the night, and it's quite breathtaking to see it rise in the dark sky and dispel the darkness. It's the definition of beauty. It reminds us that the dark of night isn't forever. We will see again and be able to walk and drive places without worry of bumping into things and causing injury. There will be warmth that comes with the rising of the sun, and often dispelling of clouds, or perhaps the heat will cause a reaction in the atmosphere to cause storms! Sunrise is necessary, it's always faithful, and it's never NOT happened.

Sunset comes at the end of a long day and offers us an invitation to come and sit, dine on the patio, take a long walk, and observe it's passing from the top of the sky down below the horizon...to sleep for the night. Often, the moon is out before the sun fully sets, and I love it when that happens. Sunset displays an array of color across the sky, sometimes peeking through the clouds to form amazing images that artists love to copy onto canvas. It's the definition of beauty. It reminds us that no matter how long and hard the day has been, night is coming that woos us to our beds to sleep and rest and forget the troubles of the day. Sunset is necessary, it's always faithful, and it's never NOT happened.

The fact that I observe the sunset more than the sunrise is something I've thought about lately. Sunset, in terms of life, often refers to the end...the last part of living on this earth. Elderly people are said to be in the sunset of their lives. Sunrise, since it happens in the morning and starts a new day, is often compared to birth, new things, the start of something fresh and fragrant and inviting!

I can easily slip into a pattern of observing the end of things, rather than the beginning. I can easily start to slide down a slippery path of worry and fear, when I consider sunset. I think that's what we all considered as the pandemic began to spread. *What if this is the end? What if the light of the day that we've all enjoyed is now coming to an end...for good?* Our focus was on the fear of the loss of the good things of the day, once and for all.

But, whether we like God's timing or wisdom or not, he put into place the sunrise and made it just as sure as the sunset. So when one day ends, another begins, equally full of promise and hope and light.

The world isn't over, yet. But even if it is the sunset of things and days and light as we knew it, there's a new day promised. Even if the end of the world is near, the biggest sunrise and the most spectacular one is promised as well. It will literally take our breath away and present to us a new order of life, one where justice reigns and all sorrow is gone. And that sunrise, I don't want to miss out on! In fact, I want to be anticipating it and looking forward to it, every time the sun goes down.

**Sunrise, sunset**...think about which one you observe the most and why. Think about whether you fear the end of the light of day, or look forward to the end of the darkness.

It's something to think about as you step outside and are seated once again on the patio of a restaurant to watch the sun go down, alongside many other patrons. It's something to ponder as you worry about this and that, instead of sleeping in rest knowing another day is promised...either here or there...both days that He has made...a reason to rejoice.

Who knows, maybe I'll purpose to watch the sun rise a bit more. It just might do me a world of good...

## **FRESH THYME – When Skies are Gray – by Marcy Lytle**

I happen to love gray, cloudy, dreary days. Not every day, but once in a while. However, it seems most of us prefer sunny days – not too hot – but just right. Too many cloudy days in a row dampen more than the soil – they dampen our spirits! And that’s how it’s been during these days at home, like a long string of cloudy days where the sun is hidden and the gloom is looming.

Cloudy days are often accompanied by fog, which limits visibility. It’s dangerous to drive in the fog, so we usually are better off waiting until it “lifts” before we venture out. Especially, if we’re driving on unknown roads, we can easily not see other cars around us.

Limited visibility comes with long days of staying at home, as well. We can’t see further than a few houses down the street, there’s really no places open to drive to except for groceries, and our vision begins to wane.

*But wait! The sun is still shining behind those clouds!*

Cloudy days are often accompanied by a fine mist of spitting rain, the kind that’s nasty, cold, and the kind that ruins picnics. At least one thing we can do while at home is picnic outside, but dampened days make for ruined food. No one wants to picnic in the rain and eat soggy food.

*But wait! The sun will soon emerge and dry up all the rain!*

Cloudy days are often accompanied by lack of warmth. The temperature in spring stays cooler on cloudy days than on sunny. We have to bring out that sweater again and quicken our pace if we’re walking, so that we stay warm instead of chilly.

Long days at home, away from our friends and family and connections, also make us lose our warmth of well-being. Missing out on hugs and touching and being near and seeing each other’s faces is like obscurity, slipping away into a coldness of spirit.

*But wait! The sun will warm us up again, as it burns the clouds away!*

Cloudy days are often accompanied by cool breezes, covering of the sun’s hot rays in the heat of summer, and offer the promise of rain needed for crops to grow. Cloudy days often give us a chance to slow down, read a book, enjoy a reprieve from life’s harshness...

*But wait! Cloudy days can be good? You bet they can!*

And even though we’ve all had too many cloudy days to count as of late, there’s this wonderful promise that all things work together for good to those that love Him. Even the darkness of job loss, health issues, depression and more – things that come with isolation and distance – cannot stop God’s goodness and mercy from pursuing us. He’s the Good Shepherd, the creator of the Sun and the Moon, and clouds only mean one thing. We either need to rest, the sun is

too hot, faith needs to be reaffirmed, we need to pick up the pace, or a whole list of other things we can do on a cloudy day.

I hope we soon sing, "I've got sunshine on a cloudy day. When it's cold outside I've got the month of May."

The birds are chirping, flowers are blooming, and the sun is still shining...even when the clouds are still hanging low.



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

June 2020





TIPS

## **The Dressing – Go Bold!** – by Marcy Lytle

A few weeks ago, I ordered myself lots of new earrings. Partly, I ordered them because I was tired of my decades-old stash, which consisted of mostly studs...not many big earrings. After all, I wore LOTS of big earrings back in the 80's and really grew tired of them. However, I had seen lots of photos of cute tshirts and simple shirts really taken to the next level with a cute pair of hoops! Yes, hoops! And when hoops are worn, there's no need for a statement necklace or a scarf, or any other accessories.

When my order arrived, I was delighted and even made room for these large earrings on my jewelry wall. You can see the picture over on the article called Seven 4 You – where we all shared what we've been doing during this slower pace of being at home more. I thought I'd share some of these finds with you, in case you too want to start a new trend this summer. These hoops are great for any outing, at home in the backyard or down the street at a park with friends...or on vacation...should we all get to go!

The first four pairs are from American Eagle (Yeah, I didn't know their jewelry was so cute!)

**Flowers** – Isn't this pair stunning? These would be great with a maxi sundress, or shorts and a tshirt! They are so unique and pretty.

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-flower-statement-earring/0484\\_9457\\_900](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-flower-statement-earring/0484_9457_900)

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-flower-statement-earring/0484\\_9457\\_900?menu=cat4840004](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-flower-statement-earring/0484_9457_900?menu=cat4840004)

**Braided** – This hoop that's braided in gold is one of my favorite pair! Gold goes with denim, navy, red, and all sorts of summer hues!

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-braided-hoop-earring/0484\\_9430\\_284](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-braided-hoop-earring/0484_9430_284)

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-braided-hoop-earring/0484\\_9430\\_284?menu=cat4840004](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-braided-hoop-earring/0484_9430_284?menu=cat4840004)

**Multi-color** – I just wore these with a white shirt, and I think this pair just completed the outfit! These hoops are not heavy in weight, just heavy in beauty and fun.

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-multi-color-hoop-earring/0484\\_9466\\_900](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-multi-color-hoop-earring/0484_9466_900)

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-multi-color-hoop-earring/0484\\_9466\\_900?menu=cat4840004](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-multi-color-hoop-earring/0484_9466_900?menu=cat4840004)

**Tortoise and Raffia** – I think these are so pretty, and if you've got an animal print pair of loafers, then you're good to go! I just recently found a pair and love them! Or even an animal print belt.

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-tortoise-raffia-statement-earring/0484\\_9446\\_900](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-tortoise-raffia-statement-earring/0484_9446_900)

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-tortoise-raffia-statement-earring/0484\\_9446\\_900?menu=cat4840004](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-tortoise-raffia-statement-earring/0484_9446_900?menu=cat4840004)

**Gold Disk** – World Market has great jewelry, and I love these disk hoops. If your outfit is already colorful and busy, then opt for a solid hoop like this!

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/gold+disc+hoop+earrings.do>

<https://www.worldmarket.com/category/jewelry-clothing/earrings/hoop-earrings.do?template=PLA&plfsku=535216>

**Beaded** – This pair looks like a pinwheel! What speaks summer more than this colorful pair! Beaded, lots of hues, and so cute!

<https://www.target.com/p/sugarfix-by-baublebar-fringe-hoop-earrings/-/A-78365078>

[https://www.target.com/p/sugarfix-by-baublebar-fringe-hoop-earrings/-/A-78365078?ref=tgt\\_adv\\_XS000000&AFID=google\\_pla\\_df&fndsrc=tgtao&CPNG=PLA\\_Jewelry%2BShopping\\_Local&adgroup=SC\\_Jewelry&LID=700000001170770pgs&network=g&device=m&location=9028316&ds\\_rl=1241788&ds\\_rl=1246978&ds\\_rl=1248099&qclid=EAlalQobChMI34OXya-d6QIV8PvjBx2CdAPqEAQYECABEgL7efD\\_BwE&qclsrc=aw.ds](https://www.target.com/p/sugarfix-by-baublebar-fringe-hoop-earrings/-/A-78365078?ref=tgt_adv_XS000000&AFID=google_pla_df&fndsrc=tgtao&CPNG=PLA_Jewelry%2BShopping_Local&adgroup=SC_Jewelry&LID=700000001170770pgs&network=g&device=m&location=9028316&ds_rl=1241788&ds_rl=1246978&ds_rl=1248099&qclid=EAlalQobChMI34OXya-d6QIV8PvjBx2CdAPqEAQYECABEgL7efD_BwE&qclsrc=aw.ds)

**Paint Palette** – This pair looks just like a paint palette. Who knows, they might even inspire you to take out a brush and create something beautiful! I think this pair would be so pretty with a red tshirt, or a denim shirt!

<https://www.target.com/p/semi-precious-hoop-earrings-universal-thread/-/A-79545383>

<https://www.target.com/p/semi-precious-hoop-earrings-universal-thread/-/A-79545383?preselect=78470880#lnk=sametab>

Maybe you're like I was and need a change in your wardrobe but you don't know where to start, you don't want to spend much, but you want to look cute for the summer months ahead. Start with earrings. Break out of your rut of wearing the same pair, just gold or silver, or just tiny and cute...and go bold!

## Seven 4 You – While at Home – by Marcy Lytle

We asked our panel of women what they did while staying at home these past weeks, waiting on “normal” to return. Many people baked, read books, went on long walks, played with kids, and all sorts of things that they never had time to do before! So we thought it would be fun to see what these women did, in case we might want to try one of their ideas ourselves!

One of my fondest memories growing up was swinging in my grandparents’ porch swing in their backyard. It was so calming and relaxing to me. We had a porch swing a couple of times more than twenty years ago and I had always wanted another. When my son graduated, he left a large metal stand he welded as a high school project. I thought many times I needed to hang a swing on it but never had. I found myself sitting on the couch during COVID 19 and looking at swings online. I did not need to spend the money, though, so I stopped looking. One afternoon while coming home from one of my two trips to the grocery store during the entire shelter in place I came across a glider on the side of the highway! I thought, “Thank you, Lord! It is mine!” The next four days I spent doing hard work, what I call ‘exercise,’ and it got me off the couch. I repaired, glued, drilled, screwed, and hung the glider on the metal stand. And I was swinging!

---

I sewed 56 masks, made 4 girl horse pillows and 4 boy dinosaurs from a free sewing pattern.

I also made my first batch of instant pot yogurt. To die for!

For the yogurt, I used the cold start process which YT blogger 'Freida loves bread' perfected. Her videos are the best to understand yogurt making. It requires 3 main ingredients:

- ultra pasteurized milk (like Fairlife)
- starter plain yogurt
- sweetener of choice

I used 1/2 cans of sweetened condensed milk and half a bottle of Natural Bliss creamer (also ultra-pasteurized). I added 1 Tclear vanilla.

Whisk really well and turn on the yogurt function. It incubates for 8 hours, and then put 4 paper towels on the yogurt, put any lid on it, and refrigerate overnight. It's amazing and addictive. It's BEST with lemon curd:

1.25 cups Sugar  
1 stick softened butter  
4 eggs  
1/2 cup fresh lemon juice  
zest of 2 lemons.

Beat until combined. Heat until almost boiling (but don't boil) and thickened. Awesome. It's Ina Garten's recipe.

---

My outdoor furniture, plants, and fixtures needed refreshing. So with some extra time on my hands, I got some spray paint and new plants and went to work. It took me less than half a day. Now, I can relax and enjoy my lovely vista.

---

We put stone pavers down to create a path in our backyard. The area never could grow grass because of the heavy foot traffic, and now with the stones to walk on, the grass is filling in and looks great. We had been meaning to do this for years!

---

I've been on the search for the best banana bread out there! I've yet to find it but here's a picture from the first one I made. It's Joanna Gaines's recipe from her book, *Magnolia Table*.

---

One thing I did was make my closet more like a dressing room. I wanted my scarves and jewelry and shoes all near my clothes so that when I get dressed, I can see each piece and put together an outfit without digging through drawers or bins to find accessories! I already had a shoe wall and a jewelry wall, and a scarf bin – but I redid them all. My husband ran across a couple of bins for the shoe wall – they hold so much! I hung my scarf rack on my over-the-door ironing board so that I could see all the colors and patterns. And I took my new earrings (I changed my style – purchased a bunch of big earrings online!) and made a twine hanger for them on my jewelry wall. I discarded several necklaces I never wear, in order to make room. I am pleased!

---

Does moving count? God opened the door for us to move into a cute little home after four years of sharing space with others in our church where we pastor. He has now provided us an adorable place in the country. It's perfect for my husband and me! We moved on May 2nd as Texas was beginning the early stages of reopening since the Covid-19 began.

---

Sheltering in place has caused many of us to do life differently. My hubby and I have been doing a lot of driving around and seeing new places with limited interaction out of the car. He has experienced elevated irritation with the news on TV and not being able to get a haircut. I am also irritated with the news, but I rather enjoy seeing some length to his hair. (He won't let me take a picture.)

---

I have been cleaning out my closets and finding unfinished craft projects. Here is a picture of a hooded towel that I added cross-stitch to, a while back. I finally finished it. It's for my 2-year old grandson.

---

It's been fun to MAKE graduation cards and sending letters to the grand babies with stickers and craft supplies that I already have or have ordered on line. I am so happy that I found some fun things to celebrate during this uncertain time.

---

I cleaned out my entry area to my home. I do this twice a year, and I was a bit late this year...but finally made it happen. I put away coats, sweaters, scarves, etc. and all the junk that had collected over the winter months. I opted for hanging bags that I use when I go out – a market bag, book bag, movie bag and beach bag – ones I can grab and go. I also placed my watering can on the floor nearby, a pretty plant on the bench, and tried to just clean up the space. It feels good, and I felt good after doing it!

### **Three Moms – Summer Fun – by Marcy Lytle**

Summer is here now, and it might feel like you've been in summer mode for months already as far as the kids being home. But now, hopefully, the school work is done and you can play a bit! However, there is still safety and money concerns for families and our three moms are sharing some ideas that are simple and super fun, for the month of June. If you have some as well, leave your ideas in the comments below!

We go for car rides often, and one ride is to check on our new house that is being built. It could be anything though, a ride in the country with ice cream in hand, or a ride to drive by and see pretty scenery.

Our family has been playing Charades and Pictionary. We downloaded an app (Worddraw) and it's a bunch of ideas for both of these games. We use individual white boards and sit on balcony, and play both. The kids have loved it!

Recently, we went through a drive-thru safari, and the plan is to do that again. It's cool in the car since it's so hot, and we can take picnic, and stop for a treat. Lots of families were in line, so maybe check out all the details before going!

We go down to the creek and go fishing. The kids have loved this, because we can do it at the end of a long day. There's a creek behind where we live, and it's an easy access.

Sometimes at night, we enjoy a treat while we watch a family movie together, but this summer we are hoping to make homemade sno cones!

<https://www.norinesnest.com/homemade-snow-cones/>

---

We live on 30+ acres of family land in the Blue Ridge Mountains, so we've spent most of our quarantine days outside and exploring. Some of our favorite outdoor activities include:

1) Finding the colors of the rainbow. My girls and I love rainbows. We love the colors, the representation of God's promises, and the majestic beauty. During our walks we try and find something red, orange, yellow, blue, green, and purple. When we get home, we glue them on paper and talk about our findings.

2) Riding the four-wheeler. My girls are obsessed with riding the four-wheeler. We have two - the adult version and the kid's Frozen version. The pure joy on my girls' faces when they ride the "big" four wheeler is priceless. We create memories that will last a lifetime.

3) Feeding the fish and geese. We have a pond in front of our house filled with fish and owned by two hungry geese. We save up some of our older bread, walk down to the pond, and feed them. They are the closest friends my girls have had during this quarantine .

---

We are saving up for an above ground pool, since pools are closed in our area. In fact, our daughters created and made jewelry to sell, to save up money for the purchase! And sometimes, we go fishing at night when it cools down. We play cornhole, basketball, and go on bike rides. Those will be our same routines this summer, along with picnics. All outside!

Indoors, we may cook more – one of our daughters made dinner tonight! One of our four wants to make Lego movies. This gives them something to do this summer that keeps their creative juices flowing, and they keep learning, as well!

One activity we've done is paint a glass door in a mosaic of hope and love...it was so fun for all!



## **In the Kitchen – Loaded with Flavor – by Marcy Lytle**

Recently, we've enjoyed some new dishes that are just so good they make my mouth water as I type! I'm not a fan of super time consuming recipes, unless they're fantastic and worth it. However, the following weren't hard, they were surprisingly tasty, and we will enjoy them again and again! Great recipes to add to your summer table...

### **Mediterranean Pasta**

Oh my gosh, this was good. And it came together so quickly! I will keep this recipe around and make it over and over again. The flavors are delicious!

- Kosher salt and black pepper
- Pasta (Spagetti or whatever long pasta you have)
- 4 cloves garlic
- 2 C grape or cherry tomatoes
- 1 can quartered artichoke hearts (14oz)
- 1 can whole pitted black olives (6oz)
- 3 T olive oil
- Red pepper flakes (optional)
- ¼ cup freshly squeezed lemon
- ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan
- ¼ c fresh Italian parsley chopped

Bring a large pot of boiling salted water to a boil and cook pasta al dente. Reserve ½ cup of the pasta water, then drain.

Prep your veggies: mince the garlic, halve the tomatoes, drain and chop the artichokes, drain and slice olives in half.

Heat the oil in a large skillet over med-hi heat, add the tomatoes, garlic and 1 t salt, pepper and red pepper flakes (1/4 tsp), cook and stir til garlic is fragrant and tomatoes break down, about 1-2 minutes.

Add pasta to skillet and toss, add artichokes and olives. Drizzle lemon juice over the pasta and continue tossing and cooking for 1-2 minutes till warmed thru. Add pasta water if needed.

Taste and adjust the S&P as desired. Remove from heat and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese, toss once more and enjoy!

### **Cauliflower Kale Rice with Fajita Veggies**

We had this for lunch, and the rice was amazing (be sure it's dry and pulsed in batches per instruction). I ate every bite in my bowl, and also enjoyed a few tortilla chips with it, as well!

- 1 can black or pinto beans
- 1 red, 1 yellow pepper, ½ red onion, ½ yellow onion

- 4 cups cauliflower florets
- 1 bunch kale, thinly sliced
- ½ lemon
- 1 T olive oil
- One avocado mashed with S\*P and lime juice.

Make sure cauliflower is dry, and place in food processor in small batches (removing after each one) and pulse til it's like rice (2-3 pulses – don't overpulse. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil and add kale, saute til wilted. Add the cauliflower and saute about 5 minutes, season with salt, pepper and lemon juice.

In a skillet saute the veggies and season with S&P and lime juice, remove and then heat the beans in the same skillet.

To make your bowl, just place piles of each group, add a lime wedge, and you're done!

### **Loaded Hummus**

I love hummus, but this recipe is like a hummus salad – perfect for a picnic – and filling! It's gorgeous in color and HUGE in taste!

For the hummus:

- 1 15 oz garbanzo beans, drained and peeled
- ½ cup tahini
- 3 T fresh lemon juice
- 3 small cloves garlic
- ¾ T kosher salt
- Water as needed

For the topping:

- 1 ½ c cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 4 persian cucumbers diced
- ¼ med red onion diced
- ½ lemon juiced
- S&P
- Paprika
- 2 T finely chopped herbs like parsley, mint, chives for garnish

In a food processor, pulse the chickpeas by themselves about 1 minute, scrape down sides and pulse again for consistency. Add tahini, lemon juice, garlic and salt and blend til smooth. Drizzle in 1 T water at a time til you get a smooth creamy texture. Taste and adjust seasonings.

To serve, tops with all the toppings, drizzle with olive oil and serve with pita chips. (We enjoyed it with carrots and wheat crackers.)

## Lemon Cakes

These are delicious and easy to make and share with friends! The recipe makes a lot of these, especially if you use the mini muffin tins! And you'll want to drizzle icing over and over the tops, until it's all gone! We plated these and left on neighbors' doorsteps.

- 1 box yellow cake mix (and ingredients listed on cake box)
- 2 oranges
- 2 lemons
- 1 ½ boxes confectioners sugar

Make the icing first: lightly grate rinds from oranges and lemons (don't go too deep – the white part will be bitter). Squeeze the juice from the lemons and oranges in the bowl as well. Whisk in the sugar until smooth.

Make the cakes: preheat the oven to 350. Make cake according to box instruction. Spray mini muffin tins with non-stick cooking spray, fill halfway up with batter. Bake for 12 minutes til done. While the cakes are hot, dunk each one into the icing and set on wire rack to drain off excess juice.

Once glaze hardens, they're ready to eat!

Tips: place foil under the racks while you dip and drain, and scoop with a spoon the excess and drizzle back on top of cakes. I drizzled about 3-4 coats, as there is lots of the icing!

## **Tried and True - Having Fun Yet?**

Last month, one of our writers wrote an article called “Laundry Worship” where she talked about the most mundane of chores becoming an act of worship! I loved it! I thought it would be fun to mention a few more chores and how we can actually make them into fun, instead of so boring and laborious. After all, household chores are here to stay for now and always, and they face us every single morning whether we like it or not! Some chores I don’t mind, but others I detest. Emptying the dishwasher is my least fave! I think it’s because I realize it needs to be emptied right about the time I’m starting dinner!

**Ironing** – I’m starting with this chore that I’m thinking a lot of you don’t do anymore. You have wrinkle spray or a steamer, am I right? But whatever way you choose to get out the wrinkles, it’s still annoying to have to stop and do it. Especially if you’re in a hurry to get dressed and time is of the essence!

How to have fun: Set aside an hour a week to get out the wrinkles, instead of just when you’re ready to get dressed. Put on music and breathe, and enjoy the disappearance of the wrinkles and the appearance of something you can now wear next time, even when you’re in a hurry!

**Mowing** – Do you still mow your yard, or pay a lawn service? We still mow, because we both enjoy the opportunity for that exercise. However, the time it takes to do it and actually finding the time to mow is the problem! Once we actually mow, we are super satisfied and happy (and dirty!).

How to have fun: Do the yard work together. Make lemonade to enjoy on breaks. Sit together on the patio between the front and backyard trims. Brainstorm about new plants or flowers or outdoor art. Make it an actual “date” as you work together – not apart. If you have little children, consider this as a date option – seriously – get a babysitter or do it when the kids are resting! Or set them up on the patio with crafts and snacks while you work!

**Cleaning the bathroom** – Toilets, bathtubs and floors – nasty and not fun. And getting our kiddos to start learning and start aiming and start wiping is like pulling teeth – next to impossible!

How to have fun: Create a cleaning bucket with pockets for each cleaning item, gloves, wipes, etc. Assign pieces of the chore to each family member and make it a relay race. (Well, not a race, but you get the idea.) You and the kids sit in a room drawing, coloring, reading, whatever. And the bucket gets passed to each individual. Mom does the toilet, then passes the bucket to big brother. He wipes the counters, and passes the bucket to little sis who sprays the tub, and Dad comes in for the rub. It can work!

**Unloading the dishwasher** - As I mentioned above, the dishwasher seems to be full all the time and needs to be emptied just before dinner! And if someone unloads it and doesn’t know where the items belong, then it could wreak havoc next time Mom needs that garlic mincer that was placed in the wrong drawer!

How to have fun: Let this be a chore that is attended to daily. Although the dishwasher may not be full and clean daily, if it's checked each morning or evening, at least it will always be attended to! Pick a time that's not near mealtime. That person can ask one more person to help, as they unload and put away. If there's an odd piece without a known home, it's put on the counter for Mom...later. While unloading, the two have to sing! Yes, *have to!* It will be hilariously great!

**Dusting:** We have one room in our house that is especially dusty all the time – our bedroom! Pretty sure it's because of the printer going all the time, while I work. Dusting every windowsill, baseboard, surface and table is a pain.

How to have fun: Each person has their own Swiffer duster, with a specific surface named and taped on the handle. (windowsills, tables, shelves). These stay in a cabinet or bucket, and when it's time to dust everyone draws a Swiffer and goes to town! The job will be over in a jiffy!

Obviously, there will need to be inspections, training on how to clean, and expectations communicated, in order for this “fun” to be effective and not a pain. But once everyone is in a rhythm, the beat will produce a marching army that produces a clean house!

Make chores fun, every one of them. Or at least try to...



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – 15 Reminders – by Marcy Lytle**

I've watched on line and read and listened to all the moms out there that felt two conflicting emotions when school was closed and lessons ensued at home...while normal life had to keep going! There were often posts of how fun it was to have family time for walks in the evening to the creek. There were just as many posts about heads down on the table and frustrations running high! So I figured you moms could use a little affirmation right about now, since summer is just beginning and you're not quite sure you can endure!

- You're allowed to scream and cry. It relieves that pressure so that you don't burst!
- You may not get applause right now, but one day your kids will appreciate your care. Seriously. It might be when they're 30 years old, but they will.
- You are smart and brave when you ask for help.
- You will get to watch your grandkids throw tantrums as pay back to your grown kids.
- You are a hero, just without a cape. But go head. Wear one if you need to.
- You are beautiful, and you deserved that cookie you ate today. Savor every bite!
- Your family is not weird because you're different. You're uniquely you.
- You will not thrive if you become your own critic. You will thrive if you let it go...
- You are allowed to fail. Completely. And so are your kids...
- Your desires are dear to His heart, so go on. Tell Him and wait to receive...
- Your dirty oven means aromas fill your house and the family is smiling.
- You need friends that encourage you, so be one that encourages her.
- You will never receive greater comfort and peace than you will in His presence...even if it's 5 minutes.
- You can do all you need to do in His strength and wisdom, and in his rest and peace.
- You can control the playlist for music in the house, and require that all who hear...dance.

I know Mother's Day was last month. I know you're hoping and wishing for a new house, a vacation away, date night once again, a husband to treat you like royalty, and all sorts of pampering and treats, because you're tired. You're spent. You're over it. It doesn't help to be told that children grow up quickly, because right now it seems they will forever be pulling on your sleeves and whining. So I won't say that.

What I will say is to find a way to release the pressure before the top blows off and there's a mess to clean up. Keep your chin up, because you are greatly valued and seen and heard, by the One who can supply all your needs according to His riches. And the One that can give you wings to soar like an eagle...while you wait.

Here's to Summer 2020, a home of plenty...where balloons fly high and moms laugh out loud.

## **I Don't Do Teenagers – Bummer** – by Marcy Lytle

Disappointments happen to our teens. Just this spring season, our graduates weren't able to attend their ceremonies because of a world pandemic. Our teens weren't able to finish out their sports seasons, go swimming with friends, or even have a birthday party or sleepover. Lots of firsts have happened this year, and there was no way that we – their parents – could have seen it coming.

However, hasn't it been amazing to see how creative parents and people have become? Drive by parties with signs in windows, creative walks in neighborhoods, and zoom gatherings on line! All of those have been wonderful, but I know there are still teens (and moms) who are so disappointed in missed celebrations.

How do we handle disappointments with our teenagers? It doesn't help to just tell them to stuff it, to remind them of the starving children in Africa, or to cry and try to make it all up to them by going broke with electronics or other gadgets to ease their pain.

First of all, it's good to talk about it. Teens and talking are sometimes only paired up with their peers, but teens and talking with parents is so important! Talking out feelings with parents that are non-judgmental but wise is a good thing. Listen to their disappointments without criticism. Sometimes the listening does the healing.

Secondly, remind them that many of the psalms were written by David, who poured his heart out to God continually, and then he eventually turned his sorrow into worship. Invite them to read Psalm 142-144 and see how David turns his lament into praise.

Thirdly, take your teen on a date or out for ice cream and lay back and look at the stars, giving thanks to God the Creator for at least 10 good things. Gratitude always helps lift our moods and spirits!

Fourth, pray together with your teen. Ask God to heal the hurt that came from loss of celebration or connection with their friends. Model a prayer with them, or just invite them to pray out loud. (This is great training for when they become parents!)

Finally, be patient. Offer an ear and a hand, should your teen need to talk further. When you're alone, pray for your children and ask God to speak to them...so that they learn to hear his voice for themselves.

And smile really big when they come to you, to share what they've heard or how they've let it go, and picked up contentment instead...

(It's not an easy formula to handle teens and their disappointments. It takes practice and modeling in front of them, and lots of love. The best thing we can do is open the door for God to speak and for them to listen...)



## **An Adage a Day - The Haste of Our Lives – by Carole Gilbert**

My husband said this title sounds like a soap opera. I assure you this is not about a soap opera. It is not about a saga of any kind, but it is about the continuity to the next episode of our lives. We are coming out of the Coronavirus Pandemic and I hope all of us have learned something. Something unique to each of us and something we can take with us into the future. Something to tell our kids and grandkids, and something to keep in mind and remember. God gave us this world and He gave each of us everything we have. Maybe it is time we realize it, think about it, and show gratitude for it. To me, living with gratitude is the best and only way to live and I am not always good at it, but I try to be.

Several years ago, in about 2011, we had a severe drought. We all did unusual things to help with not wasting water. One thing I did then, I still do now, because it helps to lend a hand with preserving the natural resource of water that God gives us and, as we saw firsthand, can so quickly be in shortage. With all that said, what I do (which was recommended by a friend) is I collect my runoff shower water in buckets. I then use this water in different ways especially when flushing the toilet. It was simple then and it is simple now. My family does tease me about keeping up the practices from the drought, but it is a win-win situation all around, especially since it helps with our water bill.

I thought a lot about wastefulness during the drought and during COVID 19 since my life was slowed down. I thought a lot about how quickly life can change. I realized more ways I was unknowingly wasteful. Did you? Was it your time you found yourself to have been wasteful in, your money, natural resources? I know we all worked to not be wasteful with toilet paper.

There is an old proverb or idiom, “Haste makes waste,” that is so appropriate for this time in our lives. It means that when we do something in haste, we can end up wasting more than if we had just taken more time in the first place. This is not one I said to my kids very often while raising them, but I will keep it in my thoughts and heart now. We were forced to take the haste out of our lives for a short time during the Pandemic. Did we prefer life in that slower pace, or do we want to go back to our hurried schedules? Or maybe we look to compromise somewhere in between.

This idiom has been worded in some ironic similarities to what we have gone through with the Coronavirus. When it was first written in the *Book of Wisdom* in 190 B.C, it said, “There is one that toiled and laboureth, and makes haste, and is so much more behind.” Seem familiar? Later in the *Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales*, c. 1387, it’s translated, “In wikked haste is not profit.” Then in 1670, John Ray’s *A Collection of English Proverbs* says, “Haste makes waste, and waste makes want, and want makes strife between the goodman and his wife.”

Lastly, Ben Franklin’s famous dictum, c.1700’s states, “Take time for all things, great haste makes great waste.” This proverb speaks for itself. It helps us all learn a little bit more about the importance of our time and how we use it. The COVID 19 gave us time and lots of it. Time to

think, time to be still, time to realize who we love and how much we can miss them. Time to cry, laugh, wonder, praise, and worship.

In Proverbs 28:20 of God's Word it says, "A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished." God wants us to use and take care of everything He has given us but in the haste of our lives we so often give it over to waste. I will be more conscious of where I am wasteful and hasteful now. I hope we all will. And I hope we have all learned the power and peace of being still and taking time.

## **Tiny Living – Isolation – by Leyanne Enterline**

I hear the word “isolation” a lot lately. Obviously, we’re in the middle of a pandemic and we have to be isolated from one another, so that is the main reason we hear it. But for us, in this tiny living scenario, we have been feeling that for a while!

About a year ago we had someone pray over us that the isolation we had been in would be gone. Not necessarily loneliness, because we have each other, but we had sort of distanced ourselves from the outside world and become more secluded from others. I mean, after all, we live in a trailer in the woods far from town! That’s pretty isolated, I think!

We were involved in the kids’ school activities and sports, but nothing really outside of that. Not many hang outs with others. Brian and I had our separate friends but not many couple friends. Brian worked at a church, but because we went to separate churches we didn’t get involved with anyone in those churches. (We went separately because the church Brian worked at was super far away from our home).

Now travel back the seven years before when we lived in California. Brian worked at church and with the youth group, we were super involved and hung out with people ALL THE TIME. We even lived for about a year with some friends from the church. So maybe our isolation when we moved back to Texas came from needing some space from our past craziness. It was fun, don’t get me wrong, but that was a lot of friend time! We were always constantly doing something.

So we move back and the progression of isolation set in. I don’t think we really realized it until we were prayed over. We thought, “Yes! That is our word! That’s what we have been living in!”

Brian quit the church where he was working so we could start attending as a family. We started our search but we started going on tour with Brian so much it was hard to find something at that time. Finally, we found a place we loved and then... the PANDEMIC! Back to being isolated in 325 square feet! Talk about the walls closing in!

We try to be outside as much as possible or we lose our mind! Funny though, we’ve been more connected to our friend groups than ever! Brian has started zoom calls with his old high school buddies. I’ve started connecting with old friends more, as well. It’s been fun to have this weird slow time in our lives to really dive deep in the word and see what God has in store for our future.

Reconnecting with others has been so much fun and we can’t wait to get back into our church to meet some more new friends and say goodbye to isolation!

## **A Night to Remember – Field Hockey – by Marcy Lytle**

I saw recently where a family played field hockey with pool noodles, a bouncy ball, and two laundry baskets. We wanted to do that with our own family, because how simple is that to set up in the yard? And then I figured why not make this game part of the family devo for the month of June? Setting up a game outside with the family is one of the best ways to demonstrate God's love for us. How? So glad you asked...

Preparation: A pool noodle for each family member, two laundry baskets, and a bouncy ball (all from the Dollar Store) – and a nice evening in the backyard. (And always, snacks).

The object of field hockey is to score a goal in the basket! There will be interference, the other team might take the ball away, but object is to get it back and score one for the team! But seriously, the object of family field hockey is to have a good time.

**Round One:** Place the ball in the center, divide the family into two teams, and shout "Go!" See which team can score a goal first.

Ask those who scored how they feel, and those that didn't how they feel? It doesn't feel good to have the ball taken away from you as the other team scores. But good sportsmanship is to congratulate the other team and play again...

**Round Two:** Set up the ball and go for the goal again, this time allowing the youngest to make a goal by helping, encouraging, and handing off the ball to he/she.

Sometimes there are those on our team that are small or young and need encouragement for a win! It feels good to let the ball go into their hands so that they can smile and experience a win. How did it feel to help the youngest score a goal?

**Round Three:** Set up the ball for action and only allow one person on each team to have a noodle. The others just have to shout words of encouragement as that person goes for the ball.

Encouraging our team members is so important! It's never helpful to yell mean things, but it's always helpful to shout nice things. What words did you shout?

**Round Four:** Set up the ball for another round, and this time move the baskets farther apart, so everyone has to run more.

If the goal is really far, we sometimes get tired. This is when teamwork is important – passing the ball – running alongside – and staying focused on the goal. Can you imagine if the baskets were as far apart as the goals on a football field? We'd all be tired!

**Round Five:** This is the last round. Everyone's in the game for the win. But now we have to use our non-dominant hand to play. What a challenge!

There are times when we are weak, broken, or just tired and we don't play the game well because our strength is gone. Again, teamwork is the key, as we move on down the field and do our best to score!

Gather the family for drinks and a snack on a big blanket and talk about the game you just played. In I Corinthians 12 it says this:

*But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

God loves teamwork. He's given us members on our team (friends and family) on the field of life, and we need to help each other score goals of success, health, happiness, and more. We aren't made to achieve goals alone, but with the help of a team! Every time we play a game, we have to remember that and not become focused on our own abilities and push others aside, just so we can score. It's important to build confidence in each other so that all finish the game well, satisfied, and victorious.

## Chipped China - The Art of Goodbye – by Jennifer Lytle

This week, the lid to my crockpot shattered. It quietly slid off the side of the crockpot and down the edge of my cabinet. I was pulling the chicken out of my enchilada soup to prevent it from over-cooking during the crash. Some athletes might have caught the thing mid-air. Not me. After deeply inhaling for the huge undertaking [necessary, required] I would need to venture in order to clean up every single sliver of glass, I thought, “Oh well, I needed to replace it anyway.”

I haven't always been this sophisticated.

It was during my first few years as a “playdate” Mom that I grew to understand there is an art to Goodbye. You may wonder if I had to learn the hard way. Quite a few tears (mommy's and son's alike), a number of ultimatums, and general grumps and gripes helped me recognize something must change. Many thanks to one particular friend who grew with me through this developmental stage as a new mom.

Fortunately for me, I too had a friend years later who was still growing through this stage of her own life as Mom. I may have felt relief or even pride to realize many must learn this lesson (the hard way.)

Did you ever watch the sitcom, *Seinfeld*? The show ended when things were “up.” Audiences were excited. Reviews were high. There really was no tangible reason to end the good thing. It was likely a hard decision, but much like Jerry, I learned it's best to say goodbye on a high note.

My two older children have recently discovered the best thing ever is playing together before bedtime. They enjoy their final moments of freedom before lights out and it makes my heart soar. Listening to them giggle, chat, and plan is beauty! I desire so much to let it go on for hours and hours.

Pre-COVID-19, our family had little to no “space” for playtime during evening hours. Some days, the atmosphere was too tense for playtime. Now that we as a family have experienced a lot of breathing room to just be present, the last thing I want to do is interrupt together time. On the occasion where there has been time, space, and desire on each of their parts to “hang out,” the last thing I want to do is set limits!

You might wonder if I had to relearn my lesson the hard way. A few bumps (maybe more than a few) and I remembered. When I fail to limit my children's free time, together time ends poorly. Yelling. Sometimes a slammed door. A whack, perhaps. Promises of retribution the following day. *Sigh.*

They are still new to the art of saying goodbye.

And...apparently, I'm still growing in my ability to let a good thing go.



YOU

## **Strengthening Your Core - Basically Free** – by Marcy Lytle

I'm sure you've been inundated, as I have, with emails from all the stores where you've ever purchased anything – sharing the latest sales. BOGO, 70% off, and one store even had a code VERYRARE because they hardly ever have sales of the magnitude they were offering! I did take advantage of the sales and had to wait a little bit longer for delivery, but I was delighted when I got some cute tops from Ann Taylor Factory and The Loft and Old Navy, and more!

It's funny, because often I read things like "it's basically free" and it did feel that way, when I was able to purchase a cute floral puffy-sleeved blouse for summer for a tiny fraction of the normal price. I ordered lots of new earrings from American Eagle because they were "a steal!" And it's been so fun opening the packages. I smile so big, as I hang up my new purchases and decide where to wear them – to the car or to the park or the backyard (insert a funny emoji here.)

Even gasoline has been so low that if we could travel, we could go far without spending lots of bucks!

This all started me thinking about freedom. I mean, we are told that salvation (erasure of sin and the guilt of it) is free if we just believe. And it is. And yet, because of the misrepresentation of Jesus to the masses, many people aren't interested in erasure of guilt. In fact, they want to keep on doing whatever they please, if it feels good. We want to seek revenge, to put others in their place, and do wrong in order to make our own lives right.

The reason these incredible sales have been occurring is because brick and mortar stores have closed, and in order to make money – these stores have to offer incredible deals to the folks who are at home in need of that shopping fix and new things! And the sales and the pitches and the offers worked! Sure, I wanted those two tops if I got two free! Why not?

I know that salvation is free from Jesus, because he paid the price for my sin. That's HUGE. I understand the need for a perfect sacrifice to undo all the havoc that's been caused by evil in the world. And I cannot thank Jesus enough, in an eternity of lifetime here and there, for giving me eternal life – free of guilt – full of joy – if I only believe. That's the purchase of the ages for sure – he died and gave – so that I might receive and live!

But I have learned from shopping and from my experience with Him over the years, it does take expense on my part for a relationship. It took a little expense from my pocketbook to get those deals, and it takes a bit of expense from my heart to get that peace he offers!

I lived for 30 years with the free gift of salvation (well, I don't really know exactly when I believed, but I was young.) I was scared into believing, and I know that Jesus, in his mercy, took that little bit of faith and forgave me and gave me the gift of salvation – from sin and evil. Best free gift ever!

But I also know that the extras, of peace and joy in the middle of hard times, aren't free. Not by any means. I do not have peace if I don't learn to cast my cares on Him. If I choose to carry them around, I'm heavy and fearful and a mess! Joy isn't free, either. It's not even a BOGO sale. Joy is something I have to choose daily, minute by minute, reminding myself to whom I



belong and how powerful and mighty he is. I have to read about his character, demonstrate and receive his love, and walk without anger with my husband, and others. Joy isn't free, and it's not there when I'm bitter and judgmental.

So...if you will, think about those sales and the deals and the fun it is getting those reminders in your inbox of the next thing you need to buy at that low, low price! And think about the gift of salvation, if you've never received it. It's totally free for the asking and for the believing – that Jesus died and lives again – and he conquered the power of sin and death! Then start this amazing life of a relationship with him where he gives you purchasing power for the other things like peace, joy, hope, forgiveness of others, kindness, and so much more – if you expend a little effort in getting to know him and obey Him.

Basically free? That's cool, if the quality is there. And salvation is pure gold.

Still costs a bit? No worries, when your heart and bank is full of trust and love for Him – the one who holds all good things in his hands, just waiting to be poured out into your heart – your daily inbox – day after day.

Check it now, and see what you can believe, purchase and receive!

## **Life in a Nutshell – Weeding** (in the garden of life) – by Jill Montz

Green thumbs run in my family. So do dirty hands, muddy knees, and smudges of dirt across sunburned faces.

I am the happiest when I am outside working in my flower gardens. While I prefer 72 degrees with a light breeze I have been known to spend hours out in the hundred degree Texas heat or even several hours with temps well below freezing and winds that even Winnie the Pooh would claim to be stronger than usual on a blustery day.

My flowers bring me so much joy. But that joy comes with lots of work. Planting, pruning, fertilizing, watering, and weeding seem to be a never ending cycle.

As much as I love to admire and adore my beautiful flowers, I am always amazed at weeds. Weeds can grow and even flourish with barely any soil or nourishment. They spring up in cracks of cement where just a sliver of dirt exists. They fight their way through rock piles to find the sunshine. They grow strong and “bloom” in the hottest heat and they often last even after a fairly hard freeze.

Weeds don't give up. They are hard to kill and hard to like (even those with flowers or the kind that offer you a wish as part of their growing cycle).

I often equate weeds to the negatives in my life. No matter how much I work at keeping my world blooming beautiful it never fails a weed will spring up right in the middle of all the prettiness of my Life's Garden and right when I least expect it.

Sometimes these proverbial weeds take root in my mind. For example, I can be trying on jeans at a department store and, while several pair in my usual size fit just fine, I might slip on a pair that is quite a bit snug. Instead of assuming it might be the brand that sizes things differently or perhaps I grabbed a more form fitting style, the Weed of Self Criticism finds that pea size spot of self-doubt and takes root. Before I can wiggle out of the ill-fitting jeans and back into the original pair I wore into the store (forgetting all about the cute ones that DID fit just fine) that Weed of Self Criticism has said things like...

- Wow fatty! You sure have packed on the pounds.
- No wonder you don't date. You look disgusting.
- You are so obese I bet people are only nice to you because they feel sorry for you.
- No matter what you do in life all people are ever going to notice or remember is how fat you are.
- Might as well go eat some more. That's all you are good at.

That Weed of Self Criticism is brutal. All weeds are. They don't care about who or what they hurt in their process of growing. They do whatever it takes to survive. And for that Weed of Self Criticism to stay rooted in my brain it is going to have to bring out the big guns and hit me where it hurts.

And the sad news is I let the Self Criticism Weeds take root more times than I care to admit. I am getting better at recognizing it earlier and taking the necessary steps to get rid of it, but usually not before I have left the store and let a few tears roll down my cheek.

The way I combat this Self Criticism Weed is I reach out to friends and family who love me regardless of what the tag in my jeans say. I remind myself that I am more than a number on a scale. And I search the Word of God to find scripture that supports the truth that God sees beyond appearances. He sees the heart of us all.

Another weed that loves to grow in my Life's Garden is the Weed of Self Doubt. This little booger shoots up almost every time I am given the opportunity to do something outside my comfort zone. It likes to find a crack in my self-confidence and it pushes its way to the surface with things like...

- You are a terrible public speaker. Your voice quivers every time you get in front of people.
- You aren't funny. People laugh at you not with you.
- You are so awkward. You will totally bomb and then you will be too embarrassed to show your face in front of those people ever again.
- No one cares what you think or have to say.
- You aren't smart enough to discuss this topic. There are lots of other people who would do a way better job than you will do.
- You're too fat. (The Weed of Self Doubt is in the same family as the Weed of Self Criticism.)

The Self Doubt Weed has caused me to say no to more things than I care to admit. Thanks to it, I have also had the Weed of Regret. Both these weeds' roots run deep and they are a little harder for me to exterminate. Again, I turn to those who love me unconditionally and are my biggest supporters to help me keep this weed from taking over my thoughts when opportunities arise. I read about those great heroes of the Bible who also had doubts, but who God still used in great and mighty ways. (Moses is one of my favorites!) And then I remind myself that all the greats in this world have failed. Failure is what made them great. Without failure there is no growth. So instead of fearing the failure, I try to expect it and embrace it (and sometimes I don't fail that bad and sometimes not at all).

The worst weed of all is the Weed of Shame. This weed has deep roots and thorny leaves. Once the Shame Weed finds its way into my soul its roots spread out and search for any place to burrow deeper in to. The Weed of Shame thrives when it can get me to believe statements like...

- God doesn't want a sinner like you.
- God is sick and tired of you doing the same things over and over again and not learning a dang thing.
- You are a hypocrite.
- You aren't worthy.
- God hates people like you.
- God won't forgive you.

The Weed of Shame breaks my heart every time. It doesn't come up as often as the others, but in the darkest spots of my Life's Garden it finds just enough room to take root. This part of my Life's Garden is the part I ignore most of the time. It isn't pretty anyway. I don't like people to see it and I never post pictures of it on Facebook. This is the part of my personal garden where beauty struggles to grow. Anything I try to plant and nurture seems to shrivel up and die. So I

stop tending to it and that is when the Weed of Shame starts to take over. It grows quickly and before I know it its root system is starting to search out other areas of my Life's Garden.

Getting rid of the Weed of Shame has taken a lot of work, some professional counseling, and at times some professional medication. These days I am very vigilant to watch that part of my garden and make sure no weeds of any kind start to take root. But it is still a struggle.

All weeds are a struggle. There a dozen or so more I could go into but we all have different "weeds" in our lives. These are just the most common (and hurtful) to me and maybe to you too. No matter how much I work to keep the weeds out, they still pop up from time to time. But that's part of gardening...and life...dealing with the weeds when you find them. Because not dealing with them causes a whole slew of other issues.

My garden at my house is lovely this time of year, but I bet if you looked closely you would find a weed or two. My life right now is lovely as well, but I can assure you I have a few weeds trying to put down roots daily. A beautiful flower garden takes work. So does a beautiful life.

## **Healthy Habits – Obey the Rules** – by Marcy Lytle

There are lots of rules that I suppose are meant to be broken, if they oppose our inner conscience or are harmful to ourselves or others. We recently watched a movie about a religious family that wouldn't allow their children to read books for fear of outside influence. Even adult children! One guy broke the rules and was shunned. How sad!

However, there are many rules that are meant to be followed...for our safety and benefit...and life! I recently purchased a new mandolin for slicing veggies and when I went to use it the first time, I was in a hurry and didn't refresh myself on the manual's instructions. I was slicing a carrot and knew it wouldn't fit in the claw so I used my hand (without the guard) and almost sliced off my finger. One would think I would know better, but I skipped the rules...and suffered.

I thought it would be fun to publish a list of little reminders about good rules to follow that bring us life and health, when we adhere and don't stray:

**No texting while driving** – even at red lights. We still see SO MANY people texting or looking at their phones while driving, and they veer into other lanes. Also, if we text and drive, so will our teens... There's just no good reason to pick up the phone while behind the wheel. Pull over if it's an emergency, and if it's not, observe the sunshine and the beauty as you drive instead of the dings and pings.

**Read the manual** – Point noted above. This new mandolin has a guard for odd veggies that don't fit the claw. I didn't bother to refresh my knowledge of that – and it would have only taken me a minute. It pays to read the instructions and save a finger.

**Wear the mask** – to protect others – even if you don't care about yourself! We've been out and about and noticed some stores where the shoppers and workers all wear masks. Although it's still eerie to me, I appreciate their protective measures. We also stopped at a famous gas station/store where hardly anyone was wearing a mask. Whether or not we agree with all the rules, wearing masks is a protective measure and rule we can all follow to show others and ourselves respect for life and health.

**Read the Word** – No, it's not a RULE that if you don't read it, you will be punished. But if you don't read it, you will be swayed to stray, drawn to doubt, and fall into fear. Who wants to do that? There's a reason we are encouraged to know the word and hide it in our hearts. It staves off all evil. A great rule to follow!

**Drink water** – however you can make that happen! If it's placing a bottle out in your line of vision, do it. If it's eliminating other non-healthy beverages, do it. If it's asking a friend to keep you accountable do it. Drinking water should be a rule for all of us, to keep us hydrated, especially as summer nears.

**Maintain** – There are rules of maintenance that come with appliances, cars, outdoor furniture and almost every large purchase we make – including our AC units in our houses and even the entire span of our yards! Maintenance is my husband's job and boy is it a job! If maintenance doesn't take place, there's great expense to all involved! Maintain your weight, your health,

your tongue, your thoughts, your friendships, your homes, your giving, and all the good things in life.

**Rules of engagement** – I know it's tempting during this time to become accustomed to being distant from friends, allowing our thoughts to overtake us that we don't matter and people don't care, and all the things that come from "distancing." However, there are multiple reminders in the Good Book to continue to assemble, to continue to give, to continue to choose love...even when it seems hard to do so. Text a friend, drop off a surprise, email a note, send a card snail mail, but do something to engage with others and encourage. In doing so, you yourself will be refreshed. It's just the way engagement works. He sees...and He rewards.

What rules have you found that need to be followed? Did you learn that lesson the hard way? For some of us, the ones that are by nature rule followers, this is a no-brainer. For others, more independent and stubborn, it takes reminders that the rules are there for a reason...for safety and covering...and health.

## **Life Right Now – Uncovered Hope – by Bethany Gomez**

I wish I had a fun, anecdotal story to share, but not much has changed since my last article, other than heading into the beginning of my summer break, the rise in the temperature outside, and maybe my outlook on things. I have become exponentially more grateful for a few things that I realized I had taken for granted.

Do you ever find that when some things are taken away, sometimes you realize you took those things for granted and oftentimes that produces more gratitude for whatever it was you had, when you had it? Has anyone else uncovered things that they have taken for granted over these past few months? I most certainly have.

*I have taken for granted hugging.* I wouldn't say I am a big hugger, but I enjoy a good hug, especially getting a hug from someone I haven't seen in a while. There have been many studies done on the benefits of hugging and that tells me right there that I should've been more grateful for hugs before covid-19 temporarily discouraged the hugging of people not living in my house. If you haven't researched it, hugging is known to reduce stress, and less stress can strengthen the immune system, which we could all benefit from right about now. I think doctors should be recommending hugs during this pandemic. I'm only kidding, but it makes me think I should stop taking hugs for granted.

*I have taken for granted well-stocked grocery store shelves* and even more - simply having enough money to buy food. I know millions are struggling with knowing where their next meal will come from. I hardly gave a thought to the blessing of walking into a grocery store and having access to whatever I wanted or needed, when I needed it and without limits on certain items like meat, eggs, bread, and (how can I not mention) toilet paper. I'm also super grateful for all the grocery store employees working to keep the shelves stocked and getting everyone in and out of the store in as safe a manner as they possibly can.

*I have taken for granted celebrating birthdays together.* Although I love some of the creative ways people have been celebrating their loved ones' birthdays during this quarantine like, birthday parades, Zoom birthday blessing parties, and gift deliveries, I miss the good ole days of cramming people into one space, enjoying good food together and helping celebrate my friends' or family's birthdays.

*I have taken for granted traveling.* Currently, traveling is discouraged and I think even banned to certain areas, still. If you can travel to certain areas, you are required to quarantine for 14 days, so what is the point? Being unable to travel freely has made me grateful for all the trips I have taken pre-pandemic, but it hit me recently that a summer trip that was being planned back in February with some of my closest girlfriends is not happening. Even though the planning was in its beginning stages, I was so looking forward to this trip. It was going to be a place I had never been to before; and quite frankly, a place I had been dreaming of visiting for a long time. On top of that, I was going to be experiencing it with some of my favorite people. I'm giving myself permission to be a little sad about it and then I will look back at all the amazing trips God has allowed me to go on and remain hopeful that I will go on more trips.

*I have taken for granted being able to worship with others at church,* most importantly. Occasionally, I would remember to thank God for this freedom because I know that not everyone has this freedom. My gratefulness for this blessing has increased greatly during this time. Yes, I know that God does not live in a building and His presence is poured out to whoever seeks it, but I also know that God created us for community. We thrive and grow when we do life together. It encourages my faith and encourages me to grow in my relationship with God. I

can't wait to be back together again, but while I wait I will keep praising God in the midst of this ever changing world.

It is comforting to know that He never changes. I don't want to put my hope in anything else.

Romans 8:24-25

*For in this hope we were saved.*

*But hope that is seen is no hope at all.*

*Who hopes for what they already have?*

*But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*



## **Created for Life - Tales from the Covid Yard – by Ginny Hurley**

I wasn't planning on writing ANYTHING that even came close to the word COVID! I kept thinking of other topics and interesting ideas that women like to talk about. Each time, I thought about it, I would be outside on my lawn chair, which is my happy quiet angel place. God kept illuminating this topic; so I am sharing about my beautiful green and gorgeous lawn, filled with shade and glorious flowers that died over night.

As some of you may know, I love working in the yard and even trimming and edging! It is a joy for me to plant and dig in the dirt. Our spring lawn had some weeds and every year we fertilize with a good weed and feed. We suspect the culprit to be the fact that it needs aerating and more water, but our big tree in the back was also showing signs of illness. An expert came by to share advice, and we discovered it is dead from the trunk, and the canopy that is there will eventually be gone. Nine hundred and fifty dollars will remove it for us! What? It's our shade and holds our beloved doves and songbirds!

Thoughts of people suffering from this unknown virus came to mind as I prayed and asked the Father what He's up to. He is not the author of death or illness and I know that He alone is our HEALER! He began to show me that the signs in my garden of old turf, are actually His call to the NEW! Many teachers have been sharing about the new wine and how God is about to do something new. He's been saying the harvest is plentiful and we are the ambassadors, but we don't yet know what that looks like. We are hearing and joining in the sounds of unity among believers all over the world. So many are experiencing Jesus and sharing communion together online. Our hearts have soared as we have viewed beautiful children worshipping and recognizing their True Healer, Friend, and Savior!

Viewing my lawn caused something to arise in my spirit and I began to pray and intercede in a new way. It was as if I found my voice in the midst of chaos and said, "Jesus, You are the Way! Come and heal our land and forgive us for living our lives at church meetings, and allowing Your beautiful world to die! Make me Your vessel of honor and love! Bring me to the place of surrender with my True Love being my most important first purpose and reason to live!"

Victory and challenge come over me as I partner with God to save our land! Jesus has finished the work and done all that needs to be done in order to bring us back to the original plan. Now I ask Him for my own intimate strategies, plans, and directions. He will show me where to go and how to get there. He will give wisdom in renewing our own land with the provision to do anything it needs! He is that good! He has NOT changed, but I have! He is retraining the way I think! He is giving me new designs and awakening my spirit to SOAR again from a New Place!

This COVID lawn will live again and be better than EVER!



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – No Tap Dancing Required – by Bekah Holland**

Sometimes I make a mess of things. Shocking, I know. And other times I feel like I'm right where I'm supposed to be and I've got my life together. Not as often, in case you were curious. And while I know this is supposed to be marriage related, today, I'm going to talk about some other relationships. But mostly the one I have with myself.

In case you don't know me, I've been married for 14 years, and by the time you read this, I will have a newly minted 13 year old daughter and 9 year old son. *Jesus, take the wheel.* I work full time, and hopefully will not quit my newest second job of helping my children through online learning. If I'm quite honest, I'm sure I'll be fired before I turn in my notice, but that's because my kids are used to being taught by patient humans who are organized and follow a plan and love to help young minds grow. Now they have me. And I am basically the antithesis of all of those things.

I'm not always patient. Sometimes, I want to shake the sass out of my teen daughter. Okay, a lot of times. Also, I love to be organized, but I usually come closer to an organized chaos. And of course, I love to see my kids learn and grow, but I was much better at the first steps and learning to read stage than the attitude that comes with puberty. Seriously. I'm not always any good at this. I'm tired and frustrated and probably get it wrong at least as much as I get right. But I could self-deprecate all day long, so I'm going to stop there. (But seriously, if you want to not feel all alone in this journey, hit me up....I've got stories for days).

Since we've been spending ALL OF OUR TIME inside, I've been trying to go for a walk most days, just to save what's left of my mind. I walk so I can breathe fresh air (and then sneeze for three hours because Texas), take some deep breaths and gain some perspective. While I've been walking, I've been listening to some podcasts (which is not my MO but I'm trying to be an *adultier* adult and listen to less 90's rap and more inspirational and intelligent babble.) On top of that, my love for reading lends itself to fiction, but I've been reading some biographies and other non-fiction to, once again, try for a better grasp on this whole grown-up thing. Full disclosure, I usually bribe myself with a pint of ice cream to start and finish this type of book. What can I say? I'm a work in progress.

Anyhow, something amazing happened when I started taking a small amount of time out of my day to be by myself and not just try to hide from all the endless piles of laundry in a warm fuzzy story about someone else's made up life. What happened is that I started both reading and hearing things that made me stop and see clearly into my own mind and heart. I am exceptional at listening to other people's problems, helping them finding their voice and fighting for them to fight for themselves. Want to know why? Because...

*It's much easier to see a path to healing and growth in someone who is not you.*

It's also way less invasive and takes much less work. But what happens when you stop and turn all that helpfulness inward? Yowza. If you're me, you stop mid step and sit on the sidewalk while you try to figure out how you missed this. These words came through my headphones and changed everything.

"Love is not something you have to tap dance to get."

I consider myself a relatively self-aware kind of person. I know that I've got tons of things that I'm working on. I say I'm sorry for things that don't require my apology, and I eat my feelings as long as they aren't too big...if they are, I quit eating all together. I share my unsolicited advice with people who have not asked for it and I have to try really hard not to attempt to fix anything and everything that might be hard or uncomfortable for the people around me. These are just a few of my annoying traits. I'm sure my friends and family could think of a few more, but you get the picture.

However, until I heard those words at that moment, I was completely oblivious to why. Somehow, somewhere along my journey, I began to believe that I was only worthy of love if I was able to prove my value. What could I do to make you happy and comfortable and feel safe and unbothered by the world around you? I couldn't understand why my husband would get so frustrated when I saw something I thought might disturb him so I'd jump in both feet first and try to fix it.

Let me give you a recent example:

We share an office which, when working from home only a day or two a week together, is no biggie. Working 9-10 hours every single day in the same room? A tad more inconvenient. One day during a frustrating hour when we're both on calls and I'm too loud (and so is he) and I can sense his irritation (did I mention in my list of personality traits that I'm incredibly sensitive to how others are feeling?) So I start doing what no sane person would do....I begin setting up an office in our guest room. I grab some boxes and a piece of plywood for a make shift desk and get down to making things "better."

As I'm sure you've guessed, this was not well received. He likes to be near me and enjoys sharing our space, but there I went trying to fix something that didn't really need fixing....which created a whole new problem of my fixing stuff, and on and on and on which is probably the 7<sup>th</sup> ring of hell Dante was talking about. Now don't get me wrong, it's been coming from a good place, I think. I genuinely do want others to be happy and am a doer and fixer by nature. And I believe with all my heart that our world needs people like me just like we need leaders, artists, strategists and visionaries, etc, etc.

BUT....I came to the realization that I wasn't always doing this for the benefit of others.

*I was doing it to prove that I was worthy of their love.*

I was begging to be seen and appreciated and most of all loved, and of course I couldn't be loved if I didn't float around like a fairy godmother turning everyone's pumpkins into chariots. How exhausting to live constantly trying to earn what was already mine! I am already loved. I don't need to prove myself or convince anyone of my value in this life. My husband doesn't need a fixer, he needs a partner, and I need the same. No jumping through hoops or tap dancing required.

Self-realization can be hard! It's not comfortable. It's confusing and takes courage and grit to face ourselves sometimes. But guess what? That's okay...because as one of my favorite authors loves to remind her readers....**we can do hard things**. God created us to be brave, strong, kind, merciful and loved.

I'm doing the hard work now. I'm looking in the mirror and offering advice to me first. I'm learning to sit quietly, even when it's uncomfortable. I'm learning that even if someone is angry or hurting, my job isn't to fix it, but to love them in that place. And to love me, too.

"Worthy now. Not if. Not when.

We are worthy of love and belonging now.

Right this minute. As is."

\*\*\*Brene Brown

## **Date Night Fun – Connecting Outdoors – by Marcy Lytle**

Whether or not we're now venturing out to meet up with other couples, we are all still being safe and wondering how close and where we should meet, and what we can do to still have fun. It's been quite a challenge to think up date night connections with friends, but we've done it and seen others do it as well. This month is devoted to double dating while distancing. How in the world can we meet with friends and have a good time and yet keep safely away? It's hard, for sure!

Find a patio – We recently met another couple at a restaurant with a huge outdoor venue of picnic tables, and the manager let us bring our lawn chairs so that we could set them up and not be right next to our friends. How nice was that? We were able to order our food and visit, outside under big shade trees, and have a great time! Think of conversation starter questions (or look them up on line) and have a great time learning about each other all over again!

<https://www.skiptomylou.org/dinner-conversation-starters/>

Hit the trail – Stay your distance, but go for a walk with your friends. Pack your own food, and enjoy your dinner by a body of water – a pond – or a lake. One fun game to play is to bring fly swatters (get them at the Dollar Store) and balloons and play balloon tennis in a wide open area in a park. You'll get a bit of exercise, and a lot of laughs!

<https://littlebinsforlittlehands.com/balloon-tennis-gross-motor-play-activity/>

Have movie night outside – We've heard of folks doing this, setting up their movies outside in the yard and enjoying the theater without going to the theater. You can see how to do this by clicking here. Ask them to bring their own popcorn and snacks, and you have yours as well. Either lay out blankets or provide chairs, and let the movie begin!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qe\\_PJR1FiFg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qe_PJR1FiFg)

Set up on the lawn – We have some friends that live in an apartment complex, and outside their back door is a grassy lawn area. They invited us over one Saturday morning for breakfast and conversation. They offered to provide the food, but we felt better bringing our own – banana bread from Marjorie Johnson's cooking *The Road to Blue Ribbon Baking*. This was a couple we didn't know a lot about, so we asked questions and learned! It was an awesome visit...six feet apart.

<https://www.amazon.com/Road-Blue-Ribbon-Baking-Marjorie/dp/098010470X>

Pick a pavilion – There are pavilions or gazebos in parks, so just seek and find one. Each couple can bring their favorite tunes on a playlist, and share. The pavilion can provide protection if it's hot outside or if there's a chance of rain. In fact, a light summer rain date under a pavilion might be just the perfect date! Pick up your favorite takeout on the way, and have your conversation revolve around food, your faves, how you cook, childhood comfort food, etc.

That's just five ideas. Connect with friends and meet up, staying safely away and taking precautions – but meet! June is a great month for being outdoors, and that's a great place to be health-wise, too. Go ahead and call them, and invite them, and get it on the calendar.

Start filling in those little squares again with double dates with friends...

## **After 40 Years - I'm Not Patient** – by Marcy Lytle

If there's one thing I've learned during this virus scare is that I'm NOT patient. I suppose I'm patient in some areas (or maybe not), but I'm not a patient person in most cases. If you are, then my hat's off to you. But I'm just admitting it today – I'm not patient.

So I decided to look up patience in the bible and refresh myself on this virtue. I know it's one of the fruits that supposed to emerge in our lives, but my fruit's a bit shriveled up. Can you relate?

I haven't been patient waiting for things to open.

I haven't been patient waiting to see my family.

I haven't been patient staying at home.

And my impatience causes frustration in my relationship with him. He's a pretty patient guy, and I'm not, so we clash like thunder and lightning sometimes.

When I become impatient I start snapping, I hurry us up, I start being sarcastic and all sorts of nasties to him...because who else is there to release my frustration upon? There's no one around!

So here's what I found in my searching:

- Wisdom yields patience (and part of that wisdom is to overlook offenses) Proverbs 19:11
- Patience is better than pride (Okay, I have that too.) Ecclesiastes 7:8
- It's his might and strength that gives us endurance (This might be why I'm tired) Colossians 3:12
- Patience equips me for good work (okay, I'm thinking...) 2 Timothy 3:17)
- Laziness prohibits patience from doing its work (ouch) Hebrews 6:12
- Patience in suffering is a virtue (and no grumbling!) James 5:8-9
- Can't experience God's mercy and compassion without trials, that bring patience (I knew that) James 5:11

Okay, I've read plenty now, and it's sobering isn't it?

I'm thinking that in my marriage is one of the key places that patience needs to be demonstrated, and yet it's often the place where we are the most impatient! I need wisdom to know that being patient and speaking softly will produce intimacy with him. Pride produces nothing good in my marriage. I need Jesus. Good works can be performed by us as a couple, if I'm patient and let patience work in me. It takes work to be patient, and my marriage is worth that work! There's no better place than in my marriage to receive God's mercy and compassion, and to demonstrate it to the world, as well. And that requires patience.





ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Simple Truths - Great Expectations** – by Erica Simmons

I pride myself on my self-reflection. I think it is a valuable tool that allows me to grow in my areas of weakness. This is more easily done when dealing with how I handle situations in my personal and professional relationships, and it proved to be invaluable when dealing with myself overall.

For the last few months, I have been sharing my struggles about life as a parent of non-minors, and my final confession was that I was devastated when I finally realized my children were not going to be who I wanted them to be. I spent my life and living in a way that I truly wanted my boys to see and mimic; and when they did not, I viewed myself as a failure. I experienced a hurt and a disappointment that stripped away so much of who I was that I was left raw in ways I did not know was possible. I pushed away and avoided friendships that were near and dear to me in an effort to hide what I had become. I was angry with God and did not even want to talk with him about it. But our God, in all His compassion, met me where I was and patiently waited for me to bring my pain into the holy place and willingly share it with Him. It was not easy and it took me months to finally crawl into my Father's lap and share my pain with Him. Once there, I was able to look at things more objectively and understand why my boys' choices for their lives were such a blow to me. Some of the truths I had to deal with were harder than others.

First, like so many of the obstacles I have faced as an adult, the root went back to my childhood. I was such an obedient kid where my parents were concerned, I simply did NOT do things they did not want me to do. Because of my obedience, I honestly expected my boys to do the same thing. I never even prepared for the alternative - that my boys would choose to engage in behaviors that I did not engage in or approve of. I KNOW, how arrogant of me, but I put forth that it was not my arrogance but my naivety. The funny thing about all this is because I was so obedient, I was so unprepared for so many social situations as I got older. I was socially awkward and painfully shy.

Another truth that I knew, but did not truly understand, was that the choices I have made for my life, like serving God and trying to live a life from that perspective, are choices I should have made ONLY because I love Him. This has taught me so much about what loving someone unconditionally is truly about. Learning to accept my boys individually for WHO they are and learning to leave the judgment and disappoint out of it has been both hard and rewarding. It makes me reflect more of who my Father is.

The final truth is that my boys can become who I want them to be or they can become who God wants them to be. One of the things I often find myself doing is forgetting how imperfect I was, with the bad decisions I made and the roads I walked. Why is it that as a parent I expect my children to have a mistake-free life? A life where they make all the right choices and never have to suffer consequences of the choices they make. It is unrealistic of me to not only think that, but to put that unrealistic expectation on them.

Most importantly, I realized I could damage my future relationship with my sons if I did not step back and allow them to live their lives as they chose. Even in learning how to do that, I almost destroyed my relationship with Jordan. I learned that even saying the right thing the wrong way can be detrimental. I hurt him in ways that I can never take back. As a parent, I worked hard to protect my children and in the end to learn the extent of the hurt I inflicted was painful and hard to accept.

We all have a story and it unfolds and has twists and turns that we cannot predict or plan for, but the only thing that matters is who we are in Christ. I have provided my children a solid foundation, which is all as a parent I can do. I have now created a safe place for them to come and talk to me about what is going on with them. They take advantage of that sometimes, and sometimes they don't. What I have to make sure I do at all times is give them God's truth. Not that they will always accept it, but truth is the only thing that will not change, and God's truth will be their anchor.

Many years ago when I was young and impressionable, thinking the world was supposed to make sense, stories of the Illuminati introduced me to the idea that the world is not as it seems. I developed a healthy skepticism for such stories, but also for “legit” information. Over time, the process of weeding through the tangled maze of fact and fiction the world offers led me to seek, pray, and learn to trust the Source of All Things True.

It’s natural to question and look for answers to understand what’s going on. Right now, ideas are circulating about a conspiracy to collapse the economy, a conspiracy to establish a one-world government, a conspiracy to vaccinate with intent to do harm, a conspiracy to remove the current leader...possibly intertwined, and led by an unidentified group called “They.”

I know people, Christian and non-Christian, who sincerely believe this, people I respect. The arguments and postulations can be rather convincing and frightful. After all, it *is* written that deceptions and takeovers would come. It’s obvious that things aren’t right with the world, and the mechanisms and forces that control such things as the economy, world peace, and the nations, are far beyond me. So what if it’s true? What if there is a conspiracy to take over the world, our money, our freedom...? The immense amount of available information is daunting, if not impossible, to sort through, and it’s often unreliable. Facts are made to sound like fiction, and fiction is presented as fact. Unless confirmed by my own trusted senses, there’s no source of information I can count on...with one exception.

Is there really an organization of wealthy power that secretly rules? Do “They” underhandedly conspire to accomplish “Their” selfish plans? Should I be wary of life-saving vaccinations on the chance that they’re intended to harm? In government, does the letter of the law override the condition of the heart? Hand me the sword that divides bone and marrow!

I’m not a conspiracy theorist; I’m a conspiracy realist. If there are conspiracies, I can’t do anything about it. The theories can’t be proven, and “They” are beyond my reach. Realistically, the logistics don’t make sense. There are too many players in the game—intelligent people who care about others, who are in the know, who would have to be involved to make the conspiracy succeed. Humans don’t cooperate well enough to pull it off—sooner or later someone gets greedy, offended, reveals the secret or otherwise succumbs to innate weaknesses.

But there is one who could pull it off. He’s in this world to do just that—conspire to deceive us.

The Trusted Book says, *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”* What a brilliant statement—written so long ago with the timeless perspective that belongs only to God. The *real* conspiracy, the Book says, is perpetrated by one who’s called The Deceiver. His mission is to keep us, in a myriad of ways, from knowing God, trusting God, abiding in him and following him. Instilling fear, suspicion, and uncertainty is one of them. Getting us to turn on one another makes his day.

God knows every plan of Man. He will either thwart it or use it to accomplish his own good purposes—his Divine plan—whether it appears so to my limited knowledge and understanding, or not. I have an unfailing guide in the triune God. His instructions hold true and keep my feet in the narrow way: do not worry, love one another, be merciful, forgive, keep your eyes on Me, pray always ...and so much more that brings Life, not death.

There's only one conspiracy to be concerned about—only as it keeps me on guard and on point in a divine mission. May you take courage as you undertake your part. Together we'll defeat on earth what has been defeated in heaven, as we love and pray for one another.

## **Moving Forward – Always – by Pam Charro**

1 John 1:5

*God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.*

Have you ever considered the implications of this part of scripture? Many of us have heard it most of our lives, along with similar verses which speak of God's goodness. But what does it really mean for us?

The understanding of who he is contrasts with so many other things I learned about him when I was younger. Part of my misunderstanding was because my parents didn't represent him accurately, and part was erroneous teachings in church, where scripture wasn't accurately explained. But all along, he has patiently waited for me to discover the truth about what his goodness means.

I can tell you that, for me, it means that nothing negative that has ever happened to me was a reflection of how he feels about me. That's been huge for me because so much taught me that I was unloved and that the world was a scary place. That I should often be ashamed of myself. That when I act well, I might get good, but as soon as I mess up, I need to be afraid. Because so much is dark and painful and there's no guarantee that life is worth it.

And yet because there is no darkness in him, he is unable to be anything but good, so he could not have been in agreement with those who harmed me. God isn't joyful and positive one moment, then angry and punishing the next, unlike many humans who are unpredictable and unsafe. I do not have to be afraid that I'm suddenly in trouble with God, even when I make mistakes. There may be consequences to bad choices, but negative consequences are never the end of the story. God is always my friend, and always a safe harbor, even when I'm hurting or my heart is hard and needs to be softened. No brokenness in or around me can stop him from being good to me.

This means that, even in painful circumstances, there is always a promise for good in life because he is in it. Good is what he is, and good is what he does. Always.

## Rooted in Love – The Hard Way – by Kaelin Scott

My most recent struggle with my four-year-old daughter has been cleaning her room. She has gotten much better about it, but it was a real point of tension in our house for a while. I would send her to clean her room, and she would immediately start crying like I had asked her to stand on the roof in the middle of a hailstorm. Seriously, she acted like it was the end of the world. She would complain about it being “too hard,” and I would point out that it wouldn’t be so hard if she would clean up her toys after she played with them instead of leaving them all out. I suppose that’s a hard concept to grasp when you’re four, though.

Eventually, she finally started cleaning her room – sometimes not until getting privileges taken away. She got to work and start putting a few toys away, but when I checked on her again, she had gotten distracted and started playing instead. I had to remind her (perhaps none too gently) over and over again exactly what she was supposed to be doing. She dragged out a simple chore, which should have taken ten minutes at the most, and make it an hour-long task. I explained that the sooner she got her work done, the more time she would have to play. It didn’t make a difference. She didn’t want to clean her room, no matter what I told her. Once, I even found her cleaning her brother’s room instead of hers, because apparently it was easier. Many times, I was tempted to just go and clean up for her and get it over with, but I knew that wouldn’t teach her anything. Sometimes as a parent, as frustrating as it can be, I have to let them learn the hard way.

And it was frustrating. It still is at times. But through it all, God has showed me a lesson about myself. He has opened my eyes to the fact that I am not so much different than my sweet (and yes, stubborn) little girl. My own life has plenty of messes that I’d rather just leave alone than attempt to clean up. Or maybe I go into it with determination, but I get distracted along the way and forget my purpose. Sometimes it’s tempting to try and clean up someone else’s mess instead, because it seems easier or helps delay what I really need to do. I know that putting it off only wastes my own time, but I make excuses, I whine and complain, and I avoid facing my mess at all costs. But sooner or later, it has to be faced. All of our problems do. Whether it’s unaddressed sin, dreams laid by the wayside, broken relationships, or any of the number of things life throws at us, eventually those messes have to be dealt with. The longer we wait, the higher the mountain becomes, making it harder and harder to clean up.

I know God could easily solve all my problems with a snap of His fingers, but I also know that He is a loving Father who wants me to learn and grow. If He took away all my pain, all my suffering, all my junk – what would I gain from that? He wants me to lean on Him and trust Him, of course, but He also wants me to do my part. He wants me to take responsibility. He wants me to be a humble and joyful servant, but I can’t do that if I just expect Him to do everything for me. He gives good gifts, He loves beyond measure, and He takes away our pain. But He also disciplines, and He also gives us hard work that seems too overwhelming for us to do. And I think that’s sort of the point. Without His help, it **IS** too difficult to do. But according to 2 Corinthians 12:9, His power is made perfect in our weakness. It is not with our own strength that He expects us to accomplish astounding feats, or even ordinary tasks. It is by His strength and through His grace we do these things, so that we are able to glorify Him.

Many people claim that God doesn’t give us more than we can handle, but that really isn’t true. Today, you may very well be facing a mountain or a mess that you just cannot handle. **But God can.** And if you lean into His strength, you will overcome it. Jesus told us that “everything is possible for one who believes.” We can do anything, it’s true. But it’s not by any power or might of our own, it is through His grace alone.

Like I tell my daughter, we just have to take it one step at a time until the job gets done. Start with something small, and soon you will be moving mountains. God isn't afraid of our mess, because He knows that it stretches us and makes us grow. And maybe as soon as we clean one mess, another one will show up. But He'll be right there to encourage us and remind us of our purpose. There is always hope, so don't give up.



## **Unearthly Thing - Judging Doesn't Go with My Outfit** – by Angela Dolbear

I wish I could see people, places and things as God does. But His ways are not my ways (please see [Isaiah 55:8-9](#))...though I hope that my thoughts and views become more like God's every day.

It was during a time when I was feeling unsettled about myself, my style of dress, and about the books I had written, and were currently writing, that God clearly spoke to me about how skewed my views were. I was internally struggling something fierce.

It was Christmas time, I forget which year. My husband was traveling a lot that year for a German software company he was consulting for. I was feeling a bit lonely, having decorated our Christmas tree by myself.

I have a fondness for all things from "[The Nightmare Before Christmas](#)," particularly for Jack Skellington, the bone-thin, well-dressed, main character of the film. I love the movie, especially the music.

God used my fondness for this film to speak to me. It was one of the handful of times I heard God speak to me directly. Clearly, and with authority.

When I finished cleaning up the empty boxes that stored our Christmas decorations, I sat down to watch *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, all the while asking God about the things I was questioning. (Note: Almost always I have a running dialogue with God in my head...is this praying without ceasing? I ask Him questions, ask for help, wisdom, and clarity, and I try to still my thoughts enough to listen to answers.)

If you are not familiar with the plot of the film, our hero Jack is feeling unsettled about who he is, what his purpose is...is he really the Pumpkin King, in charge of Halloween? (Sound familiar!?)

During Jack's song, "Jack's Lament," (sung by Danny Elfman, one of my favorite artists/composers) where he laments his doubts about his purpose and identity, I heard God say to me, very clearly--no--He *told* me, "BE WHO I MADE YOU TO BE."

In those few words He clearly spoke to me in my spirit/mind/heart/soul, there were paragraphs of meaning, telling me to turn away from my thoughts of trying to fit in, or change my style, or write a different genre of books that would be more "successful."

I had been judging myself. Harshly. I based my self-imposed criticism on the shaky ground of perception. Not on Truth.

I was to be God's "Unearthly Thing." This world will pass away (please see [Matthew 34:35](#)), so I should not try to conform to its ways. God wanted me to authentically be the person He made me to be, and to remain that way. Because then I would be able to fulfill His purpose.

Throughout the duration of the movie, God continued to show me where I was in error about my thinking; about what I thought successful looked like, and what other people think of me isn't valid, and can sometimes be in direct opposition to God's purpose.

All these views and criticisms were inhibiting me from using the gifts He gave me for His glory.

When the movie ended, I remained on my couch in awe for quite a while, basking in the glow of having spent the evening with my God Almighty.

I love that He trusted me to “get it,” and hear Him even when He used an animated film, which some church people would never consider viewing (so I have been told), to speak such life-changing words to me. Maybe it was more of God meeting me where I was, of speaking my language, so to speak. Still, I love that the Creator of the Universe would do that with me. A mixed up retro-gothic girl, living in a place she never felt like was home. An Unearthly Thing, for sure.

We are not meant to be one certain way that some might think equates to right living. We are meant to be all things to all people, especially for the sake of sharing Christ and talking about what He has done for me (please see [1 Corinthians 9:22-23](#)). Which I try to do, as often as the situation allows.

So this got me thinking about judging others: how can I encounter another person and make assessments about them, especially about superficial stuff? How could I let the (perceived) judgements of others hold any influence over me?

And I have no place to judge others. Why would I want to? It's not a good place for my mindset to hangout. To be constantly criticizing others would cramp my ability to express kindness and compassion, would it not? If my mind enters “judging” mode, then it's not in the right frame to pray for others, or help when/where help is needed, or even speak a kind word of encouragement. Would it not also stop up my flow of the Holy Spirit to hear from God?

I know we should be wise and discerning about all things, but does it necessarily include looking down on others? Or would it prompt the desire to look for situations where we could kind, praying ambassadors for Christ?

So many ideas I ponder in my wanderings...while I unashamedly wear my Jack Skellington sweater, or my Jack jacket (which I purchased at Disneyland in Anaheim, CA, one of my favorite places on the planet!), or my purple and black Jack dress (which I have not had the courage to wear to church yet, I will soon...hopefully).

And I will smile, and listen for any divine prompting to help others. If a judicious look is thrown my way, I will continue to smile, and ask God to help me kind, compassionate, and loving, just like He is.

I am still struggling with the bad habit of criticizing myself. While I am writing this article, this whiny, shrill voice in head is telling me this article will not be good, and will have no spiritual or interest value to anyone. But my logical and sanctified mind knows I have prayed throughout its composition. And I know the fulfillment of God's work does not depend on my ability. He chooses to use me, and He equips me. Such an honor, and an act of love.

The Creator created each of us uniquely, for His unique purposes. We are all parts of the same body, each part with its own gift and purpose (please see [Romans 12:4-6](#)). No part is greater than the other, and all parts are used and guided by God Himself. How lovely is that?



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME - He Draws Near**

We recently said goodbye to some awesome friends as they moved far away from us, and it was hard! They needed to move on, and we were so sad to lose our connection, our fun together, and our conversation as we had grown so close since the time they lived near us. We knew when they moved here that they wouldn't be staying long, but after over a year with this dear couple...the time came...and they were gone.

Of course, we can stay in touch through Facebook (so thankful for that!) and phone calls and all sorts of technology. But it just won't be the same. It's a grieving process for sure, when loved ones move on to a new life, a new job, another city and another place. I cannot imagine the times in the pioneer days when children said goodbye to their parents as they married and moved west...perhaps to never see each other again!

I really struggle when friends exit out of my life. I suppose many of us do, but I get familiar with friends and open up and share, and trust and give, only to have that routine upset and be forced to make new friends and become familiar with new faces. I don't like it and never have.

I remember when I was 13 and my sister married, and moved away to California the very next day. I was so mad at her that I threw away every memento from her wedding. I wanted no reminders of the day she left me, and I cried and cried. I saw my parents cry, too. And that broke my heart. Families break up, and a dad or mom leaves, with kids that cry themselves to sleep for years. We lose loved ones to death and we grieve until we hurt, deep inside, with a pain that cannot be cured.

*Or can it?*

There's this verse that says He draws near to the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18).

Isn't that refreshing? As others move on, He draws near! And the truth is that we usually want the ones that have left to come back into our lives, instead of drawing near to Him. We'd much rather have the comfort of that friend, the closeness of that parent, and or the nearness of that family member back! Losing someone is hard!

He knew there would be loss in this world and that people and family and friends would move on. He knew there would be much sorrow associated with saying goodbyes and much angst with saying new hellos. So he made us that promise above that he would draw near and save us.

*Draw near us to do what and to save us from what?*

He draws near to remind us that he is EVERYTHING. He saves us so that he can HEAL us.

He knew what it was like to lose friends, close friends. He suffered betrayal, he was misunderstood, and close followers denied him – said they didn't even know him! He had friends die, he went through so much more than we will ever experience here on earth.

So when he says he will draw near, he does so with power to breathe new life when our old life seems stale and empty. When he says he will save us when our spirits are crushed, he can really do that. Sometimes it's the last thing we want to do – reach out to take hold of Hand that is offered – but he never withdraws it.

I'm reaching for his hand every time I lose a friend, say a goodbye, or feel disappointed and crushed. Sometimes I hold it loosely, just brush it, or just look at it. But when I sit still long enough for him to take my hand and squeeze it and hold it and start walking with me, I'm comforted and safe and warm once again.

Oh, it's a daily walk, and a minute by minute deal. Sometimes, I run off just like a toddler does when he shakes his dad's hand loose to make an independent run. But there's that strong hand again, when I get up from with a skinned knee and bruised heart and reach out to grab it.

*He draws near, when others move on...*

## **FRESH THYME – On Track – by Marcy Lytle**

It's one of the worst things to hear on the news, when we're told that a train carrying passengers veers off its track and wrecks, with multiple injuries and fatalities. Thankfully, it doesn't happen very often, but when it does... There are all sorts of investigations into the personnel that run the train, the mechanics of the train itself, and the tracks beneath it. Those investigations continue until the problem is discovered, so that a disaster like that won't happen again!

I've veered off the tracks many times, haven't you? I'm going along in life at a fast pace, only to come to a turn in the tracks and completely derail in my faith, and come to a crashing halt! It's then that I analyze what made me veer off the track in the first place. And it's often the same three things that cause real trains to roll over and stop:

### *The personnel that run the train*

When I allow the Conductor to run things, I stay on track. In other words, when I consult his word, rest in his promises, cast my cares onto him, and offer praises of love and adoration for his mercy and goodness, my life train stays on track. It's when I move up through the cars into the conductor's cab and take charge, thinking I know a better way to go, when the veering starts to occur. That attitude and action never fares well for me, or for those on board with me. It happens when I panic about decisions and worries and wants, and I decide to "make" things happen my way. It's never good to ask the conductor to step aside...so that I (the passenger) can drive. That's not how trains run...

### *The mechanics of the train*

I find that when I'm tired, everyone needs to stay away. And often, I'm tired because of my own choosing. Other times, I just haven't slept well and I end up grumpy. Tired people don't make wise decisions, they don't speak nicely, and they just cannot function at a good capacity. This is when things start to break down, like communication with our spouses. Tiredness is never a good predecessor to conversation with our spouse or anyone close to us. It causes us to tune out, sputter annoyances, and lash out accusations. This then makes our train veer and start rolling off track. Yikes!

### *The tracks beneath*

Imagine the train, dependent on well laid tracks, coming to a breakage in the iron below it. This will definitely send the train off track and into who knows where – causing all kinds of damage to the train, the travelers, and those nearby. Train tracks have to be maintained and cared for, and noticed, and replaced. The tracks beneath me are my foundation. I've found that foundations crumble when they're based on speculation, emotion, or hype. So I have to continually take up those shoddy pieces and replace them with faith, hope, and love. Each joint of the track has to be secured with those bolts that hold the track beneath me together. Otherwise, I'm going down.

I don't like to drive behind a person that veers on the highway. Often, it's because they're distracted with their phone, they've drank a little too much, or they've driven too long and need to pull over to rest. And I certainly don't want to be the one that veers. Our new car has a beep system built in that reminds us if we barely start to cross the line into danger.

I have a beep system too, in my own life, and that's the Holy Spirit. He always gently nudges me back on track, if I'm awake enough to feel it and respond. And when I do, it's a clear ride to a safe destination. And there's nothing more fun than a train ride through the mountains, across bridges, next to deep lush valleys and through tall stately trees, and then arriving safe and sound having had the ride of a lifetime.

Makes me want to book a train ride...how about you?

## **FRESH THYME – The Real Stuff – by Marcy Lytle**

I have shared this story often because I was so amazed by it. And I know it to be true because my dad told me the story over and over again, about how to determine and choose what's real – and how to determine and refuse anything that's counterfeit. He worked at a bank for all of my childhood years and I remember this story so well...an experience he never forgot and made sure to tell his children...so they never forget.

Dad said that while working at the bank they were trained in spotting counterfeit bills. Of course, this would be a necessary knowledge to have while handling money, for sure! I recall thinking to myself that Dad was going to tell us about counterfeit bill markings and how they different from the real thing, so that they are easily spotted. I imagined that he would take some of these fake bills from his pocket and reveal their obvious differences, and we would *oohh* and *ahhh* as he showed us.

That wasn't the case.

He told us how the bank workers were required to stay in the vault a long time (I can't recall the length of time, but I think they had to work in there for days!). They were to handle the real money, feel it, observe it – and nothing but the real money – until they were accustomed to the feel. This would then become so real to their sense of touch and sight that they would then become so familiar with the real money that...

When anything fake showed it, it would feel so different, they would immediately spot it!

In other words, they spent time with the real thing, a lot of time, so that when the unreal dared to show up at their desk – they knew it. They would have become so familiar with the real that the fake didn't have a chance of survival!

This story amazed me. I began imagining these bank workers in vault surrounded by piles of real money, money they were given to feel, to experience, to look at, and to know. And they had to immerse themselves in this money, not just walk in and out, having seen in for a few minutes. It took time for them to take in and receive the knowledge that came with learning what the real stuff was.

Dad said that after they emerged from the vault they could then go back to work, and easily spot a fake bill. They had felt the real money so long that the fake stuff immediately felt different and was discarded and exposed.

Isn't that story so cool?

You know where I'm going with this.

In a world where fake news is rampant, stories arise daily about the why's and how's of our current situation, politicians and leaders spill out information that varies from day to day, and more – we can learn from the bank story something huge. It doesn't take hours of sitting and sifting through all of the stories and trying to figure out what's real, in order to live in peace in



this crazy world. That type of experience brings exhaustion and confusion, and then tomorrow we have a dozen more stories to sift through...

The best way for us to be sure that we're on the right track, we are ready to discard anything fake that could harm us, and that we don't allow outside "counterfeit money" to pile up in our savings account (so to speak) is to immerse ourselves in – the WORD.

God's word is completely full of hope, truth, faith, and the unfaltering character of God, our heavenly father. Our best bet to spending our time wisely to cover our family and what we claim as ours is to read it, study it, believe it and pray it. He offers peace that passes understanding in troubled times, he calms super stormy seas, and he turns water into wine. He parts seas that are not crossable, he heals the sick and even raises the dead, and he softens stone cold hearts and melts them into his pure love.

And that truth, that vault of piled up real stuff, is where we need to spend our days. It's so that when we emerge into the real world again, we're able to immediately spot the fake and choose the real. And when that line gets fuzzy again, we can always return to the vault and stay as long as we want, because that real wealth is not going anywhere...and neither is the One in whom we trust.

## **FRESH THYME - The Simple Things** – by Marcy Lytle

I've found that during these uncertain and scary times, it helps me to get away from the city and notice the simplicity of nature and small pleasures, and to give thanks. Haven't you? If I stay home too much, working and cleaning and doing and staying away and watching and listening...I become anxious and weary. But one day away can rejuvenate me to face another week.

Yesterday, we took a road trip to three small towns, just for fun. The experience is shared over on the Local Flair blog, and you can find it on the COVER page if you scroll down. However, in this story I want to take note of the small and beautiful things that caused my heart to beat a little sweeter, my eyes to open a little wider, and my thoughts to settle down from boiling to a nice aromatic simmer...

- The fields were green and wildflowers were everywhere still...breathtakingly beautiful.
- Water that we packed tasted so good and refreshing after we strolled in a park.
- That park had a stately tree that was huge and historical and provided shade for travelers, long ago.
- There was this river by which we sat, and observed the reflection of the trees in the water.
- There were these rocks and trails and greenery and benches all for walkers and observers – me!
- One antique store was open on a little town square, and there were treasures on every aisle.
- The town square was still mostly closed, but the sidewalks were there...for strolling...always open.
- The breeze and the temperature were perfect, and we noticed and we drank in its refreshing...
- The book I brought to read was just the escape as I leaned my chair back and entered another story, while we parked under a tree.
- A text from a 7 year old to see what I was doing made my heart sing and my lips turn up to smile.
- The fact that I needed a light coat as we left in the morning was an unexpected surprise of "Ahhh."
- My walking shoes were so comfortable as I held his hand and we explored new places, both breathing deeply in rhythmic paces.

Just think. If we could pause enough to think of a dozen simple pleasures each day, we might all live 10 years longer just from the peace that comes from seeing and giving thanks and observing and living life well.

I hope to maintain this exercise of simplicity, even after the memory of spring 2020 fades into the fall of 2020 and whatever that may bring. Will you join me?



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

July 2020



TIPS

## **Seven 4 You – Skin Care Works – by Marcy Lytle**

There is SO MUCH to choose from when it comes to makeup these days. And there are lotions and powders and liners and shadows of every shade and brand, enough to fill a suitcase! However, I've found that unless we have good skin care, it doesn't matter how good our makeup is. We need to care for the skin we have, before applying the glam.

So...the question to our panel was about skin care, what they use, and why they like it:

I recently purchased a Lumi-Spa skin care system and I love it. My skin looks and feels better than it has in a long time. I really like that it's waterproof so I can use it in the shower, which is when I wash my face in the morning. My skin feels very soft, looks smoother, and my pores appear smaller after using it. It's by NuskIn.

[https://ohthejoy.mynuskin.com/content/nuskin/en\\_US/mysite/mysite-home.mysite.html?storeId=US01067769&fbclid=IwAR3IvtWrnE1UI7raQRqEFbwCm0v\\_6vwBJAvGTWoc0rBIhur5l-xGk1lekE#home](https://ohthejoy.mynuskin.com/content/nuskin/en_US/mysite/mysite-home.mysite.html?storeId=US01067769&fbclid=IwAR3IvtWrnE1UI7raQRqEFbwCm0v_6vwBJAvGTWoc0rBIhur5l-xGk1lekE#home)

My facial routine is pretty basic. In the past, I used some expensive products but honestly could not see a big difference. I also have sensitive skin, so I have just been staying with my normal routine. I use Neutrogena products, mostly. I cleanse my skin with a cleanser called HydroPeptide - it doesn't break my face out. In the mornings, I then use the Neutrogena moisturizer that has sunscreen in it and then I use Almay makeup. At night I use a facial wipe to clean makeup off and then I use the same cleanser and a night time moisturizer. I try to drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water a day! I wish I had started using sunscreen as a young person, because I have a million sun spots but - oh well - that is just how it is.

<https://hydropeptide.com/>

I wash my face with IS Clinical Cleansing Gel twice a day. It was recommended by an anesthesiologist many years ago and I order it online. I use a Clarisonic brush twice a week especially in the hot humid summer months. When I worked, I applied Lancome moisturizer daily and then foundation. Now that I don't work, I used a tinted sunscreen/moisturizer combo that I absolutely love called Elta MD UV Physical. I do not do well at keeping lotion on the rest of me. I just get in a rush...

<https://www.amazon.com/EltaMD-Physical-Tinted-Sunscreen-Broad-Spectrum/dp/B00C8FVZZY>

<https://www.amazon.com/CLINICAL-Cleansing-Complex-fl-oz/dp/B0026TOCK2>

I dry brush my skin several times a week and use essential oil soap a friend of mine makes to wash my face. I like avocado and coconut oil for my moisturizer. I put the essential oils in the avocado/coconut oil. I know it sounds weird, but it works for me. I also rub just a drop of coconut oil on the lower half of my hair after shampooing. It makes it soft and helps with grey wiry hair. You may want to put it in after using a straightener or curling iron.

I have allergies but I did not realize at first how much they affected my skin. I used lotion daily for years and then my skin started to be so dry and itchy, I tried all the unscented, healing kinds of products. But nothing worked. So, I stopped all lotions and googled natural remedies. What they recommended was in my kitchen! I use 2 T extra virgin olive oil mixed with 4 drops of fresh lemon juice. I only have to use this occasionally when my skin starts to get dry and that's not very often. I mix enough for about a week, about two tablespoons full, and I mix it in this fun bottle we got on a trip through Montana. It does not take much, and I use it on my face and body. I just put a small amount on my fingers and rub it in. I also do an occasional yogurt face mask...just plain yogurt from the container!

Super simple, due to ultra sensitive skin, that's my routine. I use only goat milk soap for face and all-over cleanser, Canus Caprina soap from Amazon, and diluted ORIGINAL Johnson and Johnson baby shampoo for eye make-up remover. Coconut oil is my facial moisturizer. Body moisturizer is Alba Botanica super emollient lotion. These have been my regulars for 20+ years. If I have to be in the sun, I use Neutrogena 100spf.

[https://www.amazon.com/Caprina-Canus-Fresh-Original-Ounces/dp/B00V0CPCT6/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?crd=39M8ZZWMLSRM&dchild=1&keywords=canus+caprina+soap&qid=1591910737&sprefix=canus+capri%2Caps%2C413&sr=8-3](https://www.amazon.com/Caprina-Canus-Fresh-Original-Ounces/dp/B00V0CPCT6/ref=sr_1_3?crd=39M8ZZWMLSRM&dchild=1&keywords=canus+caprina+soap&qid=1591910737&sprefix=canus+capri%2Caps%2C413&sr=8-3)

[https://www.amazon.com/s?k=alba+botanica&crd=1CQ2788F2C6N8&sprefix=alba+bot%2Caps%2C208&ref=nb\\_sb\\_ss\\_i\\_3\\_8](https://www.amazon.com/s?k=alba+botanica&crd=1CQ2788F2C6N8&sprefix=alba+bot%2Caps%2C208&ref=nb_sb_ss_i_3_8)

My husband has skin issues due to a medication he takes, so his skin itches and breaks out on the arms and face, and even his head. My sister read about Bend Soap Company and all their testimonials (which are amazing) so we ordered some. My husband LOVES it and uses their soap on his hair and the lotion on his skin. He has seen marked improvement!

<https://www.bendsoap.com/>

I have shared this threesome before in another post, but Gruene Witch Apothecary in New Braunfels, Texas has a coffee facial bar, a witch hazel toner, and an anti-aging moisturizer that when used faithfully together makes a difference. I have seen age spots fade, and my skin feels tighter and smoother...and the scent is amazing!

<https://gruenewitch.com/>

I just use organic cooking avocado and coconut oil. Sometimes just organic coconut. I use a hand held dry brush from Eco-tools. Makes my skin feel so good!! With the oil, I add about 5 drops each of frankincense and lavender essential oils in a travel size bottle. It lasts for a long time.

<https://www.amazon.com/stores/Ecotools/Homepage/page/31B47B2F-142A-4E7E-9784-C8C3F8CC7160>



## **The Dressing – Wear It Now – by Marcy Lytle**

All during these months of staying closer to home, buying online or curbside, and avoiding public places, I've heard over and over that people are staying in "comfy" clothes like sweats or shorts, and tshirts. I get it. Those outfits are super comfy. But I've found that a lot of clothes that look pretty and make me feel dressed up can be comfy, as well! Not all "nice" outfits have to be uncomfortable and itchy! I've quite enjoyed purchasing and wearing skirts and dresses, so here are a few of my faves!

I've found that knit is good, elastic feels great, and color is the bomb...and if I wait until life is back to normal to wear these things...I might be waiting quite a while!

This navy and white striped dress from Amazon can be dressed up if I choose to go out, but it's totally comfortable to sit around in, while working from home or visiting in a park. The belt, which is attached, can be tied in the front in a long bow, or around the back and back to the front in a short knot.

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07NNJP4GR/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o00\\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07NNJP4GR/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o00_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

I love this sunflower dress. Fitted at the top, but flowy at the bottom, and full of sunshine! You can tell it's comfy just by the photo! And the sunflowers – well, they are my favorite flower! What's yours?

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07RYF7MB3/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o00\\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07RYF7MB3/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o00_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

Isn't this black dress the best? We all need one, and it doesn't have to be dressy. This one is elastic at the waist, has pockets, and can be worn with every shoe in the closet! I wore it to the park to sit by the water...it was divine.

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B082X25B9W/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o01\\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B082X25B9W/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o01_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

I've really enjoyed this midi length skirt from Old Navy (did you know that length is back?) The color is a neutral, so I've worn it with gold, mauve, white and more. It washes up great, and also has elastic on the back of the waist!

[https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/product.do?pid=571589012&cid=79586&pcid=79586&vid=3&grid=pds\\_13\\_15\\_1#pdp-page-content](https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/product.do?pid=571589012&cid=79586&pcid=79586&vid=3&grid=pds_13_15_1#pdp-page-content)

I purchased a light blue chambray and a khaki skirt in this same style. Elastic waist, great length, the perfect skirt for summer with tshirts or button-ups or whatever! They do have to be ironed, because they're linen...but they iron easily and quickly!

<https://outlet.loft.com/chambray-pull-on-skirt/528973?skuld=29353644&defaultColor=0652&catid=cat3950033&selectedColor=0652>



Love this green wrap dressy blouse. It's from Ann Taylor Factory, and it's great for summer! LOVE the tie wrap at the waist, and the fact that it can be worn with capris or a skirt!

<https://factory.anntaylor.com/tie-waist-keyhole-top/536778?skuld=29694853&defaultColor=2007&catid=cat3960032&selectedColor=2007>

### **Three Moms – Summer Snacks**

Keeping kids full seems impossible, doesn't it? They want to eat constantly, while watching shows, playing games, after activities, in the car, and just everywhere! It's hard to constantly just serve what's healthy, because every kid wants cookies! It seems to be a mom dilemma for sure – among everyone! One mom said her kids say the word "snack" every 30 minutes. Can you relate?

We decided to create a list of snack ideas, and how to portion and keep them. You'll notice these moms include a good balance of sweets and fruit and fun!

#### **For snacks:**

- Apples and peanut butter
- Popcorn (with M&M's sometimes for family movie night, and definitely for road trips)
- Pears and Laughing Cow cheese
- Veggies with Ranch or HEB dill dip (the best!)
- Applesauce and applesauce pouches – convenient, don't require refrigeration and mess free (usually.)
- Yogurt
- Cheese sticks
- Cuties – those mini oranges – delicious, refreshing and healthy
- Popsicles, sugar free made by Popsicles – delicious and better for teeth
- Watermelon (great for picnics and beach trips!)
- Favorite candies

#### **For organizing and serving:**

- Let the oldest cut up fruit and veggies, and be a part of making the snacks for younger siblings.
- Keep a bottom shelf or fridge bin for reachable snacks.
- Create a snack bin to sit on top of the fridge, where food is not in arms reach of the littles.
- Keep lots of options available, so kids have a choice to pick from.
- Limit snacks, especially before meals, but also let them have one so Mom can have quiet time!
- Find new snacks often, to give the kids variety and different nutrients.
- Require kids to ask permission for snacks (so they don't eat candy all day!)
- It's good to balance between sweets, fruit and salt intake with snacks.

- Keep healthy snacks on their level, but others out of reach because snacks affect dinner!

Moms need to support moms, not compete with each other on what they serve their kiddos. Every family is different and every parent requires and expects different things when it comes to what they allow their kids to eat. The important thing is to have variety and fun and health, all rolled into one – so that meal time and snack time is enjoyable, not deplorable!

## **In the Kitchen – Simply Good – by Marcy Lytle**

Summertime should be simple, including what we make in the kitchen. It's too hot and we're too busy having fun to spend hours and efforts to make elaborate time-taking meals for our family to enjoy! I hope you and your family are out riding bikes in the early morning, sipping cold drinks in the afternoon, and relaxing by water as the sun sets! And here are some goodies for you to enjoy as you breathe in the summertime vibes and enjoy all things simple and good:

### **Caramel Apples**

We made these on a recent weekend away with our kids, at the request of one of the kids! We bought the nice crispy small apples, so that each one could enjoy an entire wrapped apple of goodness!

- 4 Werthers bags of caramels (4.51 oz bags)
- 8 apples (granny smith or the crispy small reds)
- 3 T heavy cream
- Assorted toppings (we used sprinkles, tiny chocolate chips and chopped pecans)
- 8 popsicle sticks

(There were 9 of us, so using the small apples, we had plenty!)

Wash and dry the apples totally, and then press the stick into the top of each. Line a baking sheet with wax paper.

Unwrap the caramels (great for the kids to do!) and place them in a med pan over med-low heat. Add the heavy cream and cook, stirring, til they melt and are of a smooth consistency. Reduce heat to low.

Dip each apple into the mixture, shaking off excess and off the bottoms, then roll in your favorite toppings, and place apples on the line baking sheet. Refrigerate until caramel firms up, about 15 minutes.

Serve apples immediately or store in fridge until ready to enjoy!

### **Lemon blueberry bread**

We had this for breakfast on our weekend trip. It's a great loaf to bake and take. Just wrap it in foil and enjoy it the next day. Each slice is so yummy!

- 2 c flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 t baking powder
- ½ t salt
- 1 t lemon zest
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- ½ c milk

- ½ c butter, melted
- ¾ c fresh blueberries

Preheat oven to 350, coat bottom and ½ inch up sides of a 8X4 loaf pan with nonstick spray. In a large bowl, stir flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Stir in lemon zest. Make a well in the center.

Combine eggs, milk, and butter in a medium bowl. Add this mixture to the flour mixture. Stir til just moistened (batter will be lumpy.) Fold in blueberries and spoon batter into prepared pan, spreading evenly.

Bake 60-70 minutes til toothpick inserted near center comes out clean. Cool in pan on wire rack for 10 minutes before removing. Then cool completely on the rack.

I think this would be great with a tall glass of lemonade for an afternoon snack!

### **Blackberry Cobbler**

I'm sure you have many recipes for cobbler, but this one is one of the easiest I've ever made and so tasty! We took all the ingredients with us, except the berries. If you can pick berries at a farm, do so!

- 1 stick margarine
- 1 c flour
- 1 t baking powder
- 4 cups blackberries
- 1 c sugar
- 1 t salt
- ¾ c whole milk
- ½ c sugar

Melt margarine in deep pan. Mix 1 c sugar, flour, salt, and baking powder and milk til smooth. Add the melted margarine. Pour into a baking dish (I used 9X13), ladle fruit over top, and sprinkle with ½ c sugar.

Bake at 350 for 30 minutes or until brown.

Of course, serve with ice cream!

### **Sausage and Browns**

The key to this recipe is to let the hashbrowns sit on the heat, in the pan, until they start browning, before you turn. Otherwise, they will turn mushy. But this skillet breakfast is so good! (We included a side of salsa).

- 4 cups frozen cubed hash brown potatoes
- ¼ cup chopped green pepper
- 1/3 c canola oil

- ¼ lb smoked sausage halved lengthwise and cut into ¼ in slices
- 3 slices American cheese

In large skillet, cook potatoes and pepper in oil over mid heat until potatoes are golden brown. Stir in sausage and heat through. Remove from heat and top with cheese. Cover and let stand for 5 min til cheese is melted.

(We doubled this recipe).

### **Tiny Skewers**

These bites of fun were what we ate one night after we got back home, using up the rest of the sausage we had! This is one of my favorite snacks (and cute, too!) to whip up in a jiffy.

- Sausage rounds cut from links
- Thick sliced pickles
- Cubes of cheese
- Toothpicks
- Mustard, salsa, and chips to go alongside

Just grill the sausage rounds until browned. Skewer each one with a pickle slice and a cube of cheese, and set on a cute tray. Include the condiments, sit down to enjoy a movie, and eat!

## **Tried and True – Fun to Buy** – by Marcy Lytle

It's been a while since we shared some favorite products that we've been using and enjoying for a while, and some are new ones just discovered during all of this time of being at home more, and shopping on line! I love hearing what others have bought, created, or done during these past few months. And since summer is in full swing now, I thought it would be fun to share with you some cool things...just in case you're already doing some Christmas shopping...in July!

**JR Watkins lotion** – I ordered this peppermint scented body lotion and LOVE IT. Not only does the tingly peppermint smell good, it feels good, as well. And the lotion is just the right thickness (not too greasy or too watery – you know what I mean!). It's a keeper in my stash of potions! We bought the foaming hand soap as well, and love it too.

<https://www.amazon.com/J-R-Watkins-Rejuvenating-Peppermint-Lotion/dp/B07B6FDXRV>

**Elf eye shadow and powder** – Yes, this makeup is cheap, but I like it. I know some of the products are used up quickly, because there's not much too them, but I like that. I can afford to try a new product and see if I like it, which I have liked quite a few of these! This cute eyeshadow palette, and the pressed powder, are two of my faves.

[https://www.elfcosmetics.com/prime-and-stay-finishing-powder/300110.html?dwvar\\_300110\\_color=Light%2FMedium&cgid=face-powder#start=3](https://www.elfcosmetics.com/prime-and-stay-finishing-powder/300110.html?dwvar_300110_color=Light%2FMedium&cgid=face-powder#start=3)

**Pencil pouch** – I discovered this company Notebook Therapy while browsing Instagram! I love so many of their cute products and this pencil case that squishes down and then up, is so cute! There are bento boxes on their site, and all sorts of little organizers for your office. Love all of them.

<https://notebooktherapy.com/products/tsuki-popup-pencil-case>

**Epoch hand sanitizer** by Nuskyn – My daughter sells these products and they just came out with the hand sanitizer. What I love is the scent (most sanitizers smell awful!) and the size of these little bottles that are easy to carry in my purse. They come in a pack of five, so I can keep one in so many places. It only takes a little dot, to go a long way.

<https://linktr.ee/kamrinwolfe>

**Tablecloth clips** – For me, these are a must for outdoor dining. We used them on a recent trip with our kids, as we ate out on the patio every meal. Not only are they cute, but they are just weighty enough to keep all of our tablecloths from blowing up over the table (I hate it when that happens!) These are from Amazon.

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07WK1TR3D/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o05\\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07WK1TR3D/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o05_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

**Sprinkler Ball** – We found this on Amazon as well, and it's so big and looks so pretty as it spouts a huge sprinkle out over the lawn! It's a great addition for your backyard for kids to run and play and cool off on a hot summer day.

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0859BZDM9/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o04\\_s01?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0859BZDM9/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o04_s01?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

**Fun paper plates** – I've started stocking up piles of cute paper plates and napkins – mostly from the Dollar Store – but other stores as well – when I see them. It makes snack night at home, or even a romantic dinner for two, so fun when cute little summer colors and shapes are set on your tray or table!

**Paddywax candles** – I've sang their praises before, but I really do love these candles. They're long burning, smell great, and come in all sorts of cute jars. I chose these two scents for summer, in their apothecary jars.

<https://paddywax.com/>

**Glass storage containers** – I keep these in my fridge all the time for cut up celery, leftovers, cucumbers, any small portions that I want to keep and keep fresh. They are super air tight and keep things fresh longer. I got them as a gift, and they're great!

[https://www.google.com/shopping/product/5645165701010374837?q=storage+containers+glass+for+fridge+5+piece+amazon&biw=1600&bih=708&prds=epd:6613915044988176495,pmr:3&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiy6Lmig\\_LpAhUR26wKHbXCAK4Q8wII1wc](https://www.google.com/shopping/product/5645165701010374837?q=storage+containers+glass+for+fridge+5+piece+amazon&biw=1600&bih=708&prds=epd:6613915044988176495,pmr:3&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiy6Lmig_LpAhUR26wKHbXCAK4Q8wII1wc)

**Pretty Planter** – Smith & Hawken brand at Target always has nice things for the home, and we recently found these stately planters with self watering troughs in the bottom. Aren't they pretty? We purchased them for our church's porch and they look so nice by the benches!

<https://www.target.com/p/23-recycled-urn-planter-smith-hawken-153/-/A-54341524?preselect=53863628#lnk=sametab>





HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Summertime Sanity** – by Marcy Lytle

It's summer, but we were already all home long before summer came. So now, what? How do we keep our kids busy while we're still trying to work and stay sane? I'm a big fan of schedules, so that's what I'll promote here. Scheduling might be hard to initiate, and sure there needs to be flexibility, but having an outline helps a family know what to do, and enables them to have time and allowance to do it. So fun!

**Daily Do's** – Hang a daily schedule on the fridge for kids to follow, with words for those that can read, and pictures for the littles. It helps keep you from having to verbally bark orders all day! It might look as simple as this:

Morning: brush teeth, get dressed, make bed, eat breakfast, feed the dog, clean room

Afternoon: quiet time of reading, play a game with sibling, exercise

Evening: Pick up any toys, shoes and clothes and take to rooms. Shower, brush teeth, say prayers, give thanks.

**Outings on Weekdays** – It might be fun to hang a list on the fridge of possible daily outings with the kids so that they don't go stir crazy. Hopefully, we are getting out more and things are opening up...just a bit! It might be fun to pick one for each day of the week, to look forward to! Here are some options for weekdays:

Sunset scavenger hunt walks (you can make your own or print out from computer)

Little libraries around town (these are in yards, and you can leave a book and take a book!)

Early morning sketches (take pads and pencils and draw trees and nature)

Fast Food lunch (a once a week treat!)

Water works (sprinklers in the yard, water parks if open, pools or streams or ponds)

**Weekends with the Fam** – This is time to carve out for family fun for sure, even if vacation isn't possible or feasible right now. There are family outings to make happen on the weekend, that are something all can look forward to starting on Monday! Check these out:

Breakfast and Bicycle rides – Load them up, head for parks and trails, and ride (early before it's too hot!)

Drive in movies – If your town has one, go. If not, set up one in your own backyard! Add popcorn!

Another town – Check out what's open in a nearby town (within an hour), pack snacks, and take the kids. Visit that town's park, stream, or fast food joint – just for something different.

Evening singalongs – Bring out the instruments, play the music, dance and sing...then sit down and snack!

Picnics – outside or inside, depending on what suits your fancy. Spread a blanket, let the kids help with the menu, include a game, and make it happen.

**Projects** – These might include ways for the kids to give back and bless others, always a good thing:

Make cards and send them to the elderly you know.

Paint rocks and leave one on the doorstep of neighbors as a gift.

Draw pictures and sign them, deliver to other kids you haven't seen in a while, with a treat attached.

Bake cookies and decorate them (why wait until Christmas?)

Collect boxes, tape them together with duct tape, and decorate them all with scrap fabric and wood and plastic bottle caps, etc.

Rearrange and organize one drawer in your bathroom, or an area in your closet, and be creative!

Writing down ideas, putting them in little squares on a calendar, hanging up schedules for kids to see, planning and dreaming and being creative – it all helps create order and fun and pleasure at home for YOU and THEM.

## **I Don't Do Teens – Eyes on the Dash – by Marcy Lytle**

Our teens need friends to hang out with, friends to chat with, friends to trust and grow into adulthood with...all the things. And right now, it's been hard for our kids to have any contact with friends and really hang out as usual. Nothing's been usual about life for us, or for our kids. And it's important that our teens have good friends! But are there really any good friends, when one is a teenager? I was chatting with a friend about her daughter going to summer camp, and I said I hoped she'd find some good friends with good influence. But we both agreed that finding teens that are a good influence is downright hard! Teens just basically are hormonal, act on impulses, are self-absorbed and only worried about influencing themselves to be all they can be...at least that's the way it seems.

So what's a parent to do, when it comes to teens and their friends? We, as parents, want our kids to have solid friendships with their peers, but is that possible? How do we guide them toward that goal, and what if those friends are bad to the bone?

### **Here five suggestions to consider:**

*Monitor the hangouts.* Whether the kids are hanging out on line, through text, by playing games, or actually in person...observe them. Observe your teens after they've been with that friend and see if their behavior has changed for the worse...or the better. What is their conversation like? Is there rivalry or jealousy? It's not wise to just leave our teens with friends and hope for the best. We can pray, observe, guide and observe behaviors and attitudes.

*Be a good friend.* It's always said that parents shouldn't be their kids' friends. But I beg to differ. Obviously, we should not be their friend in the sense that we just go along with them and never parent. But a parent can be the best example of a friend our teen will ever have. We can listen well, encourage, laugh, and keep in confidence things that are told us in secret. We can be a parent they can trust and admire, and train them to be that kind of friend to others.

*Comfort in disappointment.* Our teens are going to be hurt by mean friends that talk behind their backs, like them one day and not the next, move away to another state or country, or any number of things that come in life to separate good friends. We know how that feels, as we too have lost friends over the years. It hurts, and it hurts deeply. This is when we point our teens to Jesus, the best friend a kid can have. It starts early, this pointing to Jesus, because we want our teens to run to him for solace and to find comfort in his word. Teach that, model that, and help them through as they find new friends when old ones leave.

*Step in.* Do you see your son being belligerent and defiant every time, after hanging out with that guy? Maybe the girl he's been interested in is manipulative and dangerous. Or perhaps the friend your daughter had over is asking to borrow things, making fun of your daughter, or worse... You are still the parent and you can step in, to stop bad connections. Pray, and then have a talk with your son or daughter. We are always to be a family of acceptance to people to help them out, but when a person becomes poison to our children, we need to step in. We can talk to that teen and see if they'll listen to instruction, if we've built a connection with them. It

can be awesome when a teen listens and changes. But sometimes, that teen has to go back home and stay away if they are truly hurting our family.

*Welcome and love.* If your teens feel your home is loving and you are kind, hopefully they will ask their friends in to visit. Be a parent that encourages and speaks kindness to your teens' friends, a mom or dad that models love and acceptance, and a parent that cares. Invite that friend to a family dinner hangout and play games. Encourage them to be with the family. It will be evident right away if that kid is trying to pull your child away into hiding and deceiving. Open your doors, invite them in, but then be the keeper of the gate and the warrior in prayer.

Whatever we do, we cannot assume that once our children are teens that will make wise decisions when it comes to friendships, or that they will be attracted to good kids. There's always that appeal to the dark side, and it only takes one bad friend pull our kids away into a dark world full of all kinds of danger. Teens need friends. But those friends are going to be good influences or bad, and probably our own teen will be a bad influence at one point as well! God is acutely aware of our desires and hears our prayers when it comes to our kids.

Once I found a journal on the dash of my car, after I'd dropped off my daughter at school. She "accidentally" left it there, and inside I saw a note from a boy that wasn't appropriate. I think God was all over that "accident" because it enabled my daughter and me to have a conversation that was needed, about guys, their intentions. She too realized that God was looking out for her...

He's looking out for your teens as well, just keep your eyes on the dash...

## Chipped China - My Little Library – by Jennifer Lytle

Growing up, I was a voracious reader. My mom questioned me about reading in the car; she repeatedly warned me about reading in the dark; she even threatened to take away my books one time when I was in late elementary (no joke, but you won't hear that backstory from me...not now, anyway.) Piled, stacked, and shelved in my little bedroom library, I had scores of mysteries volumes, Golden Books and Little Critter, and books on manners and etiquette (yes, I absolutely loved reading formal, how-tos on everything a girl might want to know from setting a table to answering a phone or babysitting).

When I was in middle school, I turned toward non-fiction and read *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I became absorbed in reading the experiences of that young girl and the group of those who hid with her for over two years during the German occupation of the Netherlands. It was then that I became entirely infatuated with everything pertaining to what those of Jewish descent refer to as [The Shoah](#). You and I typically refer to this period in history as the Holocaust.

As a college student reading for pleasure was no longer attainable (so I felt,) or of interest to me. I remember a moment when I placed a heavy textbook on my bed, dreaded the looming required reading, and felt sad about my loss of reading with delight. My desire itself was gone.

Part of what happened, in combination with my reading-intensive workload, was that I no longer knew what to read. My relationship with God had changed and I did not know what was appropriate or beneficial to read. After one period of spiritual development, I tried to pick up one of my favorite authors from high school. Upon reading even the first few sentences in one horror novel, I felt just that - horror - by what I had read as a young person. Turning to Christian authors, what little I did read was usually forced. I read books about raising a family and marriage, along with books from Christian authors about living a life of faith. Frequently, I found these books did not create that insatiable desire to keep reading and I ended up with many partially read books. Perhaps my spiritual development was minimal? I tried to read one or two classical Christian pieces and it was never as engrossing as I had once experienced.

Sadly, it took several years before I was able to connect with *The Hunger Games* trilogy, by Suzanne Collins. Afterward, I turned to *Ender's Game* series, by Orson Scott Card. My love for reading again bloomed and I felt a little like a kid who gets their first brand-new bike after learning to ride without training wheels.

It's funny that I should just finish reading the article by THYME's own Writer/Contributor, Angela Dolbear, about acceptance and being uniquely crafted. For a period of time, I had placed myself in a box and wouldn't allow anything outside of the label, *Christian*, in my library. It's funny . . . or perhaps it's just a lugubrious posture.

Despite being freed from only reading a certain category of literature, I have both found myself struggling to grant freedom to others in choosing and in accepting my own liberation at times.

In this season of what I would refer to as the great slow-down routinely known as the pandemic, my family and I began to build our own little free library. For many years I have wanted one of

these after spying them in our community. Is it ironic that my husband wanted to design and build a bigger Little Free Library, complete with a pull-down table and seating, and I disagreed that we should break with tradition? I wanted to confine him the same way that I had once been confined in choosing and enjoying literature. Though I am a tad bit embarrassed to admit, I wondered what my neighbors would think about our larger-than-little library.

Build your libraries; big or small. Fill them with your favorite genre of written works. I encourage you to read for pleasure. Read what suites you. Read what speaks to you. Read the stories that make you want to go back for more even if others might not approve of your interest in . . . romance novels or historical pieces.

And, my sweet Angela, write what your soul says! I need your words to fill my library.

## **Tiny Living – The Low Down – by Leyanne Enterline**

My boys are ages 13 and 11. I feel we have had a unique upbringing for our kiddos so we may not fit in the “typical” way to raise your kids but I’ll share our journey, in case you’re new to this column.

We lived the American dream of owning our own house, two nice cars, traveling some, with two parents working outside the home. As the kids started getting older we thought,

“What are we doing? Is this how we want to live our lives?  
Working to survive and pay high prices to keep up with the Jones’? No!”

My husband had started traveling more with his job and we home school, so we thought, why not travel with him? Why not sell pretty much everything we own, buy a travel trailer and travel the world? *Sounds adventurous and fun, right?* Well that’s what we thought and we’ve been doing just that for the past four years!

We bought some land as a home base and pretty much just started traveling. The kiddos were 7 and 9 when we literally sold all we had, except for a few things we put in a storage container, and bought our 325 sq. ft. home. We have lived in it so long that even the other day I mentioned something about a dresser; and my kids didn’t even know what that was! They don’t even remember having an actual home to live in...

Many of our friends, that home school as we do, are somewhat like-minded. Several travel and live a bit more simply than most, it seems. A lot of us have a few acres so we can have animals and let the kiddos run free and explore. Many of us have our own gardens and eat a more simple diet. We love this life and wouldn’t have it any other way.

Was it hard to go away from the trek most follow? Yes.

Do we constantly question ourselves and wonder if this is the way for us? Yes!

But for now, tiny living is working and we have a tribe that think like we do and that keeps us going on this crazy, adventurous path that we never could’ve guessed we be on!

I love that my kids can have the space and time freedom to explore. They have a love and respect for wildlife and creating their own adventures outside daily. They have an entrepreneurial spirit and are constantly trying to figure out how they can use their hands to create something new. From handmade bows and arrows to fishing lure making, or just plain digging a hole, they are truly in their element and using God’s gift of creation for us to enjoy. I have learned to learn through the eyes of a child.

When we first told our kids of our adventure my youngest said,

“We won’t have a backyard while we travel? Oh! I know! The whole world is our backyard!”

That brought tears to my eyes as I thought, Yes!

Yes, it is!



## **A NIGHT TO REMEMBER - QUIET TIMES** – by Marcy Lytle

Kids learn all sorts of things from parents. We teach them how to tie their shoelaces, how to brush their teeth well, and how to sort and put away toys. And hopefully, we spend time with them in devotionals, such as these we print each month. However, we can add to this teaching by showing them how to develop a personal quiet time with Him. More than ever, our kids need a firm foundation, a relationship with Him, and ears to begin to hear their Heavenly Father speak above all the noise.

So just how do we model that, and encourage that, from the youngest to the oldest in our house?

A good quiet time includes the following five components, either all each time, or at least part of these, as we sit still and get to know God, his character, his love, and his mercy.

Preparation: Carve out a time and space for quiet time for the family, and for each kid. It might be on their bed, a corner of the sofa, near a window, on Dad's chair, near the dog, or on the back porch. Give each one a personal space, and have one for the family as well. Spaces can be rotated each month! Keep this devotion as a guide (the books mentioned below are not endorsed by us, but rather suggested for you to research and try.) You may want to pick one of the five below for each night of the week, or just fit it to your own family's schedule and need.

**Reading** – Kids need to be read to or read the scriptures, to learn of their Father's character. Start with love. Start by telling your kids how you have experienced the love of the Father. Then read them John 3:16 and explain that there is no greater love than to lay down our lives for another, which is what Jesus did for us.

Consider *The Attributes of God for Kids* as a resource.

[https://www.amazon.com/Attributes-God-Kids-devotional-parents/dp/1976208114/ref=cm\\_cr\\_ar\\_p\\_d\\_product\\_top?ie=UTF8](https://www.amazon.com/Attributes-God-Kids-devotional-parents/dp/1976208114/ref=cm_cr_ar_p_d_product_top?ie=UTF8)

**Listening** – Kids need to know what God's voice sounds like. He will only instruct them to love and to think on good things. Any other voices need to be dismissed. Share with your kids a time when you heard the voice of God and what it was like. Stop and be still, and ask the kids to listen, and let them share. He can speak to them through nature, through a friend, and through His word.

Consider *Growing Up with God* for your older kids, as a resource.

[https://www.amazon.com/Growing-Up-God-Everyday-Adventures/dp/1947165461/ref=pd\\_lpo\\_14\\_t\\_0/137-2557384-0797714?encoding=UTF8&pd\\_rd\\_i=1947165461&pd\\_rd\\_r=cdad3e28-64ba-4181-9205-100e68728941&pd\\_rd\\_w=CqetF&pd\\_rd\\_wg=4TG5Y&pf\\_rd\\_p=7b36d496-f366-4631-94d3-61b87b52511b&pf\\_rd\\_r=4HGZ0B14PGHTVGM7AMKY&psc=1&refRID=4HGZ0B14PGHTVGM7AMKY](https://www.amazon.com/Growing-Up-God-Everyday-Adventures/dp/1947165461/ref=pd_lpo_14_t_0/137-2557384-0797714?encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=1947165461&pd_rd_r=cdad3e28-64ba-4181-9205-100e68728941&pd_rd_w=CqetF&pd_rd_wg=4TG5Y&pf_rd_p=7b36d496-f366-4631-94d3-61b87b52511b&pf_rd_r=4HGZ0B14PGHTVGM7AMKY&psc=1&refRID=4HGZ0B14PGHTVGM7AMKY)

**Praying** – As a kid, I learned to use my five fingers as a pattern for prayer – my thumb pointing at me reminded me to repent of wrongdoings, my pointer was to pray for those around me, middle finger being the biggest reminded me to pray for leaders, ring finger for family, and pinky for those in need. That about covered it! But prayer is so much more. It's certainly asking for things, but it includes giving thanks, and exalting God. Read The Lord's Prayer with your kids line by line, aloud, and give thanks. Repentance is a valuable piece of prayer, as well.

Consider *A Book of Prayers for Kids*, as a resource.

<https://www.amazon.com/Book-Prayers-Kids-ways-every/dp/099740633X>

**Worshiping** – Does your family worship together? Explain the value in lifting up the name of Jesus, praising His name aloud, singing together, dancing together, and all the things that worship includes. Then grab your instruments (hands, homemade, pots and pans, or recorders!) and sing and pray and dance together. Let the kids talk at the end, about their experience of worship.

Consider Spotify's Top Christian Kids Music, as a resource

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6kHYVFgRmNCBQasIYMWu1M>

**Journaling** – Let your kiddos make or pick out a journal all their own. Little ones can draw pictures. Older ones can write down thoughts and verses. Get your own journal. Write as a family. Spend time recording thoughts, prayers, answered prayers, questions, and blessings. Journaling unloads the mind, and serves as a great place to record God's mercy and grace. When our kids were small, we each had a spiral and drew a picture to go with a bible verse each night. I still have these!

Consider *A Child's Prayer Journal*, as a resource.

<https://www.amazon.com/Childs-Prayer-Journal-Kids-Mindfulness/dp/1977981208>

This month's devotional was a bit different, but we hope you will keep it as a resource for you and your family. Good habits start young. And the best habit to start is spending quiet time with him. It's never too late to begin...

## **An Adage a Day - Apples and Oranges-** by Carole Gilbert

Apples and oranges. Apples to oranges. Apples and oysters. Wait! What? Apples and oysters? This is how this idiom was first written in 1670 by John Ray in his *A Collection of English Proverbs*. This man was an English naturalist publishing works on the topics of botany, zoology, and natural theology. He was one of the first to study and classify the concept of species, which are collections or groupings of items having distinct and like qualities. This is where he came up with a lot of his comparisons and I am sure he was trying to make a point if he put apples against oysters.

John Ray spent a lot of time observing nature and the world around it. One of his many popular publishing's includes, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation* (1691), in which he confirms and gives facts from his observations that everything in creation is as the Bible states. He was from England and is often thought of as the father of natural history. Such an interesting guy!

Also interesting is how this idiom evolved and takes on a different version depending on where you live. It started as 'apples and oysters' in 1670 in England, then as 'apples to oranges,' aka 'apples and oranges,' starting in 1889. The French refer to 'apples and pears' while in Latin America they say, 'potatoes and sweet potatoes.' And the British English use the phrase 'chalk and cheese' for their comparisons. All of this is getting me in the mood for a summertime picnic, except for the chalk. But chalk does go along with summer too. Who does not enjoy sidewalk chalk art!

The meaning behind this idiom is that you cannot compare objects with no similarities or items of different species. That is where John Ray came up with apples and oysters. How can you begin to compare these two? You can't. And I love them both. They are different in every way but they both mean summer to me. Apples off the trees and fried oysters at the beach! So yummy! It is said, Summertime and July is "as American as apple pie." Now that's a good comparison!

We know apples and oranges cannot really be compared. They are both tastefully unique in their own way but are not alike. When we compare, we tend to confuse. How many of us considered whether to wear a mask or not to wear a mask these last few months, only to compare opinions by others and then become baffled by all the different responses. When we compare, we confuse ourselves, our family, and our friends. We are saying something, or someone is better or not better. Another way to look at masking or anything else is to remember we are all different and unique like the fruit, so to each his own.

As I researched this idiom, I found myself trying to think of the things I compare. When I buy fruit, I do compare apples to apples and oranges to oranges. I compare different colors and prints against my skin when I am shopping. I compare which flowers to buy, which paint color to use. I would probably compare two peas in a pod if I had the mentality to observe things in

nature like John Ray. I did not realize how much I compared. I do hope I do not compare people.

I then wondered what God says about comparing. The Bible is filled with comparisons, but those comparisons are fitting and used for description.

Proverbs 25:11 says,

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.”

And one of my favorites is Matthew 6:26-27,

“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

In other words, it is important to know if the things we are comparing have the same functions, are like items, are the same in nature, and that they are useful for further discussion. Then they are comparable. They are not like apples and oranges.



YOU

## **Strengthening Your Core – 1000s Elsewhere – by Marcy Lytle**

*Better is one day in your courts than thousands elsewhere...Psalm 84:10*

I've sang those words, read them multiple times, and always associated them with being in a worship setting with lots of people...like church. And I'm sure that's a good place to be. But recently, this verse popped up in my head in a whole new light.

I'm a person with a mind that races. It's always active, hardly ever rests, and therefore I accomplish a lot...and also become weary a lot. An active mind is good and healthy in some respects, but it can operate on overload and kill a day's joy in another.

Lately, my mind has been full and occupied with thoughts about the virus, the protesting, the injustice in the world, and the future of friendships, relationships, schools, churches, and you name it – I've thought about it. It's not that thinking about all of that can do anything constructive, but it's just that my mind runs like a ticker tape, on a never ending spool...

Then one afternoon, this verse emerged in my memory.

One day in his courts is better than a thousand days outside of his courts.

Just where are his courts? That's the question, and here's the answer:

In Chapter 84, we read that his dwelling place is lovely...these courts of the Lord. It's where birds can have their young without fear of an enemy swooping to steal and take away. It's near Him, it's His house, and it's where praises are being poured out. His courts are where people are strengthened, over and over again, and prayers are going up constantly.

In other words, *these courts* are His presence.

It's better to experience one day in his presence than thousands of days outside it.

Like a lightbulb, my mind stopped ticking. If I could slow down and just choose one thought of praise to my Father, rather than 1000 thoughts of the "what-ifs" and "oh-mys," I just might find myself in a better frame of mind and soul.

In verse 11 we are reminded that God is a sun and shield, and he withholds nothing from those who walk with him blameless, trusting in Him.

When my mind steps out of the courts of praise and into the land of a thousand laments, I find myself drowning. I fail to see His protection for me and my house, I begin to grow weary and weak, and prayers are suppressed and replaced with complaints.

And I forget...that one day in his presence...praising Him...is better than all the thoughts I can worry about or swim in, in a single day.

Why do I constantly wander in the forest of my mind through scary passageways, among thorny limbs, and among dark paths...when there's an oasis in the clearing calling my name to come and drink.

I want to always choose better.

Did you know there's another verse that says one can put 1000 to flight? Yeah, I'm not sure it refers to this example, but I'm thinking one good thought of praise to Him can put my 1000 bad thoughts to flight until they vanish.

Thank you, God, for your Word and your Truth.

## **Life Right Now – No Matter What – by Bethany Gomez**

My response to 2020 has become, “Jesus come!” I’m not necessarily saying come back, (although that would be fine with me) but just come and be in the midst of these storms we are in, or are facing.

*They say* to write what you know. I know this. My heart is breaking over the deep rooted racism and hate still embedded in this country. It is breaking for the injustices occurring in the Black community. It is breaking for my Black friends and family, including my sister-in-law, my niece, and nephew that have grown up and are growing up in a world where they are treated differently because of the color of their skin.

First, I want to apologize for being fairly silent on this matter. My silence is not because I don’t care. I care so deeply that I first wanted to work on remedying my ignorance about the presence of racism still in our country. I’m half white, but I look Hispanic. I was raised in a predominantly white environment, but I was also raised to love and treat everyone equally. I know now that being a person that doesn’t see color is a start, but, that is not enough.

One day, I asked my dad, “What can we do?” He reminded me that as Christians, as believers in Jesus Christ, we have to approach this differently. One of his past jobs was a corrections officer, so he understands much more than I do what is going on when it comes to racism, especially in the police system. He also has a heart for the lost and a good deal of wisdom that has come from walking with God for so many years. He told me that the only thing that can bring about change is the *transformative love of God*.

It is all about the heart.

We know as believers that there is an enemy bigger than racism, an enemy that perpetuates it, and his name is Satan. The Bible says,

“The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy.

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

John 10:10

My dad continued with saying that we are first and foremost called to live for the Kingdom, not the world. This is not our home. God calls us to,

“Be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,  
so that you may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Romans 12:2

God doesn’t want any of His children to die, but to repent and be saved through His son, Jesus, so that we can live with Him in Heaven for eternity. We are called as believers to spread this good news to the world. I believe the more and more hearts that are turned toward Jesus, the more we will see a change in how people of color are treated. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

He told the parable of the Good Samaritan to give us a picture of how to love our neighbor. I’ve heard this parable before so many times, but now it has a whole other meaning. I want to be like the Good Samaritan. When I see my Black brothers and sisters hurting or in pain, I don’t want to walk by like the priest and Levite did; I want to rush to their defense and help heal their wounds.



For the little bit that I might experience racism based off of my skin color or my Mexican sounding last name, Black lives experience it exponentially more, so I will do my best to oppose racism in all its ugly forms. Among other things, I will continue to educate myself, I will follow more Black men and women of God on my social media, I will listen and learn and unlearn, I will petition for justice. I will pray for wisdom and discernment; but above all else, I will keep on sharing the love of God and the good news of the Gospel.

There was a powerful question that I came across that I thought was very eye opening. It was posed by a young, Black believer. He had a very similar response that my dad had. He posed this question at the end of his video message.

“Will you defy God to appease the world or will you defy the world to serve God?”

I choose to serve God, no matter what the world says.

## **Life in a Nutshell - Aloha to Fear – by Jill Montz**

This past week my Facebook Memories have been filled with pictures, videos, and stories from the trip to Hawaii my daughter, Dotty, and I took last year. I know it is cliché to say but it truly was the trip of a lifetime. While I'm not necessarily a "beach person" (sea, salt, and sweat really aren't my thing...I am a mountain girl at heart), I'm definitely a "Hawaii person." We stayed on the island of O'ahu and it was breathtakingly beautiful.

The temperature was perfect, all the beaches were postcard worthy, the people were kind and gracious (and loved Texans), the food was fresh and delicious, and don't even get me started on the flowers...a gardener's paradise for sure! I think I took more pictures of floral beauties than I did of Dotty, but sometimes I took pictures of my little beauty standing next to the floral ones so it wasn't a total mom fail.

I seriously didn't want to leave and more than once perused Zillow listings for possible home and store locations. I mean if we ever expanded the Pecan Shed I think Hawaii would be a great place to put in a new store. I have a hunch the pecan could give the macadamia nut a run for its money. At least I am willing to move there and give it a try!

Hawaii was everything I ever dreamed it would be and more. I would hop on a plane tomorrow and go back if I could. Now before you start thinking I am fishing for the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce to book me a free trip (I wouldn't turn one down!) I will say Hawaii holds a special place in my heart for many reasons, but perhaps the greatest one of all is because of my grandmother.

Grandma went to 49 of the 50 United States before she passed in February of 1995. Hawaii was the only state she never visited. As a young girl, I loved to hear all her stories about the places she saw and the people she met. I vowed to her way back then I would go to Hawaii myself someday as a way to honor her. *A little back story is needed here.* My grandma was my favorite person on this planet. While I have often wished she could have met Dotty, I'm not sure my heart would've been able to hold loving them both at the same time. I still miss her to this day and think of her often.

Grandma was old school. She was hard core Church of Christ, never wore pants, cooked and baked better than any Food Network personality, and loved me like no other person ever has or probably ever will. She was the mom of three boys. She had four grandsons and (you guessed it) ONE granddaughter (see why I was so treasured!) She put me in dresses with layers upon layers of petticoats and let me "twirl" for her until I got dizzy or until we were both pleased with how the skirt fluttered out around me. She rolled my long hair in pink sponge rollers every Saturday night for church the next day and she bought me any doll I ever looked twice at in a department store. (Side note: To date she now has five great granddaughters. I can't help but think she has been hollering to Jesus "more girls...more girls" every chance she gets!)

My grandma also never learned to swim and she always claimed it was the reason she never went to Hawaii. Grandma would tell me, "If the plane crashed while over the open water I wouldn't be able to swim to safety." I would reply, "If the plane crashed you might have bigger issues than not being able to swim!" Her fear of water kept her from experiencing the awesome beauty of Hawaii (and other places that require trips across an ocean). I know she would have loved the flowers, the food, the history, and the people. Although I'm not sure how she would have liked a luau. I am willing to bet she would've grabbed a tan elbow or two and suggested

they might get bigger coconuts or a fuller grass skirt. Heaven knows she commented on every swim suit I ever owned past the age of ten.

I never really understood Grandma's fear of water. Probably because I've been swimming since before I can remember. I also don't understand some of my friends' fear of flying, but then again I boarded my first plane at the age of seven and I don't enjoy long road trips.

The fact that Grandma never made it to all 50 states probably bothered me more than it bothered her. But I often wonder if she did regret not going. For this reason (and others) I pushed Dotty to do many things very young. I wanted her to try new adventures before she learned to be scared of them. Little did I realize my child is scared of very little and thus doesn't need my pushing. This trait alone has given me more than a few grey hairs already.

Before the age of four, Dotty had flown on a plane, was taking gymnastics, was enrolled in swim lessons, and was playing team sports. Before the age of eight, she had been on any roller coaster ride she was tall enough to get on, had been snow skiing and zip lining, spent several sunny days being whipped around the lake on a tube (constantly asking to go faster), had been hunting, and had been put on many stages to sing, dance, and act. Now as she finishes up the age of twelve, she has been on roller coasters on every coast and many in between, loves to practice driving (still wants to go fast), never shies away from any animal be it a kangaroo, stray dog, dolphin, giraffe, or anything else someone will let her feed or pet or hug on, still loves any stage (and the spotlight), tries to sign us up for every church mission trip regardless of where they are headed, will try just about any food you set in front of her, and can't wait to go off to college someday.

I have zero doubts these adventures had way less to do with me pushing her to try new things and are all about the adventurous nature God Himself gave my sweet girl. But I never doubt kids are more fearless when mommas are standing close by to catch them (or to cringe and have an icepack handy and the local ER on speed dial).

All this to say (God bless your heart if you are still reading this) that I never want Dotty to fear things so much she misses out on wonderful opportunities and memories that will last a lifetime. You might be asking, does she get her fearless nature from me? That's a hard no. I have absolutely no plans of skydiving, bungee jumping, swimming with sharks, owning any animal other than a dog or cat, snowboarding, singing on Broadway, studying anything that has bodily fluids, water skiing, or moving far, far (did I mention far) away. Dotty wants to do all this and more!

But these fears pale in comparison to some others I have:

I fear things like letting myself be vulnerable.

I fear failure...as a parent, business leader, and just as a person in general.

I fear getting hurt emotionally or mentally.

I fear having regrets.

I fear letting go of control.

I fear God won't answer my prayers.

I fear God WILL answer my prayers.

I fear opening myself up to the Will of God. (What if He wants me to take a mission trip to some place without AC, clean running water, or Dr. Pepper?)

I fear stepping out of my comfort zone. (Clearly. See the point above.)

I fear being great because with greatness comes scrutiny, criticism, and all kinds of haters. (You just sang that Taylor Swift song didn't you?)

I fear walking down the street and asking my neighbors if I can pray for them. (What if they ask me a Bible question I don't know the answer to or what if they ask me to pray about some really hard issue I might not have the words for?)

I fear a lot of things Xanax and meditation would have a hard time dealing with.

I know fear is normal and serves in many cases to keep us from harm. My fear of dying in a tornado caused me to buy a house with a storm closet built in. My fear of skin cancer causes me to put on sunscreen. My fear of ridicule from my preteen causes me to bypass all the pictures of ladies with bangs on Pinterest the night before a haircut. These are all good forms of fear. However, fear can hinder us. While some great programs, classes, groups, techniques, tricks, and drugs have been created to help people overcome their fears, some fears just don't go away. I am certain even if my parents had enrolled me in Toastmasters by the age of six I would still, 34 years later, be petrified to stand in front of a group to speak (nothing against Toastmasters. I know several people who have grown greatly with the program. I am just TERRIFIED of public speaking. Like check my blood pressure I could very well stroke out kind of terrified.)

Fear is nothing new under the sun. In the Bible, the phrases such as "fear not" or "do not be afraid" are used many times. Often these were used before a person was called to do something they more than likely didn't want to do or didn't think they could do. (Anybody just picture poor little Mary standing before an angel hearing she was going to be the mom to the next king?) God knew they felt this way. Over and over again God reminds us He is with us and with Him all things are possible. On our own we can't face down hungry lions, corrupt rulers on a power trip, giants with an even bigger ego, Red (green or blue) Seas, floods, famine, fortified cities, or friends who turn out to be foes. On our own we can't face losing a job, a sick child, the death of a loved one, cancer, natural disasters, social unrest, and Satan himself. But with God...we can face anything.

I still have less than zero plans to swim with sharks or bungee jump. Hot air balloon rides and dating again are on the *maybe* list. Just typing the words "public speaking" makes my stomach flip upside down. Thinking about raising a teenager and someday letting her go off into the world makes public speaking look easy. A mission trip someday (at least one with the hopes of running water...AC and Dr. Pepper are negotiable) is a definite possibility. A trip back to Hawaii is a must.

In Hawaiian *Aloha* is used as a greeting and when parting. *Mahalo* is used to express gratitude.

In life fear will come and go and I am grateful for the lessons it will teach me and the blessed assurance and peace it will cause me to seek in God alone. Mahalo, for reading this article to the end.

## Healthy Habits – Mind over Matter – by Marcy Lytle

We all know that reading our bibles and praying, thinking on good things, and staying positive are healthy and wise when it comes to keeping our minds occupied and well. And we need to remind ourselves of this often. However, there are lots of little practical things that can help our minds rest, stay at ease, and close in peace at the end of the day as well...

1. Do something with a child. Paint her toenails, play with paper dolls, color with him, or toss a ball. This detangles a cluttered mind.
2. Bake bread. Reading a recipe, digging our hands into dough, kneading and forming and waiting and smelling...it's all good.
3. Leave the house. Staying in all day wearies the mind. Drive out in the country, or to another neighborhood, and observe beauty in creation and in your neighbor. This makes your mind smile.
4. Close your eyes. It might be to take a nap, but it could be to just hear the birds sing or wind in the trees. But often, we don't hear these things unless our eyes are closed. Hearing heals the mind.
5. Phone a friend. Don't sit and stew and wait and wonder why she isn't calling. Call her. Don't complain or gossip. Just encourage her. He says he will refresh you when you refresh others.
6. Take off your shoes. Sit down, remove your footwear, put up your feet – against something cool – and rest. Tired feet make tired minds.
7. Exercise. This is always touted as being good for your body, but it's good for your mind, too. Walking is the simplest exercise there is, so walk. Even if it's hot – walk and carry a spray bottle and water – but walk.
8. Create. Maybe you don't consider yourself creative, or maybe you do but never have time to do the "big projects." Try creating a new outfit from your closet, rearranging a shelf, sketching a scene, or painting a pot. Little creations make big satisfactions.
9. Make a flavored drink or water. Google beverage recipes and try a new one. Make it cold, over ice, add a straw and serve it in a favorite glass. And sip...ever so slowly.
10. Empty the bowl. By this, I mean get rid of the thoughts that clutter. Write them down and throw them away. Visualize placing them in a box and handing them over. Whatever emptying looks like...do that.
11. Hand-water your yard. My dad has always used the hose to water, and he looks so peaceful doing it. Watching the water as it falls on dry ground, and seeing grass literally perk up beneath it, is amazing and mind-blowing. And healing.
12. Vacate. Leave town, even if places aren't open, hotels are scary to stay in, or money is tight. Don't wait until you have funds. Pack up snacks and books and blankets, and leave town for the day...by a creek...to a town square...in a park...but away from familiar surroundings.

Print out this list and hang it where you can choose one thing a week to do, even one a day, so that your mind stays healthy and sane and free and alive. Mediate on his words, love others,

and pray always. But get up and do something physical to affect that mind of yours, so that it functions well and at peace, uncluttered and free.

## **Created for Life - Greed's Opposite Spirit** – by Ginny Hurley

Listening to the quiet sounds of the night, I began to see a picture of a prevalent noise pervading our atmosphere. A greedy little gnome came to mind, screeching and bellowing out the words, "More, more, more!" I then looked up the definition of greed and it simply said, 'inner emptiness, lack of control, need to have everything, predatory, self absorbed.'

As I asked the Lord why I was sensing this spirit, I felt His answer to be profound. It seemed that greed is hidden behind every evil thing. From corona to politics, business and education, greed seems to raise its head and want more. The desire for power creeps into aspects of life in the arena of marriage, religion, politics, relationships, and on and on. Even the desire for power is derived from greed in needing to have control over someone or something to gain more for self.

So whatever the opposite of greed is, that's what I want!

Is it generosity? Could it be humility? Maybe thankfulness?

*Ephesians 4:2*

*"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."*

*James 4:6*

*"He gives us more grace. That is why scripture says, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.'"*

*Luke 14:11*

*"For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

Verses tumble on about fearing the Lord, listening to wise counsel, honoring others above self, being thankful, giving with a happy heart, and loving unconditionally. These words give me hope that a greedy world system has come to its end. Greed has been conquered by the love of our God who came to transform our world into His original creation, with freedom and joy.

*Isaiah 66:2 (Passion)*

*"But there is one My eyes are drawn to: the humble one, the tender one, the trembling one who lives in awe of all I say."*

My soul finds great rest in these words above. I picture children laughing and dogs leaping around them. I am made whole with purity's joy. I am hopeful for change as God invades these thrones of greed, turning the wisdom of this world into truths that confound that world with humility.



MARRIAGE



## **In This Together – The Spark** – by Bekah Holland

“So it’s not gonna be easy. It’s going to be really hard; we’re gonna have to work at this every day, but I want to do that with you. I want all of you, forever, every day. You and me....every day.”

Nicholas Sparks

Now I know I normally save my little blurb or quote for the end of my articles. But sometimes, especially when you’re well past your editor’s cut off and you’ve already scrapped two pathetic attempts, mixing things up just a little might just push you forward and put the words on the paper that make a little sense. *I hope*. So here are my musings for today. Buckle up.

If I am going to be completely honest, some days, being married is hard. Most days are great, and lots of days are comfortable and comforting. But some days....some days are awful. I always thought that this was something that I had to hide. I grew up never seeing my parents disagree. I never saw my friends’ parents argue. Even as an adult, I didn’t know that my friends who were in long term relationships had days when they’ve considered making a run for it. I guess it’s one of those things like the dishes in the sink and laundry piles. You want to sweep it under a rug to project a pretty picture to the outside world. I get it. I feel you. And just in case there is any question here, I’m not talking about dangerous and/or abusive situations. *(If you are in one of those, you’ve got my FB info right here, so send me a message and we’ll get you to a safe space. You are not alone. You are enough. You are valuable. Period.)*

What I am talking about are two humans, trying to figure out how to live together in wedded bliss while simultaneously trying not to lose their minds. We’re imperfect. We’re selfish. We’re annoying...all of us. My husband and I have experienced the gauntlet of issues in our 15 years together and with our extended families and friends. We’ve been through loss and grief, joy, health fears, births and deaths, broken bodies, broken hearts and broken minds. We’ve been through some of the highest of highs and what felt like the lowest of lows. And most of the time, we have been able to weather these things together, he and I against the world.

*However, there are other days.*

There are days where we’ve let little annoyances fester unspoken. Ones that started as basically nothing, but over time, built into a big something. And once the avalanche starts, it’s can leave a pretty rapid path of destruction in its wake. We all have those stories. Something related to the human condition, I guess.

Now, we all know how dumb we are in the early stages of a relationship. Everything is so new and squeaky clean. It’s full of romance and butterflies, our brains are flooded with dopamine, and we can’t imagine being anything but blissfully in love with this beautiful person we’ve chosen. Fast forward a few years....add in job stress, money stress, kids stress (whether that’s having them or not having them, wanting them or not), social injustice, mental health struggles and then wrap it all up in a nice pretty global pandemic bow, and we have yourselves a recipe for meltdown. One day, we’re daydreaming of walking down the aisle to Canon in D or the ever trendy Etta James, then we blink and suddenly find ourselves lying in bed, listening to the brain rattling snores coming from this person we’ve have pledged our life to, wondering if we can claim an insanity defense if we were to actually smother our partner with a pillow. And to top it

off, we can't even remember the last time we shaved our legs, much less felt those same goosebumps we did after our first date. It happens to the best of us.

Even the couples that look like they have this special secret ingredient that the rest of us mortals long to have....yeah, you know the ones. I promise you that if they were honest, they could recount stories of times when they were far from picture perfect. It's because while God created us for connection and communion, we are also still messy and imperfect even without adding an extra set of baggage to the mix.

But what makes us keep going? Why would we keep drudging through the bad days when we don't feel at all "in love?"

*One reason.*

My mom always told me that love is a choice. I didn't really understand this until I'd been married for more than five minutes, but there are days where we have to work REALLY hard at our marriage. I personally blame the entire rom-com movie industry, Christian "romance" novels and Disney princesses. They paint this easy, gentle, fun loving picture that just sets us up for the letdown of unrealistic expectations. If you want the truth, I was so unprepared for what marriage was going to be. I had zero idea how to deal with conflict, misunderstandings, when to speak up and when to shut up. I thought it was supposed to be easy. But it wasn't. Some days it still isn't. But the thing that has given us reason to push forward with each other instead of running far, far away is the fact that even though he still gives me the shivers, we are friends before we are lovers.

My husband and I met in our early 20's at an airport in New Jersey. After I finished being grumpy about getting stuck alone in Newark after dark, we became friends. We would banter back and forth, arguing over football, and talking about our favorite TV shows. He'll tell you that he knew I was special from the moment he met me. I'll say he thought my spice girl hair-do and flippant sarcastic attitude were intriguing, because he couldn't just woo me with his long eyelashes and big brown eyes. We'll agree to disagree, but either way, he was right (do NOT tell him I said that! He's reached his "I'm right" quotient for the month). We WERE special. And for years after that meeting, we would talk on the phone, picking up every silly conversation wherever we had left off.

Those years getting to know each other from a distance (Louisiana to Lubbock) without any other expectations really helped to build our foundation more in friendship than hormones. But our friendship has carried us through the dumpster fire portions of marriage. And there have been some. We've gone through times that neither one of us could see a way out. We were tired. We were hurting. We were broken, both as individuals and as a couple. We did not feel "in love." Sometimes we didn't even feel "in like."

Choosing to love each other - even when we didn't like each other - saved us more than once or twice. As well as choosing to fight even when we wanted to quit saved us again. Not because we necessarily wanted to all the time, but more because...

*We were invested in our friendship.*

So when things get mundane or hard or busy, remember the person who made you laugh too loud in the middle of a fancy dinner, or left your favorite candy on your nightstand after a tough day at work. Remember the person who pushed you to stand up for yourself when you forgot

how to and be proud of who you were and are and will someday be. Find him/her again. And even more importantly, be that person again.

And when we do, and the friendship that holds it all together remains, we can find the spark that's been hiding in the dark, waiting to come to life.

## **Date Night Fun – Jump In - by Marcy Lytle**

As time goes on and we're still cautious in our socializing, it's hard to think of dates where there aren't crowds or viruses lurking at every table, right? Or maybe you're already out and could care less; you're ready to be back at life. What's important is that we don't let date night slip away, just because date places are few and far between! Just like when we jump into the deep end of a pool on a hot summer day, we can totally jump into fun with our dates this month of July...no matter what is going on in the world.

Dinner theater for two – Pull out the card table and set it right in front of your television and decorate it for two – with whatever you have on hand – to make it romantic! Maybe pick a few flowers and place them in a vase, add a candle, set out placemats and fun plates (you can even use colorful paper ones!), and then serve your food while you pick a movie to enjoy. We've enjoyed the Hallmark mysteries just because they're light and not heavy, in this heavy-filled world right now. The food doesn't have to be fancy, just the setting...with the lights down low...in a dinner theater you've created all your own.

Adventure for a day – Get out a paper map (or look online) and choose one or two towns within two hours of your home, google what there is to do and eat and see there, and GO. Pack up a few water bottles, include your walking shoes (because you'll see a pretty park), take a magazine or puzzle book (because you'll want to linger in a quiet spot in a small town), and some cash for junking. Be on the lookout for cool old buildings, junk shops, eateries that have good reviews, and hidden treasures. You'll come home happy and full.

Shopping for Christmas – Yes, I'm putting it out there. Shopping for others and with a purpose is fun for both, with list in hand. Wear something red or green, make a list of someone to bless this Christmas (or for Christmas in July!), decide on your budget, and go. Find great sales, and start buying now. You could just purchase stocking presents for fun, or you could pick a friend and purchase a surprise and leave it on his/her porch at the end of the date. Enjoy something red and green, like watermelon!

Remodeling an Area – How can this be a date, you ask? It can be SO FUN. Pick an area of the house. We recently picked the front area of our kitchen by two large windows. We decided to make it an office area, so we shopped for furniture, designed the look we wanted, and ordered. It's a blast! It doesn't have to be big. Maybe he has a messy desk, and you have a messy shelf, and both are driving you crazy. Sit down and google inspiration (save copies of how you want these areas to look) and then order or go out and get a few organizers, and start – doing it together! Enjoy an ice cream float when you're done, then go back home and admire.

Conversations by Water – Take your lawn chairs; meet another couple under a shady tree near water...and converse. Bring a picnic and eat, and get to know each other. Ask questions, and listen to their answers. Don't discuss the state of the world, the pandemic or anything negative. Speak life to each other and encourage and pray. Then give thanks. We often do these things alone, but with another couple can be life-giving to both! Stay until the sun sets and breathe in deep as you are reminded with your friends of His faithfulness to all...as you gaze up and see the stars march across the sky in the dark.



## **After 40 Years – Pat Phrases** – by Marcy Lytle

When you've been married for decades, you can almost finish each other's sentences. You know what the other one likes/dislikes, you recognize his/her moods, and just know each other pretty darn well. And then...there are the other things that occur...like phrases we become accustomed to saying and hearing. All of them are not sweet...at all. And I don't think it's ever too late to take note of what we say and change it, because some habits aren't so good to fall into, in a marriage.

Sometimes, especially when I'm tired, I hear myself saying a few pat phrases, things I say quite often, that when I think about it – they aren't so nice. And then I listen, and I hear him say the same ones! One of us starts a bad habit, and the other picks it up, and pretty soon those phrases are normality, but they're not uplifting or encouraging one bit.

Here are a few I've noticed that come out of my mouth that I'm trying to change:

**“You weren't listening”** – Maybe I say something and an hour later he comes in the room and asks me about the very thing I told him earlier. That pat phrase is the first thing out of my mouth. And maybe sometimes he isn't listening, but there are often times I think I've told him and I haven't. And other times I tell him when I know he's busy and preoccupied, instead of stopping and waiting until I have his full attention. When I say this pat phrase I'm judging him as being inattentive, and that puts him on the defensive. Never a good place to be!

**“What in the world”** – I walk into the room and see him doing something I'd rather him not do, or he tells me something I think is absurd and silly, and instead of responding with a nice affirmation...this pat phrase pops up. I'm basically saying I think what he's telling me or what he's doing is stupid. Only I didn't use the word “stupid.” It's all there though, behind my words, that judgmental spirit.

**“What do you mean?”** – He says something I disagree with. And sometimes I don't really disagree, I'm just disagreeable! Maybe he states a fact or a statistic and doesn't get it quite right. Or he gives his opinion about a news story or an event, to which I rear up and make him feel “less than” because he didn't fully understand it like I did. Wow, how self-absorbed of me!

**“Uhghhgh”** – I wasn't sure how to spell this sound that comes out of both of our mouths when we say no discernable words but we utter this sound of disapproval. Maybe I hand him the remote and he has forgotten again how to exit Netflix, or he's told me something (I wasn't listening because I didn't care) and I tell him he didn't ever tell me. You know those times...when he acts or does or missteps and we just roll our eyes and grunt.

**“What's wrong with you?”** – This might be the worst of all, when I attack his character. I'm saying I'm right, he's wrong, and even more than that – he's rotten to the core. This phrase is like lighting a stick of dynamite, because there's sure to be an explosion that follows. Anytime I come out with a phrase that implies that sort of attitude, I feel bad. And yet, sometimes it happens.

We all find ourselves in ruts of rash phrases that if said too often then become a pattern. And I personally realize it when I hear both of us do the same thing. We've fallen into a pattern of pat responses, the same ones over and over again, and it almost always causes frustration between us.

There's never a time when we say we're too old to relearn, repent, and reestablish good practices in relationships, especially with him. I've found that those phrases slip out when I'm just too lazy to stop and think, pray for self-control, and walk away before I speak.

Reading self-help books and books on marriage and attending seminars are all good things for relationships, but until we're aware of the heart behind the hate that spews out, we don't really change.

I'm working on listening to myself and changing my words.

Words are powerful. They can shape a child. And they can hurt, or bless, a husband.



ENCOURAGEMENT



## **Simple Truths - Gracefully Broken** – by Erica Simmons

If you are a regular reader of this column you already know that for last few months I have been on a journey that has been difficult. If you are a first time reader or occasionally a reader, you know now. I am going to take a few months away to find a way to press into God and heal, but I wanted to share a few things that have happened and let you know where I am currently.

A couple years ago, I heard about a new journal writing of Mother Theresa that had been discovered. The big news about the discovery was the fact that on several occasions she expressed doubt about her faith. She was such an iconic and faithful follower that the revelation caused quite a stir. I am not Mother Theresa by any means, but I too have found myself in the midst of the biggest battle of my faith that I have ever encountered. What is ironic about it is that a few years ago I faced what I still consider the hardest time of my life, yet through it all my faith was strong and was the foundation upon which I firmly stood – and both got me through. So why is this situation different? I ask myself that question and sometimes I realize that it isn't. I just need to make the decision to stand on God's truth, to accept it, and quit looking at my circumstances and focus on who God is. Then there are times that the overwhelming emotions challenge what I have for all my life believed and trusted. As I have struggled, I am amazed at how God simply refuses to let me go. So, I have some healing to do. But before I take a break, I want to share three experiences, *God moments*, that have inspired me.

**First**, I shared in one of my earlier articles about a year or so ago about how a fellow church member shared how her signature line on her email account was "In Him." I was so inspired I decided to add it to my email, too. So for more than a year, anyone who gets an email from me knows I am boldly declaring my allegiance to my Heavenly Father. A few weeks ago, I got a call from my supervisor; she is an executive director for the school district. She called to tell me how she sees me living my life and this has inspired her. She shared how she was struggling aligning her faith with some of the work she was taking part in, and so much more. The important thing is not what we discussed, but the timing of the call. As I struggled, God wanted me to know that my sacrifices for Him make a difference, they have an impact. *I am just NOW understanding* the importance of that last statement, because part of the problem has been my questioning and wondering if choosing to live a life for Him even makes a difference. I was thinking from the standpoint of being a parent, but what we do for Him is so much bigger than our children.

**The second thing** I want to share is title and subject of a sermon my pastor preached last week. The title of the sermon was "The Truth," but the part of the message that stood out to me was the question, "What happens when you base truth on your own understanding?" That is so powerful, because the heart of the issue that has lead me to question my faith is indeed due to leaning on my own understanding and erroneously thinking that it was God's truth. I am aware of this, which brings me to the last thing I want to share.

**A third thought...** I have a 10,000 gallon above ground pool in my back yard. I have learned the hard way how to take care of it and keep the water clear. The flip side is that I know what happens when I don't do what I need to do and the water can go from clear and pretty to bad, so quickly. So it will come as no surprise that I let the pool get out of hand during this time and it developed a pretty bad algae problem. I went through the process and just about had it clear, when things turned bad again in a matter of days. I made the rare decision to just drain the pool and refill. It took me a couple days to drain it and then we got in and scrubbed and vacuumed out all the algae. That is where I am right now. I have had too much of my own expectations in God's truth, and I've had to be completely emptied of my own understanding. I am now empty and going through the process of being scrubbed down, so I can be refilled with God's PURE truth. I have been *gracefully broken*. It just hurts way more than I thought it would, and because I have spent so much time focused on the pain, hurt and disappointment of everything, I have allowed the enemy to attack me and challenge my faith in ways I would have NEVER thought possible.

I have known for a while know that I am standing at a major crossroad of my life of faith. I am tired and am weary and I want to quit. The funny thing is I will not actually live my life any differently. I have no desire to bring into my life anything outside those things God has over the years shown me that I should not have in it as a Christian. So I will say good-bye for a bit as I allow God to do His work, because I know there is no other life for me. I just need to take time to be with Him with no other outside obligations weighing me down. I need to allow Him to not only fill me with His truth, but lead me to who He needs me to be for Him - going forward. If all goes well, He will have lots for me to share with you when I get back in a few months. As I close, I have to once again share the scripture that has gotten me through my fair share of tough spots:

Romans 8:28

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,*

*who have been called according to his purpose.*

I love Him, but most importantly He loves me. What a simple truth.

## Firmly Planted - The Man – by Dina Cavazos

---

Unrest is here, reminiscent of the '60's when protests about Vietnam and civil rights rocked the world. Change happened as a result, but it wasn't enough; and it will never be enough until it is Complete. We don't know when that will be. In the meantime—the present NOW—I'm looking up, the only solid direction, and listening for the voice that centers me when things are swirling around.

Just last night I came upon a poem called *The Child*, written by Ingrid Jonker, a South African poet and human rights advocate. It was read by Nelson Mandela at his inauguration speech. To me, it expresses far more than the words actually say...the beauty of poetry. It inspired me to write *The Man*.

I offer it with prayers that it speaks a word from above to you.

The Man

The man isn't dead.

He cries out in through voices heard in the land;

He cries out to God, the one who defends.

The man isn't dead, through tears and wounds and pain;

He's alive in the breath of those living in shame.

The man isn't dead.

In Staten Island and Fergusen, Dallas and St. Paul,

In Chicago and Cleveland—his blood runs in the streets.

Young men, old men, woman and child,

Bend over in insult and anger and fear.

The man isn't dead beneath the knee bent in triumph--

It will collapse; it will break, all the way to the ground.

The knee bent in sorrow is strangely profound;

The knee bent in humility takes the prize...

It will rise.

The man isn't dead.

Minneapolis and Baton Rouge, Louisville and Atlanta,

Your legacy pulses with blood and breath still alive--

A surgery of steady purpose,

To crack hearts and open eyes.

The man isn't dead.

He sings in chorus with others,

Hoarse with weariness and waiting

For my blood and breath

To come alive, come alive.

## **Rooted in Love - Purpose In Pain – by Kaelin Scott**

Miscarriage isn't something people generally like to talk about. Many couples face it alone, suffering silently while no one else has any idea of their pain. It's a tough subject, but I don't think there should be any shame in bringing it out into the open. We are meant to help carry one another's burdens, and sometimes healing comes through sharing our pain.

I never knew that one in four pregnancies ends in miscarriage, until I became one of those statistics myself. When my daughter was a year and a half old, I lost my second child at seven weeks. Add onto that a somewhat traumatic emergency room experience, and my husband and I were both pretty shaken up and exhausted. To sum it up, we were devastated, as anybody would be. But we recognized that there are two reactions to trials – to become angry and distant from God, or to draw near to Him and trust. We both agreed on the second option; we chose to praise God in the storm.

Making that choice did not magically take away our pain, nor did it suddenly erase our sadness. But it did give us hope, because we knew that God was in control and that we didn't have to face it alone. We trusted His plan, even though it hurt, and we knew we could grow through the trial. Let me tell you, it would have been so easy to get mad at God and blame Him for my suffering. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't tempted to do just that. But worship would be meaningless if I only offered it during happy times. So, painful as it was, I decided to believe and actively remind myself that God is good ALL the time, even when life isn't. His plan is perfect, no matter what. In choosing to believe this, although my heart was absolutely broken, I was able to experience joy and hope and peace.

Sometimes God allows things to happen in our lives that don't make sense and maybe never will. But I believe the words of Romans 8:28.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him,  
who have been called according to His purpose.”

Sisters, there is purpose in our pain. We may not ever understand it here on earth, but our job is to trust, not understand. Whatever you are facing today, remember that God is bigger. Have faith that Jesus can calm the storm and, until He does, cling to Him and dwell on His goodness. You are never alone. He is with you through it all, and He knows how much it hurts. Give it to Him and believe that He can turn your mourning into joy. He can make beauty from ashes, but His timing is not always the same as ours. Wait on Him and know that He loves you and has a plan for you.

I am still in awe of His love for me, and so very grateful for the rainbow to our storm. Less than a year after our miscarriage, we were blessed with a happy, healthy baby boy (who is now an energetic toddler). I still don't know why things happened the way they did, but I can see the fingerprints of God all over our story. And I promise that they are all over yours too.

## **Unearthly Thing - “Consider the Ravens...” – by Angela Dolbear**

Occasionally, words and phrases I hear and read seem to be on repeat. They show up in different places, or teachings I hear. Coincidence? I think not. I try to pay attention when this happens. It's usually means God is trying to get my attention, to teach me what I need to learn.

Ravens are the current topic on loop. Not the professional football team from Baltimore, of course. Sports have little to no bearing on my world. Ravens as in Edgar Allen Poe's famous poem, and various ominous gothic decorations (my personal favorite!).

“Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!” Jesus said, in [Luke 12:24](#).

The whole portion of this quote sticks in my head, as I grapple with my fears and doubts. I have long-standing struggle with trust in God over my finances. Which makes no sense, since God has consistently provided for my husband and me. Every month.

While I was paying some of this month's bills, my head pounded with a migraine over my stress about what to pay and what not to pay (yet), a Voice I know well, speaks in my soul and stops me in my tracks. Literally stops me from all activity.

*“DO YOU QUESTION MY FAITHFULNESS?”* God asked me.

*Oh, Lord.*

Ouch of ouches in my spirit. Even as I write this now, tears collect at the corner of my eyes. The pain of the voice sucked the air out of my lungs.

How could I question my Lord's faithfulness, when I have experienced nothing but His full and never-failing faithfulness, including all things financial.

I love having such a close relationship with God. It's such a huge blessing. But my disobedience really hurts sometimes, especially when I come face to face with it.

I needed to change my way of thinking. To really stop, and consider the ravens.

Ravens seem like unlikely creatures to use as examples. They are dark, solitary, flesh-eating creatures. Yet, God uses them in multiple incidences in His Word. Such as:

- Unlikely heroes: Noah sent a raven from the ark to test out the post-flood land to see if it was dry yet;
- God's Prophet Feeders: God used ravens to feed the Prophet Elijah in his distress ( peruse this interesting story in [1 Kings 17!](#)); and
- Portrait of God's Great Provision: Jesus uses ravens as an example of His unfailing provision in the previously mentioned quote. It's interesting to me that God uses these dark and ominous birds in His illustration, as opposed to say, a peaceful dove or a sweet sparrow. Ravens are birds of prey, and kin to the vulture! Side note: It shows me I have a lot of preconceived notions about birds and other things that are not true...but I digress.

Realizing the deepness and trueness of God's faithfulness, reveals the lies that I believed about my perceived precarious state of provision, or lack thereof, fearing I could lose everything at any moment. So wrong.

This massive error shows me that I had not made God the ONE true King over everything in my life. I still thought I ruled over my finances. I repented of this mindset. Jesus needs to be Lord over all areas of my life. Amen, and amen.

I am so very grateful that God still loves me when I mess up, when I have things all wrong.

I received a beautiful picture of God's love in my women's Wednesday Night Bible study this week. We are going through [Angie Smith's Seamless Bible Study](#) (it is such an excellent study...I highly recommend it to deepen your understanding of the Bible as one complete story).

The study brought us to Hosea 3:1, which is a beautiful illustration of God's unconditional and ever-present love for His people. His love isn't dependent on our obedience.

The whole book of Hosea is so good. One of my all-time favorite novels, *Redeeming Love* by Francine Rivers, sets the book of Hosea in the 1850's, during the California Gold Rush period. So lovely. (I won't lend my copy out, so please purchase your own copy to hoard, and also bless Ms. Rivers with book sales.)

My Lord is faithful – every day, all the time. Before I get out of bed every morning, I ask Him for strength to do the things He wants me to do, and to give me guidance. And every night, when I lie in bed and think back over the day, I am grateful for the strength that He provided. And the guidance. Prayers of thanksgiving are ever upon my lips. He fights my battle with disease every day.

I have lived with Scleroderma, an auto immune disease for over 20 years. It has tried to take me out of this world by attacking my lungs, heart, and brain, but God has healed me with every terrible episode. Even now, He strengthens my hands to type, my fingers are stiff with damaged skin and scar tissue cause by the disease. But my God is faithful.

And my God is faithful about His promises. He brought a group of people He called His own, the Israelites, through thousands of years of disobedience, conquests, and exile, to fulfill His promise of the Messiah, my Savior Jesus Christ, so me and everyone else who believes in Jesus could be saved. He saved everyone with His sacrifice of Himself (Another excellent insight from the *Seamless* study!)

So I can certainly, beyond the shadow of a doubt, trust my God to take care of every single one of my needs, no matter what it is.

*Lord, may I never, ever, ever again question Your faithfulness.*

I have a new appreciation for Ravens. Unfortunately, I have never seen one flying around my neighborhood in Nashville, Tennessee. I will consider how God used them, and fed them. And how much more He will use, feed, and care for me, one of His own kids.

**\*BONUS MATERIAL\***

***A Simple Nightly or Anytime Prayer Exercise, for Kids and Adults***

I learned this in a video from the *Seamless Study*. Every night when you pray, find:



1. One thing you are grateful for;
2. One thing you are sorry for; and
3. One thing you are asking for.

*ANGELA DOLBEAR is the author of four novels, and several short stories. She also writes and records original music with her husband, Tim Dolbear. Please visit her author page on [Amazon](#) for more information.*

## **Moving Forward – The Healer – by Pam Charro**

What a year 2020 has been so far! Our country is experiencing pain and difficulty right now in so many ways. These challenges have stretched all of us, even strong believers, uncomfortably, and many have experienced various types of physical, financial and emotional trauma. It is easy to understand why some feel jaded and without hope. Words fail in the aftermath of massive layoffs and lost loved ones due to the pandemic and racial injustices; and so much in such a short period of time! I am beginning to wonder when the next disaster will strike. How much more can we take? Where is the cure and comfort for all of our wounds?

I am so thankful that our Father understands all of these feelings and has comfort for us during these difficult and painful times. He has provided everything we need; our job is to believe his words, regardless of feelings and appearances, and receive his love and comfort.

Psalm 41:4

*So in my sickness I say,  
"Lord, be my kind healer.  
Heal my body and soul; heal me, God!"*

Psalm 13:3

*Take a good look at me, God, and answer me!  
Breathe your life into my spirit. Bring light to my eyes in  
this pitch-black darkness or I will sleep the sleep of death.*

Psalm 46:1-3

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.  
Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the  
mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters  
roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*

Isaiah 26:3-4

*You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast,  
because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever,  
for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.*

Isaiah 30:15

*In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.*

Philippians 4:6

*Do not be anxious about anything, but, in every situation,  
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

1 Peter 5:7

*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

The Healer is here! He is powerfully alive and well and waiting for us to go to him in quietness and trust, where we can receive rest for our souls.



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – Find a Log – by Marcy Lytle**

We recently spend a weekend with our kids, away at an airbandb, and the last morning we went on a hike to find a pond on the property. Some of us were less than enthusiastic (because it was hot and muggy), others were adventurous (because that is their nature – my husband!), still others were willing to go because it's what we were all doing (so why not?) Whatever we felt, we all put on our walking shoes and began the trek to find the pond, down a trail and through a bit of high grass and along brush, until there it was...

It wasn't huge, but it was quite something! It was completely covered with lily pads and tiny jumping frogs! The kids squealed and we all marveled, because we don't really see that in the city, where we all live.

We discovered more trails, and kept walking, but it was a relatively short hike. The littles grew a bit weary and one wanted to be carried. Our son and his wife were childlike and enjoyed giving each other piggyback rides. My husband wanted us to "come on" and see the next thing in nature that caught his attention. Me, I just watched and observed my entire family together outside, and my heart felt complete.

And then...my daughter and her daughter sat on a log. I think that was my favorite scene of all. I'm not sure why, but there they were sitting and resting, and Ayla (age 7) picked a small flower, her mom smiled, and they rested...both wearing sneakers...one wearing sunglasses....and the other a darn cute cap that had been bought at the zoo two days prior. It was a picture worth taking.

As I've scrolled through my phone over the past few weeks, these photos keep drawing my attention. The hiking adventure that lasted maybe 30 minutes provided a great backdrop of family life and the stillness and the beauty that came when mother and daughter found a log and sat for just a minute.

A lot can happen while sitting on a log:

- All of nature can be observed from a place of rest.
- Tired legs can be rejuvenated.
- Conversations and smiles can be passed.
- Tiny flowers nearby can be picked and smelled.
- Listening to nature and to each other can bring new life.

When's the last time you found a log and sat with someone and picked a flower and rested?

I hope our family continues to hike together and play together. For me, it's one of the most important things in life, to get away. And if you can snap a picture of one of your kids with one of their kids, and the love is obvious and the rest is good...then that's just pure gold right there.

Find a log. Take a friend or family member. Sit and observe. Get up and marvel at the lily pads. And make plans to do it again real soon...

## **FRESH THYME - Informed or Insane? – by Marcy Lytle**

Covid-19

Looting

Hurricanes

Curfews

Masks

CDC

I could go on and on with the list of words that pepper the news stories right now, and have been for the past few months. We turn on the news every night at 10pm to get the latest updates on what's happening in our city and around the world, and quite frankly – it's depressing! We both have news pop-ups on our iPhones where we are alerted with "breaking news!" And if we stop and read every one throughout the day, everything starts to feel insane!

We want to grab our heads and say, "Stop with the madness!"

When our family went away together for a weekend, we were still connected, but being away from the city helped a bit with an escape from the madness. Of course, we wanted to be aware and informed, but sometimes our conversations became dark and full of despair. That's not fun. So we stopped and played a game, or took a walk, or watched the kids.

So just how much of listening and reading and staying informed is healthy, and how much is harmful?

I'd say the answer to that depends on each one of us and our tolerance to the news.

Obviously, journalists and media personnel are going to fill our ears and eyes with sensational stories that are full of truth and untruth. It's impossible to decipher all of it and categorize it, so we have to do something with the part that disturbs us the most. We have to cast it over on HIM.

Obviously, we need to stay informed so that we can pray effectively, vote smartly, take care of our health and our families, but it's also impossible to know exactly every move to make, when to make it, and who to help and how much to do! We have to listen and obey, and follow PEACE.

Obviously, we need to be prepared for emergencies that are weather-related, to stay away from dangerous parts of our cities, to be informed so that we can make intelligent decisions that change our world for the better, but it's not in our skill set to ward off every danger that lurks in the shadows. We have to dwell in His SHADOW and rest.

There's got to be a healthy balance to being informed but not insane.

The only way I've found to stay informed but keep away from insanity is to be sensible.

- When I start to feel anxious, I can turn off electronics and the television.
- When I begin to wonder and worry about the future, I can read the Word about His love and protection.
- When I frantically search for ways to safeguard me and mine I can pray and listen, and obey for me and my house.
- When I see storms on the horizon, I can lie down and sleep because He's there with me to speak, "Peace, be still."

It's not easy, striking a balance between informed and insane. But we have to search for it, find it, and stay there. We can think about the scales of our minds and emotions and see which way the scales are tipped. Too much information tips us toward insanity, because the information we hear is full of all sorts of scares, lies, agendas and yes information – but it's wrapped in fear. Fear tips the scale toward insanity. Fear is an emotion we all find on our scales, but we can totally move it to the other side where FAITH resides, and bring ourselves back to peace.

It's not been easy and it may not get easier for a while. But be encouraged to turn off, disconnect, and settle your heart before plugging back in to stay informed. Information is good. Insanity is bad. Keep an eye on the balance...

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

*Trust has to be earned.*

We hear that phrase all the time in broken relationships between parents and children, husbands and wives, employer and employee, etc. When trust is broken, we don't automatically trust again. We wait until the trust-breaker proves himself to be "worthy" of our trust. And rightly so, correct? I mean who wants to be disappointed and stepped on again, if they trust someone that has disappointed them over and over again? No one can stand that kind of repeated hurt...

I was thinking about mistrust, because we've become a society that trusts no one. We don't trust the government because of lies and being misled. The police force is not trusted because of abuse, and it doesn't matter that there are good cops...the bad ones have spoiled the bunch. Teens don't trust their parents because of divorce, abandonment and neglect. Spouses don't trust each other due to extramarital affairs and pornography online. I would venture to say that mistrust leads the pack of emotions in the bulk of our society.

I haven't written anything above that you don't already know. However, that mistrust can bleed over into our relationship with HIM, if we are not careful. We often lump God into our pile of people and things and entities that are not trustworthy. That action only comes from losing sight of the truth, forgetting his character, and thinking that our ways are better than His...therefore when he doesn't "come through," He cannot be trusted.

*Is it okay to mistrust God?*

I think we all have mistrusted him at one time or another in our lives, mainly when unanswered prayer brings confusion, hurt and grief. Maybe we prayed for healing, and death came instead. Perhaps we gave thanks a new job, only to lose it two months in. And maybe that family member that's causing so much grief has caused us to give up trusting God at all, because we are so weary we cannot trust at all...anymore. There is no strength left to trust.

I do have a handful of people that I trust completely, but even they are flawed. Every single person in my life, including myself, has failed my expectations and I've felt a twinge of mistrust over an act of neglect or forgetfulness or failure.

So what are we to do with the trust that must be earned? Who has earned our trust, and what happens if we trust again?

- Obviously, Jesus earned our trust when he died on the cross. After all, no greater love has any man than to lay down his life for a friend.
- Obviously, God earned our trust when he created the heavens and earth, caused the sun and moon to rise every single day, because he has proved himself faithful.
- Obviously, Jesus is worthy of our trust because there is NO OTHER name by which man can be saved except for Jesus – the name above all names – the name that heals, protects and covers a multitude of sin.



- Obviously, the Holy Spirit can be trusted to guide us into all truth and comfort us in hard times, because he's the gift of HIS presence that goes with us throughout all of life, once we place our trust in Him.
- Obviously, the Word of God is trustworthy because it has stood the test of time and proven to be true – every word and every foretelling and every hope and every story – offers hope of wonderful things to come.
- Obviously, all of creation teaches us to trust the Creator when it blossoms and blooms through cracks in sidewalks, stands tall through gales of wind, and flows freely over rocks and through canyons, singing praises and clapping hands to the Maker of all things.
- Obviously, He knew we'd lose our footing and falter in our faith, so he tells us to trust once again and not lean to our own understanding but to acknowledge Him – and he WILL direct our paths.

I don't know where you stand right now and where your trust meter points, but it can only point to one entity and authority that never fails. And when we point that meter at each other and start mistrusting and fighting and quarreling among ourselves, our meter soon breaks and is rendered useless in measuring trust.

God never fails in being faithful. It's because FAITHFUL is his name. He is trustworthy of all of our faith, all of our trust, all of our dependence, all of our hope, and all of our future.

Riots, pandemics, economic losses, diseases, and even death will emerge over our land until that final day...He told us it would be so. But...

Isaiah 26: 3,4 says this,

*You will keep in perfect peace*

*those whose minds are steadfast,*

*because they trust in you.*

*Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD,*

*the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.*

I want that perfect peace and a steadfast mind, don't you? He never said that peace reigns when we get what we demand every time we pray. He did say that peace reigns when we give thanks in all things, regardless of our understanding...because our trust is in Him.

## **FRESH THYME – Those Friends – by Marcy Lytle**

How have your friends made you a better friend? Have you ever asked yourself that question? During the course of our lives, we have friends that come and go, and each one has an impact on our lives...for the good or the bad. But even friendships that end badly can create good in all of us, if we let it. I was thinking about friends from childhood to the present, and came up with so many good ways that I have learned and grown. I'd love to hear yours in the comments below!

- Childhood friends that I still have are pure gold. They have stuck with me, they know me and allow me to feel comfortable around them, and they have common memories with me. I'm fortunate to have several that I've known since I was super young, and they're some of the best friends...ever.
- Moms of my kids' friends were the best friends during middle and high school years. Showing up at games and getting to know their children on the field, at team parties, and just watching our children grow together provided some great times for all of us! It gave us all this permanent smile when we think back to those years, and we now see our kids grown and married...and having kids. A forever connection!
- Church friends that pray and stay and live and give bring encouragement to me, and I hope I do to them, as well. Counting on another to be there when a parent dies, or to rejoice when a daughter gets married, and to worship through all the phases of life is life-giving. I'm so thankful for a body of believers across the nation that I've known and worshiped with at some point in my life.
- Neighbors that become friends are a special class all their own. They watch our house when we go away, they put away our trash can or we do theirs, and they wave at the beginning of our day as we leave or at the end of our day when we arrive back home. Neighbors are great.
- Vacation friends are so fun, when we meet someone from another state or country and find ourselves drawn to them while we're away having fun. We've met several people on our trips, including seven women on one trip to NY with startling needs that we've been able to pray for, and remember. I sat by one person on an airplane and got to know that person so well over the course of a 3-hour flight, all for a purpose, I'm sure!
- Online friends that we've never met but ones that follow what we post are just the best, really! Many women that read this magazine I have never met face-to-face but we chat, we LIKE each other's social media posts, and we message each other often. I would love to meet each and every one of them someday, but I'm sure I won't! That doesn't make them any less my friend...
- Marketplace friends are those hairdressers, clerks at the store, the guy at the bank drive-up, or the young waiter at the restaurant we frequent, all people that serve us and serve us well. It's comforting to build relationships with people we see often and trust to take care of our needs, big or small. These friends are huge. My dad, 94 years young, has many of these kinds of friends that recognize him when he shows up to deposit money or order a burger in a drive-thru.

When I stop and think about all the different kinds of friends I've met and am still meeting, I'm amazed and sit in wonder at how each one has shaped my life. Yes, there have been many friends that have exited with hurts, but I have to learn to live and learn and love again. I've hurt others, as well, and forgiveness is prime when it comes to friendships. Other friends have shown me what it's like to give selflessly when they call or text just to see how I'm doing. Those that let me be me, in all my quirkiness and sarcasm, still love me in spite of what makes me odd. And friends I've only met in passing have strengthened my resolve to be kind and engage with everyone I meet, regardless of their skin color, economic status or belief system.

Friendship. It's grand, isn't it? And to have friends, we must be friendly. And when we are friendly, we will get hurt. But when we are friendly, we all will grow into mature, loving, kind people that have learned from the Master – to love at all times.



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

August 2020



TIPS

## **Seven 4 You – Good and Cold – by Marcy Lytle**

August is here – the dog days of summer – when the heat is on! So we asked our panel to share something cold that they enjoy, either a drink or a food, and to share the recipe with us and why they love it so much! Nothing lifts the spirit like a cool drink on a warm sunny day, or a cold supper that invites us to sit and rest and savor every bite...

*Slushy:* I just blend and freeze watermelon and lemon juice! Before serving I will defrost it to slushy stage and give to my company this weekend. I freeze a 9x13 pan about 3/4 full of blended watermelon (it's better to freeze the chunks and then blend them frozen). I used half a lemon.

*Rice a Roni and Marinated Artichoke Heart Salad:* Drain marinated artichokes and reserve the liquid, chop the chokes roughly, chop 3 green onions and 15 green olives, then set aside. Mix the reserved marinade with 1/2 cup mayo. Prepare Rice a Roni per directions...cool completely. Mix all together and refrigerate. It is really good and a family favorite! (Don't add salt, it has enough.)

*Macaroni Salad* just says summer to me. It came from my husband's family. Super simple and tasty: 1 package of elbow macaroni, cooked. Cut up several cucumbers, and tomatoes into bite size pieces to mix in. I also like to add some red onion, chopped small. Make a dressing of equal parts oil (I use a light vegetable oil), sugar, and white vinegar. (About 1/2 cup each.) Mix the dressing together until the sugar is dissolved, and pour over the macaroni and vegetables. Salt and pepper to taste and chill. (Over the years I have discovered that I like less oil and more vinegar in the dressing.)

*Broccoli Salad:* I remember the day I got this recipe. I walked into the produce side of Walmart and a sweet, elderly, man was behind a display table working. He was so excited and motioned for me to come over. Walmart had let him prepare and share HIS Broccoli Salad recipe! And it is so good! I have even had the chance to see him again and tell him how much we enjoy it. (insert recipe)

If you like quick and easy, try these *Microwave Lemon Bars*. They are yummy! (insert recipe)

For the 4<sup>th</sup>, we rolled the edges of *ice cream sandwiches* in red/white/blue sprinkles and inserted popsicle sticks for the kids (and we loved them too!) – but any kind of sprinkles or chips will do, depending on the mood or season!

*Watermelon with mint lime juice* is to die for! Zest and juice 2 limes. Place the zest, 1/4 c chopped fresh mint, 1 T brown sugar and 1/4 t kosher salt on a cutting board and chop til it forms a paste. Transfer to a bowl and mix with the lime juice. Cut watermelon into wedges and arrange on a platter, then spoon the mixture on top. Garnish with more mint leaves and lime wedges. Seriously delish!

My absolute favorite cold dessert is a Dairy Queen vanilla cone dipped in chocolate. It is always a treat! Also something I think is wonderful is a good ole popsicle. My granddaughter Millie was over one day and she wanted one and I thought, "You know, I am going to have one too." It was so fun sitting with her eating a popsicle and just talking. However, I made a great non-dairy *peach ice cream*, too. Moses has dairy allergy so when I make something like this I have to find something for him. My food processor is not large so I had to make in two batches and I used

frozen peaches. The texture may be different with fresh peaches. It's easy to make and the kids love it! It's from a website called A Sweet Pea Chef.

*Peach Ice Cream* - This peach ice cream is dairy-free, vegan, paleo, and gluten-free!

5 ripe peaches  
2 14-oz cans full-fat coconut milk, refrigerated  
1/2 tsp vanilla extract  
1 tsp ground cinnamon  
1/4 cup pure maple syrup  
1 tbsp fresh lemon juice

1. Combine the ingredients in a food processor and process until smooth. You can remove the skin from the peach if you'd like, but it's not necessary and will get blended once frozen. 2. Transfer the mixture into a freezer-safe container and freeze for a minimum of 4-6 hours, until mostly solid. 3. When ready to serve, allow to thaw on counter for 5-10 minutes, then stir until creamy and smooth.

*Cool drink:* I love watermelon sparking water with lime and fresh mint for hot afternoons.

*Mexican Salad:* organic ingredients including ground beef or chicken cheese sausage, spring and romaine lettuce, black and/or kidney beans, tomato, red onion, avocado, cilantro, and sprinkled with grated Mexican cheese served with fresh tortillas or tostada chips. Can't beat it for a super healthy summer meal!

I love this "cool" salad...my fave:

3.4 oz instant pistachio pudding  
1 can (20 oz) crushed pineapple, reserve the juice  
16 oz cottage cheese  
8 oz Cool Whip thawed  
1/2 cup chopped pecans and/or mini marshmallows

Mix together the dry pudding mix with drained pineapple. Mix in the cottage cheese and fold in the Cool Whip. Add 2 T (or more) of the pineapple juice. Mix in the nuts and marshmallows, and chill in fridge before serving (at least an hour.)

My favorite summer cold snack is definitely *frozen yogurt drops*! All you need is your favorite yogurt, Parchment paper, a plastic bag and scissors or an unused condiment bottle. Then all you have to do is fill the bag or bottle with yogurt and squeeze little nickel sized droplets into the parchment paper and freeze for an hour or so!

## **The Dressing – Summer’s End – by Marcy Lytle**

It’s August.

It’s hot.

Is there anything even worth talking about in the way of fashion this month? Most of us here in Central Texas where I live just want to wear a little as possible, sit in an air-conditioned room, and not move! And besides that, we’re done buying summer clothes, aren’t we? I mean, fall is coming and it’s time to start thinking forward to the next season. After all, we are hoping for a new season in so many ways!

I thought it would be fun to shop our closet this month, to try different staples in different ways, or to look at our closets and decide what to keep or what to toss, now that summer is coming to an end... Use one of those days where you’re bored and browse everything you already have, before you start looking for new things. Put together a color scheme, gather your basics, and then you can just accessorize come fall!

**Jeans:** Take stock of your jeans and decide now to go through them and see what fits and what feels good and what doesn’t. I’ve found that ones with a little higher waist (not way up there!), with a bit of stretch in the fabric, are the keepers. And one brand I really love is Kensie. And I recently purchased a couple of pair from Walmart – and love them! If you’re still hanging on to a few pair that don’t flatter or feel good, give them away.

<https://www.kensie.com/kensie-jeans-and-denim/all-jeans-and-denim.html>

**Cardigans:** Now is a good time to go through all of your button-up or long sweaters to see what you’ll really wear when temps cool off. I have so many long cardigans/wraps but some of them have pulled threads or don’t match anything or just don’t feel right. And those that have shrunk or become misshapen need to go! I think a long black, gray and brown cardigan – those three - are staples to keep – as they will go over almost any shirt in your closet, when you need them! My favorite is a longer length (hip length will just look boxy) with pockets.

<https://www.amazon.com/Womens-Casual-Cardigan-Sweaters-Pockets/dp/B07JHMFBSR>

**Shoes:** Sandals will soon give way to your booties once again, so why not look through the ones you own and toss or keep? Does that old pair really feel comfortable, and what do you like most about the pair that really fits? August is a good month for browsing your shoe racks and making note of what you need. It seems comfort is key these days, and I’ve found that the lower block heel is one that can be worn all day! But while we transition, mules are a great option! Grab a pair or two to match those cardigans we mentioned above – for a sleek and put together look!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-maura-microsuede-mules-universal-thread-153/-/A-54284159?preselect=54264567#Ink=sametab>

**Scarves:** Where do you hang your scarves? I’ve recently moved mine to a rack hanging on my closet door so that I can see them and choose, as I get ready. Drawers and bins were a



nuisance and had just become so messy! It's time to go through the scarf pile and decide on one or two GOOD ones for fall. If you have a fave, then keep it! But if not, think about a multi colored scarf that goes with all of your basic cardigans and boots – the grays, blacks, and browns – and then one for a pop of color! I say keep them pretty lightweight for now...and plaid is always a classic staple to have! Etsy has lots of choices!

[https://www.etsy.com/listing/252891757/winter-plaid-blanket-scarf-tartan-plaid?gpla=1&gao=1&&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=shopping\\_us\\_low-low\\_d-accessories-scarves\\_and\\_wraps-scarves-other&utm\\_custom1=4d1004f7-29c2-433f-8e28-de297d07d631&utm\\_content=go\\_6721326381\\_79102929003\\_388378857584\\_pla-314261242547\\_c\\_252891757&utm\\_custom2=6721326381&gclid=EAlaIqobChMI\\_fDVhvS66gIVzsDACH3RHwGVEAkYAyABEgJnPPD\\_BwE](https://www.etsy.com/listing/252891757/winter-plaid-blanket-scarf-tartan-plaid?gpla=1&gao=1&&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=shopping_us_low-low_d-accessories-scarves_and_wraps-scarves-other&utm_custom1=4d1004f7-29c2-433f-8e28-de297d07d631&utm_content=go_6721326381_79102929003_388378857584_pla-314261242547_c_252891757&utm_custom2=6721326381&gclid=EAlaIqobChMI_fDVhvS66gIVzsDACH3RHwGVEAkYAyABEgJnPPD_BwE)

**Tops:** Fall tops this year need to be comfy and bring us joy, would you agree! Tunics are great for working at home, nice blouses can be tucked in with a belt, or lightweight sweaters are good to stock up on. Look through your closet and see what tops you truly wear and which ones look good on you. Find your colors – do you look better in taupes and grays – or bolds like reds and golds? What kind of neckline and sleeve length do you prefer? Remember, we are coordinating a wardrobe here, with staples, for the coming change of season... You'll want a good button-down, too!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-long-sleeve-button-down-shirt-universal-thread/-/A-78142756?preselect=77550793#lnk=sametab>

**Bags:** I know. Do you really need another bag? Yes, you do. Go through your purses and think about what size and purpose do you need bags for this fall? If we are all still at home, I think a tote is great because I love to have this available to fill with books and magazines for road trips or just leaving the house to visit a park or find a different spot to relax and read. I love a good tote – so roomy for all those extras (masks and sanitizers and wipes) that we have to have near.

How about a reversible one that's such a good price, so you could get two!

[https://www.amazon.com/Scarleton-Stylish-Reversible-Shoulder-H18422501/dp/B01M0GEAF0?ref\\_=fscpl\\_dp\\_1](https://www.amazon.com/Scarleton-Stylish-Reversible-Shoulder-H18422501/dp/B01M0GEAF0?ref_=fscpl_dp_1)

**Jewelry:** I read that star earrings will be a hit this fall, so why not get a pair? We've put together some classics here, and stars are classics as well! Extra long necklaces will be in this next season, so those might be fun to wear again. Look through your jewelry – consider giving some of the old costume pieces to a teen! Place some cork board on your closet wall and hang your jewelry to see, while you get dressed, right near your scarves!

[https://www.google.com/search?q=star+earrings&source=lnms&tbm=shop&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjT9lee\\_LrqAhUKGKwKHd-oB30Q\\_AUoAXoECA8QAw&biw=1600&bih=708#spd=10479799154923950163](https://www.google.com/search?q=star+earrings&source=lnms&tbm=shop&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjT9lee_LrqAhUKGKwKHd-oB30Q_AUoAXoECA8QAw&biw=1600&bih=708#spd=10479799154923950163)

I think it's fun to gather a few key pieces like the ones listed above and use them as a backdrop for your wardrobe. You can then shop for colored and patterned pieces to wear with your basics. You can even tie a colorful scarf on your tote, or add a pop of color with a bright piece of jewelry. Having a good pair of jeans, a couple of cardis, some comfy yet stylish mules, a scarf or two for warmth or handle décor, and a pretty pair of earrings – and you're ready for summer's end!

### **Three Moms – Bath Time Stuff**

Kids and bath time – a mix that can sometimes end in tears for parents and kiddos! Struggles to get them in the bath and get them clean, what products to use, and then there's brushing teeth – lots to do before bedtime. And when everyone is tired and cranky, sometimes bath time can be anything BUT relaxing! The moms this month are sharing how they manage to get the kids in bed clean and happy...well, for the most part!

#### *The actual bathing:*

Around age 4 or 5 they can start bathing themselves. It varies with each kid. One just wants to play and then forgets to bathe. We teach them that they need to learn to bathe first, play second. An older sister can help a younger sister too, if they bathe together.

If we start bath times late we end up with kids in both bathrooms and then we lose our own parent space. Just this year, we've worked on making sure we have a better bath routine. The kids bathe one at a time, so that they are all ready for bed on time, and all have a bath at night.

#### *The arguing:*

The kids do argue on who goes first because it interrupts play time. We draw toothpicks or straws – whoever has shortest goes first and whoever has longest goes last. Luck of the draw each night. This eases “most” of the arguing. We do have to watch the time limit...because one takes longer than the other. This has to work because all three share one bathroom, and we now have our bathroom back!

Sometime the two youngest will fight in the bath and Mom just has to referee!

#### *The waiting:*

The other kids play or read a book, or brush their teeth, while waiting.

#### *The bedtime routine:*

We lie down and read a bible story and add a verse to memorize, and then we pray together. This allows everyone to settle their thoughts and go to sleep in comfort, including mom and dad!

We do an 806 prayer outside before bed. 806 is our area code where we live, so we read a psalm and pray for our community, our churches and businesses, our government, and those who are sick – especially with the virus! We also include thanksgiving. The entire process is so sweet – because families all over our neighborhood gather at 8:06 pm on their porches to pray!

#### *The products:*

Suave 3-in-1 – free and clear (no dyes) – giant bottle. Youngest uses that. Our oldest switched to soap body wash by Nuskyn bc it's more natural scents and easier on his skin – has grapefruit and vitamin C – helps with his eczema and dry skin. It moisturizes and cleanses. Our daughter likes Method – rotating the scents – from Target. She recently switched to a better product for fine tangled hair, and it's wavy. Leave-in condition made her hair oily, but still hard to manage.

Switched to Age Lock Hair & Scalp shampoo and conditioner – it's not so cheap – but helps so much with manageability. It strengthens from the scalp, and gives volume! She hasn't had to use detangler. Sometimes it seems the cheaper products don't do so well with fine hair.

<https://www.target.com/p/suave-kids-purely-fun-3-in-1-shampoo-conditioner-body-wash-28-fl-oz/-/A-52508973>

<https://www.target.com/p/method-body-wash-energy-boost-18-fl-oz/-/A-52735177>

<https://naskn.co/GYgAg4>

<https://naskn.co/vvyjnS>

Our kids use Everyone soap from HEB – and we do an armpit check! The Everyone soap comes in different scents and it's great for the whole family. Our kids also are wearing deodorant – Tom's Natural Brand. As soon as they can stink, they can smell better!

Each of the kids has their own Crest Kids mechanical toothbrushes – it's on for 2 minutes – and this is a huge help. They each have a different character. The heads of the toothbrushes can be changed out. They all use AP24 Toothpaste – helps restore teeth without abrasives. They don't like 'spicy' adult, they like this more soothing vanilla type taste.

<https://naskn.co/ytRjrm>

*The bathroom:*

The kids get an allowance on Friday – but only if bathroom is clean! They have a clothes basket, and a hook for hanging towels to reuse them. That's their chore!

\*\*\* If you use the links and order any of the NuSkin products above you will get 20% off ( it will be taken in the cart). These are custom links for you readers!

## **In the Kitchen – Making it Fun – by Marcy Lytle**

Since we are sharing cold goodies over on the Seven 4 You column this month, with lots of good recipes to try, I thought it would be fun to just share some kitchen hacks/lessons/tricks I've learned over the years that might be new to you! And I'd love you to add your own in the comments below. Since I've been watching cooking shows and trying out so many new things, I've corrected some of my behavior, added a few more tools, and smiled at little tricks that make cooking so much more fun!

Here are my top dozen:

- It's easy to burn granola. Don't walk away for a minute – be sure to stir and check.
- Veggies brown and taste better when cooked in olive oil AND butter – they just do!
- A zester works great with the grate on bottom, so you can see how much you're zesting as it accumulates on the top!
- Everything but the Bagel seasoning is good on – well – everything! Not just avocado, but in tuna as well – and lots of places like veggies too!
- Organization of recipes is fun with a pretty file box from Lakeside Collections. Have you shopped there, yet?
- Making bowls is one of my favorite meals. Just pick a base like rice, pasta, beans, even croutons. Then make 3-4 piles on top of whatever's in your fridge – cooked bacon, avocado, leftover chicken, nuts, greens, etc. Add a dressing if you wish or not...They're delish!
- Have you tried cooking your favorite nut with a bit of maple syrup, and then adding to the top of a salad or bowl like listed above? To die for...
- You can totally make a fondue for two using a can and a bowl, with a tea light inside the can. We just did this on our trip, and it was campy and cute! Just make a few air holes in a can, light the tea light, and place your fondue on top in the bowl.
- It's easy and just as quick to just chop your own nuts on a cutting board as it is to use a fancy nut chopper. In fact, you can control the size and avoid the tiny crumbs.
- A good squeeze of lemon brightens up the flavor of SO many dishes, so keep them near you as you cook!
- You can substitute a can of black beans for a can of chickpeas when you make hummus, and sub lime juice in for the lemon juice and have black bean hummus! Top with taco meat and other flavors, and it's so tasty and good!
- Pantry organization is super fun and actually turns out so pretty when you move all dry goods into glass containers with lids – to set on your counter or on your shelves. Just cut out the expiration date and include it inside, as well. This works well for rice, pasta, sugar, dried fruit, crackers, cereal, and more! And you'll love looking at it all...

So what tips/hacks/tricks have you learned?

## **Tried and True - Little Treats** – by Marcy Lytle

During these months (who would have thought it would last so long!) of the Covid crisis, I've found that little treats mean so much. There are lots of new habits we've picked up, and a few little surprises I've allowed myself to enjoy. Why not? We all need a little bit of normalcy right about now, and the new norm I've added to my life has made me feel a little less out of balance...

Here are a few things I've added, that maybe you'll enjoy as well:

**Ipsy** – This is a makeup bag that arrives monthly with samples inside that suit my tastes (I filled out a profile before subscribing.) The little makeup bags are cute and can be saved for giving to others, filling for a stocking present at Christmas, or keeping for travel. That alone is fun! But inside are new blushes, mascara, lip balm, and more – and it's so fun to see it arrive in the mail!

**Ice cream** – Oh my gosh, we've had more ice cream than ever and I have no idea why. Maybe it's because we are trying to eat healthy meals at home, since we're cooking ALL THE TIME, so an ice cream treat while out is the best! Blizzards from DQ and ice cream from Chick Fil A are my two faves! And...we recently made homemade peach ice cream – to die for!

**Long walks** – Oh we walked before, but now it's mandatory for our sanity! And oh the trails we've found, ones we would never have sought out, had we not needed yet another new place to explore! There are parks in every neighborhood, and it's a blast to try new trails with new sites and new people to smile at, sans masks, since we're in the great outdoors!

**Gardens** – I've always tended to herbs and flowers, but I planted veggies in three big pots to tend...hoping to grow my own produce to enjoy. I am not the best at it yet, but I've enjoyed the process and have had mini eggplant – which I didn't even know existed! Sliced up and roasted, on a pizza, yum!

**Scrabble** – I'm sure many of us have favorite games on our phones or apps that we enjoy, but lately I've discovered Scrabble. I like to use my brain and to exit life for a few minutes to play the computer contestant, and try to beat her. I love searching for and making words. It rests and stimulates my mind, all at the same time!

**New recipes** – I've discovered What's Gaby Cooking and her meals and recipes are really yummy looking! I decided to subscribe and now I receive her weekly meal plans in my inbox. It's fun to have new recipes arrive to choose from, with the best photos of them, too!

**Devos** – My church has this opportunity to submit 3 minute devos for social media, for people to listen to, and be encouraged. I wrote a series on God's Wisdom, and looked forward to studying the topic and then summarizing it in a video. It caused me to study, and it encouraged me – even if I was the only one!

I'm sure I could keep going with other new treats that have popped up because of life changes this year for all of us. And I'm also sure I could share some downers and days that weren't so fun because I'm tired of this new norm. But it's these little treats that I'm trying to focus on,

looking for more each day, and hoping that even when life is back to normal (or will it be?) that I keep some of these niceties around and never go back to dismissing the little things that bring joy.

<https://www.ipsy.com/glambag#/2020/07/GLAMBAG>

<https://whatsgabycooking.com/>



HOME



## **Practical Parenting – Give Them More** – by Marcy Lytle

Growing up, I heard and memorized all of the bible stories – those ones all the kids learned – like Noah and the ark, Daniel in the lion's den, the Tower of Babel, and more. And I am so grateful for that memorization of God's feat and victories over scary situations, and deliverance from storms and danger. Seriously, those stories are awesome. However, I realized recently that those stories ALONE didn't serve me well, because somehow I missed Jesus. I was left wanting more...

This thought process made me think of how could I possibly have been presented Jesus, the person – the savior – the Friend – and the Lord – in a more tangible and real way. I'd never say throw out the Bible stories, but I will say *don't just stop there*. Give the kiddos more, and here are a few ways how:

**Tell them about answered prayers** – When you prayed for a job and got it, or money came through at the last minute, tell your children. Let them enter in and pray with you for big things, and not just big things in your eyes. Let them ask boldly for big things that concern them. Don't be afraid. God can handle their prayers and their little hearts with big dreams.

**Let them see you give** – Don't just write a check or give on line to your charity or church. Take them with you to serve, talk together about where you're giving, read up on the child you're sponsoring and again – let them be part of the giving process. Let them give a part of their allowance, or earn a few dollars to add to the giving jar.

**Talk about why you praise** and then worship as a family – Read the Word aloud, the other verses besides the stories, the ones about exalting and praising God because of who He is. Teach your children about the character of their good, good Father and then praise Him together. Kids' classes with their peers are great, even on line, but family praise and worship is gold...pure gold.

**Love and forgive** – and then love and forgive again. Your children will anger you, disobey you, drive you to the end of your rope...but keep loving them and forgiving them...and discipline them out of that same love. Show them how love disciplines and guides, direct them to obedience, and then talk about why they disobeyed and offer forgiveness and hugs. Let them see you forgive one another as well, as you interact with others. And ask for forgiveness when you wrong your children.

**Speak kindly** – Don't let any form of gossip enter your house and land on the ears of your kids. Take your cares and concerns about others to Him, and ask Him to deal. If your kids see the hurt or the mistreatment from others as well, sit down and roll those cares over on Him together. But don't slander, talk behind backs, or write off people for good. Love your neighbor as yourself, and be kind. Even when the world is anything but kind.

There are SO MANY ways we can present Jesus to our kids, in addition to the stories in the Old Testament. Those stories are a great foundation for the wonders of God, which are good to know. But that intimacy that comes from walking with Jesus comes from...well...walking with Jesus. Talking, giving, forgiving and loving others...that daily stuff we do that we normally don't

share with our kids. Go on. Share it. Let them be a part of something more than memorization and facts.

## **I Don't Do Teens – However...** - by Marcy Lytle

It's a hard world out there for teens. They've seen protests this year like none other, against injustices, and that's a good thing. However, they've seen violence coupled with those protests, where people were hurt. And that's a bad thing. They've been sheltered at home because of a virus, where they've been with family nonstop – which hopefully was a good thing. However, they're missing their friends and their hangouts and feeling depressed, and that's a bad thing. They are seeing and hearing and learning about life and maturity and respect for their fellow man, and that's a good thing. However, they're wondering about life and if they want to mature, who's worthy of respect, and that can be a bad thing.

There are two sides to every coin, aren't there? There's the head and the tail, and only one of those is a winner when tossed to see which way the coin lands. Given that analogy, how do we help our teens navigate these waters we haven't even navigated, and end up safe and secure without capsizing into a sea of anxiety and frustration with God, people, and life itself? I'm sure there are self-help books, pills, and escapes that our teens can find, but we need to offer them lasting peace.

*How can we do that?*

**The protests** – Don't leave your teens to watch the protests and then say nothing. We have to talk. And we cannot bash the protesters, the policemen, or whatever party we think is wrong. We need to have intelligent discussions with our teens about injustice and what God says about it, why it's present, and what can be done as Christians. We can even take our teens to a civil protest if we can find one, and show them how to stand up for their fellow man, without taking aim at other people in the process. And if that's too dangerous, we can read stories in the bible about injustice and what God told his people to do – to pray, love others, and give. That's HUGE. And we can certainly pray for our leaders and the upcoming election.

**The racism** – Racism has been around as long as I can remember, and thankfully we don't live during the time of slavery. And yet...here it is...still present...those lines we draw and judgments we hurl. We as parents can be the best model of loving people no matter their skin color, and our teens will observe and follow suit. We can make sure our circle of friends includes every person, no matter their race, economic status or any difference at all. We don't have to be afraid to like different. Jesus liked different and sought out the outcast of society, to meet them where they were and bring hope and love. We can train our teens to walk away from racial slurs, to welcome friends that look different than they do, and to have conversations with all people – not just of different races – but those that are wheelchair bound, those who are ill, and more. Racism is just a symptom of a deeper wound, one our kids do not have to carry around.

**The virus** – By now, all teens everywhere are sick of restrictions and rules and coverings and protection. They just want to play ball, hang with their friends, go to parties and be. We're all tired of it. Right now, at this present time, the coin has landed on the unchosen side and it's not being tossed up to land on the opposite side just yet. Hopefully, our teens have put into practice some great hygiene habits that will carry them the rest of their lives. As we continue to be

cautious, we can pray together and ask big – ask God to heal our land and our people and our friends. We can ask Him to grant us patience and give us ideas to creatively connect with others that we may not have sought out, had the virus not occurred.

In other words, we can train our kids to yes – acknowledge those bad things that are out there all around us. But we can teach them the value of the word “however,” that transitional term that means there’s a counter statement coming to the one just made. There’s always something good to find in the middle of bad. In fact, God is always working things together for good even when we can’t see it. There’s always a light at the end of the tunnel if we keep traveling forward, and we are, when we love Him and love others.

That’s the key to handling this difficult season. Love God. Love others. And that’s going to be a daily, or maybe hour by hour, choice that we all have to make while the bad side is up...until the coin’s tossed again...and heads up – the *however* begins.

## Chipped China – Liberty AND Love – by Jennifer Lytle

Love is not greater than liberty. Liberty is not greater than love. The emphasis is on the AND. The two are synchronous. The two hold one another up. Neither can properly exist alone.

God gave humankind the freedom to choose whether to walk His way or not (please see [Deuteronomy 30:19](#).) God gave humankind the law of sowing and reaping (please see [Proverbs 11:25](#).) If the God of all creation designed humans with the responsibility of liberty, should we as humans demand compliance from one another?

### *Cover Your Mouth and Nose*

In the early stages of The Great Slowdown (please see [My Little Library](#)), I dreaded going to the grocery store. It took me a moment of being very present with my feelings, inside the grocery store with a basket full of goods that would keep my decent-sized family fed for a week (NOT the same as hoarding), before I could discern what was going on in my heart. What I discovered in that moment of intentionally trying to accept and understand my feelings was that the masks covering everyone's faces and my own helped increase this sense of oppression . . . and fear.

At that point, I thought about painting or drawing big smiles over my masks and even went so far as to come up with a title for a potential article. *Masked Smiles: Are They Wrong, After All?*

For my family, washing hands when we get home is a given. We take our shoes off right away when we enter our home. We bathe *before* bed so we don't sleep in any ick from the day. That's been a way of life since before my husband and I were married. "Sneeze in your elbow," is a mantra I've shouted for 10-years. One of our little loves still sneezes how she pleases. I still have to say, "Wash your hands," at least 10 times a day. "Did you wash your hair?" or "Did you USE SOAP?!" are questions I repeat more times than I'd like. No thanks to COVID. It's just how we operate in our home. Outside the home, I have always been a little bit of an over-zealous mother with hand-sanitizer or cleaning wipes thanks to my question of which germs one of us might encounter.

What's different now is that I realize our community might not return to "normal" or "business as usual" and I may have to accept a face covering is the standard or expectation. This makes me very sad.

Freedom is hard to come by; it's not a normal aspect of humans living together. Everywhere in history, one nation is trying to dominate the other. One group is enslaving another.

The freedom to walk around with a naked face is one I never imagined to hold precious. I don't wish to give this up.

In honor of our nation's Independence Day, I designed this [lovely piece](#). It complies with [Texas law](#).

I stand against living in a society where we:

- cannot clearly hear what's being said between one another due to layers of fabric covering the mouths of the speakers
- experience diminished or unavailable non-verbal cues/data

- are unable to read lips

I love liberty and I will do my best to love my neighbor AND myself . . . lest I end up like one of Margaret Atwood's [handmaids](#) who live in D.C.

## **Tiny Living - Fishing, Fishing, Fishing** – by Leyanne Enterline

Since quarantine started, all the boys have wanted to do is fish! This isn't out of the norm at all, but we have had way more time to do it now. Every trip we take, that's all they want to do!

However, so far, we haven't had too much success. If you know much about fishing (which I really don't) every lake, pond, stream, and ocean has its own type of fish swimming in them. This means we must use all different kinds of lures. Oh my, have we gotten the lures! I love that the boys have a hobby; however, it can get quite expensive, our space can become overcrowded with stuff, and it all become overwhelming.

We just got back from a trip to Colorado, visiting family. We also just wanted to travel into the wilderness away from all the drama of the world right now. And we, of course, had to go fishing! What I didn't know was that most of the areas where we fished had trout running in their streams.

Of course, the boys said, "We don't have the right equipment!"

To which my reply was, "Are you kidding me?"

We loaded our vehicle down with rods, reels, and a ridiculous amount of bait. But apparently, all of these things still weren't enough. We needed a fly rod and flies! After visiting several fly fishing shops in Colorado, we decided we'd have to wait on this kind of expense. It's one pricey hobby to start up for our first time trying out this new type of fishing.

The boys sadly had to use the gear they had already brought; but to their surprise, up on the top of a mountain we climbed - the trout were literally jumping out of the water trying to swim upstream! So much that the boys were able to catch the fish with their bare hands! Well, forget all the *needed* gear. This was a much cheaper fix and they were beyond happy to catch a new species for them!

Whew! So thankful the Lord provided us a much needed trip and a great fishing experience, away from the reminders of the pandemic that's smothering us all...

## **A Night to Remember – What He Says** – by Marcy Lytle

Kids are getting ready to go back to school, or they're staying home to learn, or a mixture of both. Parents are having difficult decisions to make, in order to keep their kids safe and yet continue to learn, and it's hard to know what to do. They say this, the news says that, those over there tell us something else, and we are all in a quandary of wonder...and fear.

*But what does He say?*

That's the lesson in this family devo this month of August in 2020.

Ask your kids these questions, then read the scripture, and do the activity. You'll need a hand mirror, paper and colored pencils.

What are you afraid of, as school begins to start? (*Let each kid answer*)

**Joshua 1:9 says this,**

**“Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid,  
nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”**

*Gonna be strong* – Ask a child to pick up the heaviest object in the room, then ask, “Why can't you pick it up?” When something seems impossible, God gives us strength to make it possible. Whatever we cannot do, He can be our mighty arm to do it for us!

*Gonna have good courage* – Pass around the mirror and let each person look into it, and say “Be of good courage” and smile and say “yes!” Courage enters a dark room while trembling, but good courage enters a dark room with the Light of World offering Him a steady hand.

*Gonna not be afraid* – Turn off the lights and sit in the dark together as a family. Let the person with the flashlight turn it on. Light dispels the darkness, just like God's light banishes fear. Fear is gone with the light of God in our hearts. Fear is just like the dark, and it can go away with a flick of a switch – just like that!

*Gonna be at peace* (not alarmed) – Ask everyone to use their pencils to draw a picture of a peaceful place and then describe that place to everyone else. Did you know that even if a boat is in a storm, Jesus says we can have peace? The last part of the verse is the reason why...

The Lord your God is with you wherever you go – Because God loves us and we love him, He has promised to never leave us. We don't have to see Him with our eyes, just like we don't see the wind. But we can feel Him with our spirit and know that He's near.

As a family let one lead and the others echo, then say the last four lines all together.

Gonna be strong (echo)

Gonna have good courage (echo)



Gonna not be afraid (echo)

Gonna be at peace (echo)

Why?

Because He is with me

Where?

Wherever I go!

(REPEAT last four lines)

Pray together as a family and memorize this verse together, hang it on your walls, recite it at night, and believe it with all your hearts...that what He says is what will come to pass!

## **An Adage a Day - Don't Worry. Be Happy – by Carole Gilbert**

August is National Back to School Month. Everyone is busy getting ready for the new school year. Even we grandparents are trying to get in the last hoorah of summertime. This year of 2020 has given us lots of new changes and still has lots of anxieties. Will the school year start? Will it finish? What will be different or new? And it is okay to have these new thoughts, concerns, anticipations, and anxieties.

We all have been through so many changes lately. Moms (that never thought they would) have become stay at home teachers and some, if not many, may decide to stay that way...if only for a while.

Along with August being National Back to School Month, it also has my personal favorite of National Smile Week right before school starts. August also holds claim to National Simplify Your Life Week, Friendship Week, and is also Admit You're Happy Month. That brings to my mind a special quote and chorus of a song titled the same, "Don't worry. Be happy." I remember this phrase from the 1970's.

It is a good quote to focus on for this school year and it has been around for a long time. This phrase originated and was used often by Indian Mystic Meher Baba (1894-1969). He was a spiritual guide who said this phrase many times to his followers for their encouragement. It literally means what it says. It was so popular that it became a daily inspiration in the 1960's, even being made into postcards, plaques, and posters. That is how I first saw it. And I remember where.

I was in seventh grade and there in the counselor's office at school was a plaque that said, "Don't worry. Be happy." This plaque was on the wall behind him so I could not look at him without seeing the plaque. I wonder if he put it there on purpose.

I was in there a lot, almost daily, so I read it every time I went in. And just in case you are wondering, I was not in trouble. I was his School Service Helper working for volunteer hours. I really didn't know what was behind the School Service program, but what I did know and liked was that when I got my class work done with each teacher I got to leave class and go help this counselor. It was such motivation for me, and I liked helping him. We got to know each other well and some days he would say that catchy phrase to me, "Don't worry. Be happy." As my counselor, he knew the difficult home life I was leaving school to go to. And I knew he was trying to cheer me up. It only worked because I knew I would see him the next day at school. It is amazing who and how people can impact our lives. I still love that phrase and think of him every time I think of it.

An American jazz vocalist, Bobby McFerrin, saw the phrase on a poster, wrote it into an inspiring song, played every instrument in the song as well as singing and doing the whistling that is included in it. The song exploded becoming #1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. This was

in 1988. It was also that year that it became Jamaica's unofficial anthem after the 1988 Hurricane Gilbert, which did horrible destruction and is still ranked of record proportions.

This phrase and song went on to be used as a book title, was a featured song for movies including, *Casper: A Spirited Beginning*; *WALL-E*; *Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation*; and was used in many other ways. It is meant to be encouraging and uplifting and is quite like

Proverbs 12:25,

“Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.”

So, start your kids and yourself off this school year with, “Don't worry. Be happy,” and if you know the catchy tune, sing it!

And always remember...

“Cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you,” 1 Peter 5:7.



YOU

## **Strengthening Your Core - Easy as ABC** – Marcy Lytle

I've shared a few times about my alphabet prayer that I so love reciting. It's where I choose adjectives from A to Z to describe Him while I pray – and I usually do it when I'm walking. I might be something like,

“Thank you that you're awesome, big, caring and daring, ever-present, faithful...”

I love thinking up ways to describe my great big wonderful God, and sometimes I even sit still and listen to him say something similar back to me. One time I felt he hung out on the P – telling me I was pretty – which I needed at the time. Another time He paused on the T – reminding me that I was trustworthy – which brought me to happy tears. It's not hard listening to Him talk back, and I know that His words will always be affirmative and kind.

Recently, I decided to switch to verbs, to thank God for all the action He takes in the world and on my behalf and on the behalf of others, for whom I pray. It went something like this: (Oh, and by the way, there are no rules in this fun – you can totally skip a letter that's too hard!)

Thank you God that you're always

- Acting on my behalf
- Bringing good gifts
- Caring for my needs
- Delivering peace
- Entering my room
- Freeing my spirit
- Giving me time
- Holding me close
- Inviting me closer
- Justifying
- Kissing my wounds
- Loving me well
- Moving mountains
- Nearing the broken
- Overreaching my imagination
- Producing fruit
- Quickening my mind
- Reaching out to me
- Satisfying my thirst
- Teaching me to love others
- Understanding
- Validating me
- Wooing me to listen
- X-ing out my wrongs
- (skipping Y)

- Zipping along beside me

I'll admit, that prayer above was mostly about how He is for me personally, but it changes each time I do this exercise. I can choose verbs that describe more his actions in the world at large, or any number of things. I can also use nouns, or again back to adjectives. The possibilities are numerous, and so enjoyable.

It doesn't have to be a lofty prayer with perfect petitions and praise. Prayer can be as simple as the ABC's and end up being powerful to bring heaven to you, elevate you into praise, or move mountains as you recall his faithfulness among us all.

Try it. Recite the one above. Then make up one of your own.

## Life Right Now – An Amazing Watch – by Bethany Gomez

I am writing this month about something that I wish everyone to know about. I will give you a hint. It has nothing to do with my job as an assistant teacher and the controversial topic of whether or not students should go back to school this fall as the coronavirus is currently still running rampant. For one, the update I have will probably change, and two, it is what it is. God is still God and in control and that is bringing me peace in this chaotic, ever changing time.

I'm curious, though. What has everyone been watching during this pandemic/quarantine/stay-at home time? The reason I ask is to find out who has heard of or seen *The Chosen* yet. If you haven't heard of it, then here is a quick summary: *The Chosen* is the first-ever, crowd-funded, multi-season show about the life of Christ and the perspective is primarily from the Disciples of Christ rather than Jesus himself.

If you have heard of it, but have yet to watch it for whatever reason, I highly recommend watching it right now! If you have seen it, can we just talk about how amazing it is? I know, I am late to *The Chosen* bandwagon, it premiered back in April of 2019, but once I started it, I didn't want it to end.

I know what some of you are thinking. Faith based movies or shows do not have a great track record of being up to par with Hollywood made movies. They have gotten a lot better I will say, but sometimes I am even skeptical. However, I watch them for the encouraging, faith-filled messages that I desire the world to see, not for the visual spectacle that you can expect from most secular movies/shows these days. Also, up until this point, films about Jesus haven't portrayed Him very well, right? We have gotten a lot of somber, stoic, almost emotionless pictures of Jesus over the years. I honestly believe Jesus smiled a lot and laughed, and cried, and had a whole range of emotions. He was human too after all, right? *The Chosen* is like no other in how it portrays Jesus as human, relatable, but at the same time divine.

I have read several posts, comments, and testimonies of how the portrayal of Jesus in *The Chosen* has impacted others and many of them have resonated with me.

"I feel closer to Jesus watching this show than I've ever felt before"

"I get why people would follow and want to be with Jesus"

"I felt the presence of God watching this show"

"The love of Jesus for ALL is shown beautifully"

Now can you guess which one of those quotes was mine? Truly, all of them entered my mind at some point watching this series and many more.

There are eight stunning episodes in Season One. I don't want to give away any spoilers, so I will not go into too much detail. The show enters the story of Jesus a little before his ministry was truly started. Since the series is mainly from the perspective of the disciples, they delve into the lives of each one. Of course, the show takes some artistic license here and throughout, but that is what makes it so beautiful. It is the very fact of how relatable the disciples are, with all their flaws and struggles, that made the deepest impact on me. They are flawed too, just like me and yet Jesus called them to follow Him. I absolutely love how the show demonstrates the life of Christ primarily from the perspective of his followers and others that encountered Him.

There are so many powerful moments written in scripture that are portrayed so brilliantly in this show (by fantastic actors and actresses) that I was brought to tears throughout the entire season. If I have a critique, it is so miniscule that it is not worth sharing because the praises I have for this show far outweigh the flaws I noticed.

Have I convinced you yet to watch it, that is, if you haven't already? You won't regret it! There is even an app that you can watch it on for free due to the "pay it forward" aspect of this wonderful show. The name of the app is called none other than *The Chosen*. It has over 45 million views and counting. They are currently in the works to get Season Two funded. I can't wait!

There is one final quote that I would like to share. It is the one from the son of the director, while on set: "Dad, I think this show is really going to change some lives."

I think so, too. I am praying for eyes, ears, minds, and hearts to be opened to the life changing love of Jesus Christ through this show.

Every chance I get I will recommend *The Chosen* to everyone. It's that good! So grab a bowl of popcorn, click on your TV, and start watching...



## **Created for Life - The Song of Moses – by Ginny Hurley**

Music is the language of heaven. Worship with singing, dancing, instruments, flying colors, and so much more, diffuses the atmosphere of heaven. This majesty cannot be contained and is spilling into the earth more everyday as the people of God release these sounds and joyful melodies down below, on earth. These blessings pouring from heaven are colliding with the rising tide of worship here on earth, bringing cataclysmic explosions of power, love, and hope. Never before have we seen such unity, prayer, and worship on a global scale. The ones who know and love Jesus have risen up to a calling so deep, so genuine, that the earth is shaking. Many have seen angels while experiencing heaven's songs.

As a child, I experienced Jesus holding my hand every night as I lay down. I always slept on one side because I knew He was there holding my hand on the other side. I've seen angels. I've witnessed miracles and wonders, not every day or season, but often enough for me to realize that we are in the best times on the earth right now. Because God is GOOD and He is coming and is here for His beautiful Bride to show His splendor to a lost and hurting world. He shows up in a multitude of ways through His loving ones. Serving others, being kind, sharing, living a life of joy and love, these are the things He loves. These are the things He sees. We don't have to witness miracles or observe signs and wonders, but they are here for a witness, an expression of heaven and how very much He loves us. My flesh cannot contain these thoughts, yet my spirit understands. We were made for this. We were made as vessels for Him to flow through for the sake of others. My finite being will die, but my spirit will never die. He has even promised me a new body.

In Moses' song in Exodus 15, he's praising and worshiping because of the great miracle of crossing the Red Sea. However, in Deuteronomy 30-32, his song changes to one of recollection and direction for his people. He is reminding them of who God is and what He has told them. Now Moses is about to be gone and a new era is coming with the new leader, Joshua. As Moses sings his song in Deuteronomy 32, he is crying out in worship, repentance, and hope, that God's people will remember the miracles and go forward with their destiny. Deuteronomy 32:9, "For the Lord's portion is His people: Jacob is the place of His inheritance."

The following truths are ours if we want to believe them:

Verse 10: We are FOUND, He ENCIRCLES and INSTRUCTS us

Verse 11: He HOVERS over us, He CARRIES us

Verse 12: He LEADS us

Verse 13: He MAKES us RIDE on the HEIGHTS of the earth, He GIVES us HONEY from the rock, He GIVES us OIL from the rock

Verse 14: He GIVES us choicest WHEAT, He GIVES us sweet WINE

I could do a word study here of these blessings, but that is not my point...

Then Moses continues his song: Basically he sings that they are a nation void of counsel and understanding. He calls them back to a people of faith and wisdom. He finishes by singing verse 47, that this is not futile but for their very LIFE!

We are in a season, as the Body of Christ, where we are to go up to the mountain of God, the place of intimacy and there find His heart for those around us. We are in a season of time when He is saying that He completed His work on earth, so that He can give to us His Holy Spirit of Truth. That we are fully able to BE and to REPRESENT Him is our call of action for this time.

Will we respond while chaos, confusion, and fear try to swirl around our songs of worship? Will we arise with trembling and a sincere fear of the Lord to awaken a world asleep and lost? There are many questions that need asking and many problems to solve, but I believe we were created for just such a time. I believe He wants our YES. I am not able, but I do KNOW the ONE who is! For just such a time as this!

I want to sing a song of freedom and deliverance. I want to sing the songs of hope and victory for a nation that has lost its way. Many sounds and songs are sweeping the airways. Which one will you choose? This is literally our lives and the lives of our loved ones. This is a call for His Presence to invade our homes and lives like never before. Let's make Him welcome!

## Healthy Habits – Touch Not – by Marcy Lytle

Masks. They're everywhere in every color and style, and they are part of our wardrobe...all to protect others and our own faces...from the virus! Maddening, isn't it? However, one thing I've noticed for me personally is that when I wear a mask, it keeps my hands from touching my face...something we all should do...all the time – even when the virus is no longer a threat! Touching our hands to our faces brings germs into our airways, and when we don't touch our faces, we stay healthier.

Here are seven more ways to keep our hands off our faces that I've found to be working:

1. If you're a nail biter – Find a friend or a family member that's willing to remind you when your fingers go in your mouth to stop. It will be annoying at first, but be thankful someone cares, and break that habit!
2. If you're a finger licker – Make sure you have napkins when you eat. Buy some really cute ones at the dollar store (seriously, there are so many pretty patterns!) and keep them out to grab for everyone to have when they eat the smallest of snacks to the largest of meals. No finger licking, only napkin wiping!
3. If you're a face toucher – Wear makeup! I know, many have just gotten accustomed to working at home all *naturale*, but I've found if I take the time to put on makeup, it helps me keep my hands off my face.
4. If you're an eye wiper – Wear mascara! Just put on some each day, and it helps keep your hands at bay! Allergens in the air, tears of joy or sadness, or all sorts of reasons can cause our eyes to weep. Keep tissues in your purse, along with that hand sanitizer, and train yourself to wipe with that...not your hands.
5. If you're a nose picker – Yuck! But we all do it from time to time, when no one is looking. Carry tissues! Buy those small packs and place one in each tote bag and purse, and in the console of your car, so that your fingers are never in contact with anything but that tissue!
6. If you're a face picker – stop. Just stop picking at your skin altogether. Maybe you can't stand that blemish or that spot or that wild hair (yeah, all disgusting, I know). When you wear the mask, this helps so much with picking at your face. So all the more reason to wear it!
7. If you're a face strummer – Maybe you like strumming his cheeks or he yours, or even the kids. Find another way to show your affection – away from the face. Our hands don't need to be in the faces of others. We can rub a back, brush the kids' hair, or massage the feet.

My husband and I are constantly telling each other to stop with the face touching, and honestly at first it caused arguments. But we've both become better at not touching, and I appreciate it now when he catches me biting a nail. I want to be aware and stop all the nasty habits, and stay well...on into the fall season!

## **Life in a Nutshell - Uncontained** – by Jill Montz

As the deadline for this month's article loomed closer and closer I was in a pickle. (And I'm personally not a fan of pickles unless they are fried and dipped in Ranch dressing.) With the constant state of change and uncertainty we now live in, every idea I had could've been a moot point by the time the article was published. So I did the only thing I knew to do.

I prayed.

I asked God to show me what He wanted me to share with you readers. I told Him I was empty of words and lost as to what to say and I needed Him to lead me. And, oh by the way, I needed Him to walk fast because the article was due in less than a week. No pressure, God!

God was silent for several days. I could say I was worried but I really wasn't. I just kept praying that my eyes, heart, and soul would be open to whatever He had in store for me. And then God did what God does best; when I least expected. He showed me something my own soul was aching to see.

I took a trip to a local plant nursery with one of my dearest friends who needed some ideas for her flower beds. We were deep in discussion about what was troubling our hearts when we strolled into the exotic indoor plant greenhouse and came upon a giant tree reaching floor to ceiling. It caused us both to stop mid-conversation and stare in amazement. Not only was the tree huge, but what was even more amazing was the tiny pot at the base of the tree that the roots were in. At first it reminded me of Robin Williams as the genie from Aladdin when he comes out of the lamp and the famously says, "Phenomenal cosmic powers...itty bitty living space."

I stepped closer to read the tag to find out what kind of tree it was. When I leaned in, I discovered it was a Fiddle Leaf Fig tree and I saw that the roots were actually not contained in the tiny pot at all. They had broken free and were firmly rooted in the floor of the greenhouse. As I looked around to find someone to ask about this tree, I saw another one just like it. It too had roots busting free of the small container pot it originally grew in. These trees were probably 15 feet tall or more and their root systems had grown over the top or busted through the pots in order to seek more water and dirt in which to anchor themselves to.

These images spoke to my soul in so many ways. Immediately I was hit by the idea that this was a perfect analogy of what God wants for our lives. His plans for us are limitless, but we ourselves, and the fallen world we live in, try to contain them in a manner that is easier to carry and handle. I have no idea how long these trees have been inside that greenhouse, but I am sure when they originally came in they were carried in by a person. They were small enough to be able to be picked up and placed on the ground. Now, in their current state, I am guessing they could never be moved. They are too large and they are firmly rooted. Moving them, given their location and size, might require damaging the root system and thus harming the tree.

So often God places big dreams or big hopes in our lives, but we, in all our humanness, can't handle them. I know I personally ask God for something smaller, more manageable, and easier to carry. And God in all His love and mercy gives me what I ask for. I find just the right spot for my little metaphorical pot of hopes and dreams. I water the pot and take care of it as best I know how. I think it looks lovely. I know the potential my hopes and dreams have, but I rest easy knowing that the pot I placed around their root system will keep them from getting too big for me to easily manage.

That pot is created out of my own doubts and fears and struggles with giving everything to God. The pot can be beautiful. I can dress up my doubts, fears, and struggles with all kinds of pretty excuses and make them look more pleasing to the eye. But the truth is they are just my way of trying to put limitations on myself and God.

Depending on the hopes and dreams (and on the specific type of plant) that pot can limit the growth or even kill what is trying to thrive inside it. We have all seen hopes and dreams die because of doubts and fears. We have all seen regrets for what could have been. We have all asked ourselves the question, "What would I most want to do if failure was not an option?"

These Fiddle Leaf Fig trees remind me that while God will often let me limit myself sometimes, when it is for His glory, He will not be contained. He will find a way to break free of all the obstacles holding His children back. He will firmly take hold of those hopes and dreams and grow them to heights we weren't prepared for and weren't sure we could handle.

God knows we were created for more. He knows that with Him we can achieve great things on this side of Heaven for His honor and glory. God has given us gifts and talents to achieve these things. And He has blessed us with opportunities if we will only stop long enough to see them. God doesn't want us to put our dreams inside a small pot. He wants us to break free of what is holding us back and reach heights we never imagined were possible. And He promises us that if we will stay rooted in Him, His word and His will...then all things truly are possible. Miracles can happen. The unexplainable can occur. Ordinary people can do extraordinary things.

The Bible is full of stories just like this. Noah built an ark when he had never even seen rain. Moses led his people out of Egypt with a speech problem. David was herding sheep when he was chosen to be king. Mary was a typical teenager when an angel told her she was going to give birth to a savior.

In 2 Kings 4:1-7 we learn about a widow who went to Elisha for help. Creditors were coming to take her two sons as slaves if she wasn't able to pay them. Elisha asked her what she had and the woman replied "nothing...except a little oil." (2 Kings 4:2) "Elisha said, Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few." (2 Kings 4:3) He then told her to fill each jar until it was full, put it aside and fill another. She was to keep doing this until all the jars were full. So she and her sons did just that and when all the jars were full the oil ran out. She used those jars of oil to pay her debts and save her sons.

Notice Elisha tells the woman "Don't ask for just a few." The woman thought that she was limited with just "a little oil" but Elisha knew the power of God. He knew God was limitless. The only limits placed on how long the oil would flow, and thus how much money the woman would make to pay off her debt, was on how many pots the woman gathered up. If she had gathered 10 pots we could assume the oil would've dried up after 10. If she had gathered 1,000 pots we could assume the oil would've filled all 1,000 of them.

When I researched the Fiddle Leaf Fig tree I found out it can grow to be over 50 feet tall in its native soils of West Africa. There it flowers and produces fruit. However, many homeowners around the world have adapted the tree to be a small indoor plant and in this environment the tree will not flower or bear fruit. While it is still very beautiful to look at, the tree never reaches its full potential.

Like the widow and the domesticated Fiddle Leaf Fig tree, we create are our own limitations. God is a giving God. He wants us to overflow with all His goodness and His plans for us are better than we could ever imagine. No pot of doubts and fears, not Satan himself, can hold back the plans God has for each of us. But I believe God wants us to be willing participants.

I am a lover of plants and if I am honest I love beautiful pots too. I have many filled with flowers in and outside my home. Some of them were gifts from friends and family members. Some of them were hand painted with the tiny hands of my daughter when she was in preschool. Some I lovingly chose myself and some I inherited along the way. As a stroll around my house and look carefully at each pot I also look carefully at my own soul. Some of the physical pots are chipped and faded from the weather. Some will need to be tossed after this season ends. And I can't help but ask myself...what metaphorical pots have I placed in my soul that need to be tossed too? And if I am brave enough to let those hopes and dreams take root deep within me, just how big will they grow and what fruit will they produce? Perhaps I may never know, but I am praying to God for the strength and courage to someday find out!



MARRIAGE

**In This Together – The Messy Party** – by Bekah Holland

*"It was the best of times. It was the worst of times."* Tale of Two Cities

*"If I am out of my mind, it's alright with me."* Herzog

*"I write this sitting in the kitchen sink."* I Capture the Castle

*"Marriage in the days of COVID....."*

My future epic bio of surviving 2020 with a fraction of remaining sanity. \*I hope\*

You guys, I have no idea what to say. That's why I started with these quotes that I feel in my soul. This is day 732 of quarantine (lockdown days are like dog years!). I'm completely stick-a-fork-in-me done. So while I know many people are using this time to learn a new language or start a new hobby, I don't have the bandwidth to continue an old hobby, much less learn Hungarian. But, as I've mentioned in prior episodes of "Lunacy in the Face of Lockdown" (catchy, right), I have been a bit more introspective lately. I have discovered some things about myself, several being a surprise even to me.

One example is, despite thinking all of my life that I am an extrovert, it has been abundantly clear that I am, in fact, not. During this lovely time in our lives, I have uttered the words, "I hate people," more times that I can count...although mostly when trying to grocery shop with a mask while people hoard toilet paper and yell at helpless cashiers. My mom told me never to say *hate*, and she's basically always right, so I'm leaning more towards complete disgust than hate, but you get the picture.

There are times when being around others gives me energy. But 8 ½ times out of 10, being around big groups, or even small groups for long periods of time, completely drains me. Probably something to do with my Enneagram number or Meyer-Briggs personality type. So as much as I love to be around the people in my life in bite sized chunks of time, I've come to realize that because of my helper, fixer, peacemaker type tendencies, along with my people pleasing side, there are many times I find myself more often than not, sacrificing my wellbeing to make someone else happy. Or I end up playing the referee, trying to create peace in relationships where pressure, expectation and hurt have caused a rift.

Some(lots of)times I find myself in these roles in my own home. For whatever reason, I tend to be very sensitive to how others are feeling. If they're happy, I'm happy. If they're sick, I comfort. If they're stressed, I try to ease their worry. If they're angry, I will move heaven and earth to calm them. But I feel physically ill when my kids or my husband are angry. Doesn't sound all that bad right? Ask my husband. I'm a disaster. Partially because I try to take on the weight of the world and, let's face it, I'm just not equipped with strong enough shoulders. Now sad...sad I can handle. Hugs and gallon of ice cream fix a plethora of heartbreak. But angry? Nope, I would rather roll around in an ant bed.



How did I make it to 14 years living side by side with another human? No idea. Seriously. And while I try to be aware of my reaction to the feelings of others, my go-to, auto response isn't healthy. For me, or my relationships. Because, shockingly (insert sarcastic font here), it's not good for someone to take on the responsibility for the feelings of other people. And if I don't intentionally walk away from it, slow my breathing and talk myself down, I start down a dangerous path. I'm often overwhelmed by assuming ownership for every negative reaction.

I hope someday I get to ask God why I'm like this, followed closely by, "Why did you make mosquitos?" but I digress. This is still a work in progress for me. I wish I was coming at this from some place of growth, but I'm still in the messy part. And that's okay.

It's okay for us to still be figuring it out.

It's okay to not have it all together.

It's okay to eat ice cream in the bathtub.

It's okay to lose it sometimes and have to say, "I'm sorry. Again."

This story we're writing is a journey. We can't sprint to the finish or we'll miss all the beauty in between. So keep going, whatever that looks like for you. Even when it's hard. Even when it feels like you've finally got a handle on things. And then again when you realize you have no clue. Because there is something new on the horizon, as long as you remember to hold desperately to the "giver and perfecter of our faith" rooted in hope.

"I'm a beautiful mess of contradiction, a chaotic display of imperfection."

Sai Marie Johnson

"Sometimes I'm the mess. Sometimes I'm the broom.

On the hardest days, I have to be both."

Ruby Francisco

## **Date Night Fun – Games for Two – by Marcy Lytle**

I can't believe that we're for the most part still staying at home or with our families, and this virus stuff is still a part of our lives, but it is. And we've found a few games that we've revisited that we've quite enjoyed. And the cool part about game playing is that we can play them in different venues, at different times, and with different snacks alongside! So this month, here a few games to revisit and play while you stay...with him...for date night in.

**Pass the Pigs** – Have you ever played this game? You roll these little rubber pigs and gain points depending on how they land – upright, on their sides, on their snouts, etc. There's really no strategy, just pure luck and so much fun. Try making fondue skewers of bacon, bread cubes and pickles, and dipping them in melted cheese, while you play. You can even make a fondue setup with a tin can (with air holes punched on the sides), a tea light inside, and a bowl on top. You'll need a tabletop for this game!

<https://www.amazon.com/Winning-Moves-Games-Pass-Pigs/dp/B00005JG3Y>

**Outburst** – This is a fun game to play while swinging or sitting on the porch late in the evening, when the day has cooled off. Take a cold drink with you (like ice and lemon juice crushed in a blender til it's slushy), muddled with a few blueberries in the bottom. You basically ask each other topic questions and try to guess the 10 answers on the cards. We usually take out five cards each and see who has the most points at the end!

[https://www.amazon.com/Hasbro-C0419-Outburst-Game/dp/B01ISKSLGI/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=outburst&qid=1594815631&s=toys-and-games&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Hasbro-C0419-Outburst-Game/dp/B01ISKSLGI/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=outburst&qid=1594815631&s=toys-and-games&sr=1-1)

**Yahtzee** – Find a clear spot on your floor, where you can roll the five dice! Consider graham crackers, slice strawberries and strawberry cream cheese for your snack. You know the game, you roll, you see if you have a pattern that fits your score sheet and you total up your points at the end. It's a great game that you can still converse while playing. And there's a wonderful vintage box version!

<https://www.entertainmentearth.com/product/yahtzee-vintage-bookshelf-edition-game/ws27440>

**Trivia** – Just find that old Trivial Pursuit game and pull out 10 cards each. Lay down in a cozy spot, or just lie back on some comfy floor pillows, and start asking questions. If you answer correctly, you get to go again. Keep playing until all cards are used up, and whoever gets to the end first wins! Don't use the game board. But if you miss the little triangle pieces, then serve up those Laughing Cow triangular cheeses with nuts, olives, and grapes!

[https://www.amazon.com/Trivial-Pursuit-Genus-Subsidiary-c2000/dp/B006G4TZN2/ref=sr\\_1\\_12?dchild=1&keywords=trivial+pursuit+cards&qid=1594815966&sr=8-12](https://www.amazon.com/Trivial-Pursuit-Genus-Subsidiary-c2000/dp/B006G4TZN2/ref=sr_1_12?dchild=1&keywords=trivial+pursuit+cards&qid=1594815966&sr=8-12)

**Jokes** – Okay, this isn't a game, but we love doing it. Reader's Digest Magazine has joke scattered throughout, but you could totally just find a list of jokes from the internet to print out.

This is a great way to end a hot summer day, with some funny snacks that make you smile as well. Maybe pretzels, chocolate chips and peanut butter – or pickles and popcorn – or dark chocolate and orange slices. Read the jokes out loud and see how many actually make you laugh out loud!

Look through your stash of games that you once played and enjoyed and let them make a comeback in your date night together. Browse your pantry and fridge and create snacks to go with, make fun drinks, pick toppings for ice cream, pile up crackers and goodies...and you'll be ready. Don't forget to dress up for date night as you would if you were truly going out...why not? Isn't he/she worth it?

## **After 40 Years – The Most Handsome – by Marcy Lytle**

When we're young and dating, it's all visual, isn't it? If he dresses cute, smells good, stays fit and all the things...we're attracted. I guess that's the way it still works. But it doesn't take long for those perfect, charming young men (and we women) to start showing signs of aging on the outside. Gray hair, the effects of gravity on the body, time and just life itself changes the way we look on the outside. Boy, does it change!

However, the cool thing I've been realizing lately is how handsome my husband appears to me in other ways, ways I never thought to notice when we were in our 20's. Just lately, he's become more handsome to me than ever...because I suppose I'm seeing beneath the skin... Although, it's pretty cool how when you observe beneath the skin, the outward looks handsome again as well!

I've ridden with him during this pandemic, on days when my work was slow, and observed him in his element – his job. I had no idea of all of the details he attends to, people he has to deal with, and smarts he has to have when taking care of all that he does! I have been amazed at how well he does his job, and realized why he ends up so tired at the end of the day! That was impossible to know without opening my eyes to see.

I've worked more with him on projects. He recently built a wall around a transformer in our yard, and his skills at detail and perfection have always been there, but I've been too busy and self-absorbed to notice as much as I did this time. He worked hard. He's smart (Did I say that already?) And that man inside, the one full of integrity and grit shines through when he's hammering and measuring. I'm a fan.

I've been with him a lot more. We stopped at a convenience store on the way back from a weekend trip and he returned to the car with his drink of choice and peanuts. In his other hand was a cup of ice, which he knows I prefer instead of drinking from a bottle. That little detail he remembered made my heart flutter. I smiled and gave him thanks, instead of barking at him about something else.

I've sat with him on the sofa so many nights, just the two of us. I love it when he moves our dinner dishes away so that he can scoot closer to me and hold my hand. He lets me rest my foot in his lap and rubs my feet while we catch up on a series we're watching. I really love him.

He's not perfect. Neither am I. But somehow, though our physical vision requires reading glasses for daily activity – our other vision – is getting sharper by the day. We're both looking more at the other person for who they are now – what they've been – and their ways and stamina that we love.

And surprisingly to both of us, we are finding new romance emerging. No, it's not that we've worked out and toned our bodies, lost a few pounds or erased a few lines. It's mostly because we've been forced to slow down and observe, to give thanks for each other, and to remove our facial glasses and see with our years of being together – the people that we've become and are still becoming.

I think he's the most handsome man in the world...all dressed up when we're going somewhere...but even more when he's doing what he loves to do...serving and working with his hands to give.

Growing older together isn't so bad, and neither is being together 24/7.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## Simple Truths – That Song – by Marcy Lytle

Erica is our writer for this column, but she's on a three month hiatus. The title she gave this column indicates that the truth should be simple, not complicated, so we will continue with that theme...while we write and wait for her to return! Simple truths are the ones we need right about now in this space and time in which we live. All the theology in the world won't get us through, but the simple truth of Jesus will. And I learned that in a very hard space in my life...and I'm still learning it.

Theology was taught to me as a kid, with lots of ideas and thoughts that landed in my head about God and me. Some of it couldn't have been further from the truth. I thought if I dressed a certain way, read my Bible a specific amount of time each day, and went to church like a good girl...all would be well with my soul.

I missed the simple truth that **Jesus loves me**, period. I don't have to perform to gain his approval. I am approved of because I belong to him.

As I grew into adulthood, those theologies and ideas crumbled as I saw my husband's health fail, our finances plummet, and intruders arrive...to rob me of my peace. But what was really robbed and taken out from under me was my foundation, which again was performance and duty. I sat beside the road one day and finally realized that **this I know** – Jesus – and he is enough for every season and loss in life.

I somehow thought that I had to be strong and never fail, if I truly believed and had enough faith. Weakness was a sign of mistrust, or so I thought. But the weak are the ones that reach out for a hand up, and then learn to walk strong, in the strength of that friendship made from the time in need. **Little ones to Him belong**...I finally learned the meaning of that string of words. I felt so little and small when I lost it all, but then so big and strong when I saw to whom I belonged.

So many "no's" were taught to me as a child, no to wearing pants, no to movies, no to kissing, no to dancing, and no, no, no. What a downer it was to live a life set apart for Him. But, wait! The rest of the song says "**Yes! Jesus loves me!**" In fact, that phrase is repeated three times! When I learned that His answer to so much fun and good times in life is YES because He has set me free to live, I could finally sing with joy...the rest of the lyrics.

The bible, the good book, the gospel was no longer a thick book of words and phrases I could not understand and directives I could never obey. I finally learned the narrative of the love of God from the beginning of creation throughout all of history, until the time to come which I have not seen yet. There's a story there, one I had missed, and it was there in plain view hidden behind all the rules...right there! **The Bible tells me so...**

I suppose that's the most simple of all kids' songs that we teach to our kids from the time they can hear and then sing out loud. But do they really get it? I didn't, until I was about 30 years old and it's taken me that many more years to get back to the simplicity of childlike trust to where I can play at the feet of my Father without fear.

*Jesus loves me,*

*This I know*

*For the bible tells me so  
Little ones to Him belong*

*They are weak,*

*But he is strong*

*Yes! Jesus loves me!*

*Yes! Jesus loves me!*

*Yes! Jesus loves me!*

*The Bible tells me so.*



## Rooted in Love - Never Grow Up – by Kaelin Scott

As adults, we are constantly trying to teach children to be more like us.

“Don’t talk with your mouth full.”

“Wash your hands after you go potty.”

“Say please and thank you.”

“Share with your friends.”

“Pick up after yourself.”

“Don’t pick your nose.”

“Use a napkin, not your shirt.”

Do this, do that. Don’t do this, don’t do that.

I don’t think there’s anything wrong with helping kids become mature and productive. But in my opinion, there are many ways in which we should become more like children.

For starters, *they are so helpful*. It’s the sweetest thing when a one-year-old runs over to help you unload the dishwasher, even if she can’t actually reach the cabinets to put anything away. Or when you’re vacuuming and your toddler mimics your actions with his own toy vacuum. And most kids seem to get a thrill out of taking trash to the trash can, for some strange reason. But it’s so beautiful, because they don’t do it to get anything in return. They do it because they love you and want to help. They don’t look at helping others as a burden, but they enjoy it.

*Children are also so trusting and full of faith*. When you read them a Bible story, they don’t doubt what you say. They take it as truth and store it in their hearts. Even if they don’t understand everything about God, they believe wholeheartedly and profess it to anyone who will listen. Faith isn’t a struggle in the mind of a child. They simply take your word for it, because they trust you.

One of the most magical things about children is their ability to be joyful in any circumstance. *They are experts at going with the flow*. They don’t get their undies in a bunch over a change in plans, because they can manage to have fun almost anywhere. I’ve seen it with my own kids. Whether we’re in an auto repair shop, grocery store, hair salon, hardware store, hospital waiting room, or doctor’s office, they always find a way to entertain themselves. They don’t sit there all grouchy, counting down the minutes until they can get out of there. They enjoy the day they’re given and make the most of it.

And how about their eagerness to forgive? Their feelings never stay hurt very long. They simply move on and keep playing. And that’s because they love too big to stay mad. *Their hearts have no room for bitterness or resentment*. “Forgive and forget” is so easy for a kid.

It’s natural for kids to grow up, and it’s good for us to equip them with tools to help navigate adult life. But while we’re doing that, we should take time to study their behavior. Maybe we could learn a thing or two from our little ones. Their innocence and purity only lasts so long, but maybe we can preserve it by encouraging and fostering the things that they’re already really good at. Things like helping others, having faith, choosing joy, and forgiving. Children have such beautiful hearts, and in some ways, I hope my children never grow up.

“And He said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children,

you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:3

## Firmly Planted – Guardian of the Garden – by Dina Cavazos

---

I'm continually amazed at God's involvement in my life, even in the small things. I love God's surprises and don't ever want to take them for granted. If every prayer I prayed was answered, not only could that be dangerous, but it could dull the joy when he surprises me.

This past April, in the midst of extraordinary events, another extraordinary event was happening in my garden—a rodent infestation like no other. I've written about my battles with the little monsters before. Along with the birds, squirrels, lizards, butterflies, and the occasional opossum that visit my backyard paradise, these unwelcome guests are attracted by the bird feeders. Birds are messy and picky eaters—they drop a lot of seed as they eat, leaving a feast on the ground. Not only that, but crafty rodents can easily jump from the trees onto the feeder itself.

I don't know what was going on this year, but it was especially bad. They were swarming—several mornings and evenings I saw six or more of them at a time moving through the trees, hanging on the bird feeders, jumping on the fence, running down the boards like a racetrack. I saw them feeding on the ground, in the gutter, and even in a potted plant where seed had fallen. Up and down, across and over, in and out...disgusting! One morning, from inside the house I saw several on one of the feeders. I rushed outside to take it off the tree and when they heard the door they jumped off. As I was carrying the feeder to the patio I felt something brush against my hand. A tiny mouse had gotten *inside* the feeder and jumped out as I was carrying it! Talk about creepy!

My history with rodents includes various kinds of traps, natural remedies such as plaster of paris, peppermint and vinegar, and, in desperation, poison. I put baffles on top of the feeders and seed catchers under most of them. Finally, I made homemade shields to keep the rats from jumping onto the feeders. I had an exterminator come out, but because my problem is outside, not inside, their recommended solution wouldn't work for me. My last attempt to *do something* had the neighbors worried—I shot one with a BB gun. I'm sorry animal lovers, but rats and mice are just nasty. The unpleasant result made me realize I needed something bigger than a bb. I bought a pellet gun, but soon realized that, even though it was satisfying in a brutal kind of way, this wasn't the answer either.

For a good two weeks, most of my time was spent in rat prevention or annihilation in one way or another, and, as you can see, I tried everything. It was consuming me. One day, I was talking to my friend Jeannie about it. We prayed.

I can still hear her simple,

“Lord, I'm asking that you just take care of it.”

I haven't had a pet in 15 years, for many reasons, but I finally agreed, around March, to get my grandson a kitten, because he loves cats, and I love him. We were just waiting for kitten season. One of my concerns was the predatory nature of cats—I was afraid for the birds. We were actively looking for kittens, and I had my preferences: female, short-hair, small when fully grown, white or light color. Then one day a stray cat shows up in my yard. I shoo it away because I'm

not in the market for a *cat*. It comes back. I think “*hmmm, maybe...*” I say to my grandson, “*Let’s feed him and try him out—see what he’s like.*” He’s a spayed MALE, a BIG cat with a tail as long as his body—not exactly what we were looking for, but, oh so sweet. We bring him in, he loves Austin, he’s cuddly and purry, he listens when I tell him *No*. Austin says he’s *the one* and I realize that he’s God’s answer. I try to locate the owner, find out he’s not chipped—finally, after investing in vaccinations, tests, and chip, he’s *ours*. He’s happy inside and outside, the birds are thriving as ever, and I haven’t seen a rat or mouse since the day he became Guardian of the Garden.

*All praise and thanks to God who daily loads us with benefits!*

Psalm 68:19

## Unearthly Thing - Layers of Love: the Onion Journey – by Angela Dolbear

My relationship with God is like peeling an onion. When one trial, or lesson, or victory is overcome, and that layer is peeled away, then a fresh layer to conquer is revealed.

And like slicing through an onion, there are usually tears as the layers get worked away. Usually tears of repentance, revelation, and thanksgiving, instead of stinging fumes of onion-ness.

My layer of late is encountering God's constant, attentive, loving help. His help is present in every situation (I'm already starting to tear up).

I am well aware of my need for help, especially from God. I guess awareness is the first step.

Somehow, my thick head (and heart) didn't realize I could ask for His help with everything. I do mean *everything*. And that I should expect that I will receive this requested help, because that is part of God's character. It is an outflow of His love.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible can be found in Hebrews 13:5-6, particularly in the Amplified Bible translation:

“He has said, ‘I will never [under any circumstances] desert you [nor give you up nor leave you without support, nor will I in any degree leave you helpless], nor will I forsake or let you down or relax My hold on you [assuredly not]!’ So we take comfort and are encouraged and confidently say, ‘The Lord is my Helper [in time of need], I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?’”

God speaks with an exclamation point when it comes to His promises to us (see verse 5), especially regarding His ever-present help. There are many verses in the Bible that speak on this topic, but this one is special to me, because God spoke these words to me, so loudly and clearly in my spirit, in a time of great need, indeed.

I believe I have mentioned this incident in an earlier article, but it bears repeating, since I live with its aftermath every moment of the day (and night):

On March 9, 2018, I had a stroke. Actually, one big stroke and several small ones. Two days later, after I was moved into a regular hospital room, the neurologist was going over my MRI test results with my husband Tim, and me. The neurologist (as well as several other doctors) said it was a *miracle* that I was able to sit up and talk, and play Words with Friends on my phone.

At that moment, I so very clearly heard (and still hear) God say to me, “I will never, ever, ever leave you.” (Reaching for a tissue now...)

SO I should *know* that in my relationship with God, I am free to ask for help with everything. Do I? Hardly. But I'm learning.

In this new layer of learning, I am asking God for help with everything. The big stuff, and the small stuff.

And I am learning to expect help when I ask. And to ask in a big way—not just for “crumbs” from my Almighty God. As if He would only help me with the bare minimum...where did this frame of mind come from? God is awesome.

A week ago, Tim and I decided to try another attempt to shop at Trader Joe's, during the pandemic. The last time we tried, there was a long, long line to get into the store due to social distancing. The line was in the hot sunlight, no shade. Excessive heat is not my friend (due to a prescription drug side effect), so we turned around, and went home...without the best rice crackers or Snickerdoodle cookies (both gluten-free, yay!).

But I love Trader Joe's. I was born and raised in Southern California. There was always a Trader Joe's nearby, loaded with tasty quality food at reasonable prices.

So on our second attempt at shopping at Trader Joe's, I prayed there would be no line. I stopped myself from asking for a short line---that would be praying for “crumbs.” No line. I asked for no line.

And there was no line. We walked right in the store.

And we had the funds to stock-up on all our favorite foods, especially gluten-free items. This girl can't consume gluten without swearing she might die during the next 48 hours after eating gluten (a symptom of systemic sclerosis). But God is good.

I was praising and thanking God all the while we shopped, and on the short drive home from downtown Nashville.

I am still praising and thanking God for His attentive and loving help. I am also thankful for:

- God's help with recording the audio books for my second and third novels. The stroke damaged my ability to read out loud. God met my plea for help with not only healing my ability, but the audiobooks came out awesome! God is good. I will say it again and again.
- God's help with recording vocals. The stroke took away my ability to apply singing techniques I have used all my life. Mentally, I could remember the mechanics of singing, but physically applying them was totally disconnected. God helped me get my voice back, and I have recorded vocals for a couple songs, and lead worship music at our church with my husband. So thankful.
- God's help with writing. As I am doing right now. In the weeks after the stroke, I found I could not spell (Spell Check is a close friend now), let alone string words together to complete a cognitive thought. So grateful.

It's important to list out recent situations where God has helped me, as well state my gratitude. And I want to publicly give glory and honor to God.

This list is also a big part of my testimony of His very personal and power touch of healing on me. Yes, I had to do my part putting in the work to improve and/or relearn reading out loud, singing, and writing but He did the rewiring of my brain. I could not have accomplished anything without God, and His help.

If you are a person who is unsure about your faith and where it lies, please hear me when I say, God is here for you. Right next to you, as you read this. No matter what you are going through. He is our helper. All you have to do is ask. So why not ask Him today?

Start your own “onion journey.” It’s so worth it.

P.S. I am walking on this journey with you. Questions, or need a little word of encouragement? Please feel free to email me at [angela@angeladolbear.com](mailto:angela@angeladolbear.com).

*ANGELA DOLBEAR is the author of four novels, and several short stories. She also writes and records original music with her husband, Tim Dolbear. Please visit her author page on [Amazon](#) for more information.*

**Moving Forward - A Quiet Life** – by Pamela Charro

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

*Make it your ambition to live a quiet life so that your daily life might win the respect of outsiders*

(paraphrased)

Everyone seems to be upset right now. We yell at the news on TV, at other drivers in traffic, and, more and more lately, straight into one another's faces. It is an unsettling time and emotions are running rampant.

God's Word challenges us to not get caught up in the hysteria. When we set our minds on him and his promises, we have access to the peace that surpasses understanding...

Philippians 4:7

*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

...and we offer an example to the world that is an attractive retreat from all of the chaos. We can live in a God-bubble of calm quietness. Others desperately need to know that this emotional safety is available to them as well.

As Joyce Meyer has said, we can "think about what we're thinking about."

Our example matters!

Today, I choose to think about God's eternal view of this world and to mind my own thoughts and actions instead of allowing the crazy out there to invade my peace.

Who knows?

Maybe someone will see what I have and want to know how they can get it for themselves, and that peace will guard us all.





FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME - His Treasure**

Sometimes I enjoy browsing IGTV for cooking videos or fashion ideas. Recently, I stumbled across one of the singers from Little Big Town and her cooking segments. I decided to watch a few at a time because I'm always up for learning something new in the kitchen. What caught my attention in her show was her repeated use of different bowls that her father had crafted and made.

Kimberly Schlapman pulled out bowls in beautiful colors or with pretty detail and repeatedly said that these bowls were her daddy's treasures. And then she made a statement that stuck with me,

“My daddy's treasures are my treasures.”

She went on to use these bowls for mixing and stirring and creating scrumptious things to eat, as she continued to literally gush about these bowls that found their place in her kitchen, on shelves of honor, because they were handcrafted by her daddy. These bowls were super special to the daughter, because her daddy had made them, so she took extremely good care of them and used them to present foods with aromas and tastes that filled her kitchen.

I found myself wishing I had a collection of bowls like that. What a great treasure, for sure, to have a collection of handmade items from a parent to use, then pass down to the next generation!

I couldn't stop thinking about these bowls and I realized that I DO have treasures that my Father has made. I have friends, people that he has created in his image, and they're mine for the pleasure of knowing and exalting to places of special recognition.

Racism isn't something new, but it's certainly something that's still prevalent and a huge story of interest right now in America. Handcrafted treasures of all colors, shapes and sizes surround us in our neighborhoods, in the marketplace, on line and more...from our past, right now, and will be in our future. And there's this verse in the bible that says he formed treasures in earthen vessels of clay.

II Corinthians 4:7

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay,*

*to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.*

Imagine with me, standing in our houses, preparing dinner for our families, and finding on our shelves a hidden bowl that's been there for years, unused and unseen because it was buried behind and forgotten about. Wouldn't we be so excited to discover this bowl if we suddenly remembered and realized that it was handmade and given to us by a loving father? We'd pull it out and carefully handle it, fill it with something good, and place on our tables for all who come to enjoy and see and eat from its fullness.

I have a handmade chip/dip bowl. It's absolutely my favorite for several reasons. I spotted it in an old bakery emporium in downtown Austin one year right before Christmas. It was handmade, and the only bowl like it on the shelf. I mentioned it to my husband, and before Christmas he went back and purchased it and gave it to me. It now sits prominently on a shelf in my den, and I pull it out to use it for special nights where we enjoy chips/salsa from this beautiful dark gray bowl that's now become a treasure.

People are treasures. And just like those bowls that Kimberly treasured because of who made them and who gave them, we have to see people in the same way. It's only then that we will give each other a place of honor, when we agree with His sentiment that treasures await us all in jars of clay. In treasuring each other, we show the power of God and his love for all.

If you haven't watched her cooking shows, check out Kimberly Schlapman and do so. Then search your shelves or purchase a bowl that you treasure, as well. Scour your drawers and your cabinets for hidden treasures. And for sure, search your database of contacts and friends and see which ones you can gush over because of how beautifully and wonderfully they are made in the image of the Father of you both.

<https://www.greatamericancountry.com/shows/kimberlys-simply-southern>

## **FRESH THYME – The Greatest Lesson**

By now, parents have decided on schooling for their kids, as they've cried, worried, wondered and shaken their heads at the choices they're having to make. It's an unprecedented time for sure, and now our children are suffering in ways we'd never choose them to suffer. I too have prayed with my own daughter as she and her husband have had to make tough decisions about schooling for the new school year.

Some have this idea that if we all have enough faith, we can send our kids to school without worry and they will be covered and suffer no effects of the viruses around them. But then what if they bring the virus home to family members and spread it, causing others to be ill? Others have set their foot down and decided that no way are they sending their children to school. The kids will stay home and learn, even if it means mom and/or dad have to sacrifice time and work harder.

My daughter called the other day and asked me what we (her parents) would do if we had to make this decision. I didn't want to tell her what to do, because I honestly didn't know the best solution and it was ultimately up to my daughter and her husband to decide. Her question did remind me of an earlier time when she was young, though...

When my kids were in public school, we had lots of friends begin home schooling as an alternative to the public school system. Home schooling versus sending kids to public school became a hot topic of conversation. I even had one friend who attended home school meetings and heard that if parents truly loved their kids they would keep them away from public school. Some said that sending kids to public school was like throwing kids to the wolves to be devoured.

For some reason, we never wavered on our own stance, and we sent our kids to public school. I'm sure if we would have sensed real danger or felt our kids were going to be harmed in any way, we would have kept them home. However, every year we prayed and we continued to send them in to the public school system, where they attended class with others...in a school in our neighborhood.

Oddly enough, our strongest opposition and segregation came from those we worshiped with. Several families had chosen to home school and made it evident that they felt it was the better choice, making several comments that hurt. On one camping trip, our son took a friend from school with us, and that little boy said the "s" word, according to a home school kid. The mother of the home school kid told him not to play with my son's friend. And guess what the "s" word was? Shut up. Others made comments on the poor quality of education in public school, and the home school kids gathered in huddles, away from those in public school, as if each group had some sort of disease the other one didn't want to get.

I know it's not comparing apples to apples, but my daughter's question reminded me of the judgment that came from both sides of parents and their choices made with their kids. The judgment caused division, and the division trickled down to the kids.

Every parent has to do what's best for their children, is what I told my daughter. And very rarely (well never) does God send a blimp across the sky when we pray, with the answer to our prayers trailing along behind for us to see. He just tells us to pray, trust, believe and act accordingly. We can follow what brings us peace. We can always change direction if we feel we have acted too hastily or circumstances change.

But the best thing we can do is entrust our kids into His care. We do not have a bubble big enough or strong enough to encircle our children, nor should we put them inside one. And fear certainly cannot be our motivation for action. Many parents only home school out of total fear that their kids will succumb to evil and be eaten up.

I sent my kids to public school, prayed over them, trained them, and they thrived. I had many friends that kept their kids home and taught them behind their four walls, prayed over them, trained them, and their children thrived. And the division that was there between parents was realized and talked about, and we forgave and purposed to stop throwing darts and start loving instead. I realized I had judged them, and they realized they had been insensitive in their conversations around me.

As parents, we are going to be faced with decisions regarding our children our entire lives. We speak and guide when they're young; we pray and release as they age, and we stay quiet and on our knees when they're adults...unless they ask. And when they do ask, like my daughter did, we give them the best answer we know to give...

Pray, seek peace, and pursue it.

As the new school year starts, there will be kids wearing masks and social distancing in the classroom. There will be kids sitting on their beds at home behind ipads as they work and learn with a parent nearby. And let's hope that the school year doesn't divide but rather brings us alongside each other to aid and encourage no matter the decision we've made. Our children will take note of what we say and how we treat, and they will follow suit.

That might be the greatest of lessons they learn all year...

## **FRESH THYME - Wave Hard**

It was early one weekday morning and I was driving to deliver my work, cruising down a street I frequent often. Over to the right, he caught my eye. He was an elderly man with a cute hat on his head, and he had just stepped out of his front door. He waved at me, and I mean he really waved hard! It wasn't just a glance and flip of the hand. He waved at me as if he'd seen a long lost friend he'd been waiting on for years to drive by!

In fact, his wave was so strong and heartfelt, and accompanied by a big smile, that I felt overjoyed when I waved back. It was so strange, I even laughed at loud. I wasn't laughing at him. I was laughing at the joy that overtook me. The connection and the joy of a hand wave had made my day.

Honestly, that little wave set me on a course to notice all the joys in that one day. I went to Target and got a spot right up front. A hat I purchased ended up being on sale, and I didn't know it until I paid! I then found the CUTEST basket for five bucks for my kitchen shelf. I just felt good inside and out. And I know it started with that wave.

This started me thinking about the simple gesture of a wave, not just a flippant "hello," but a strong hard wave to those we meet and see, in all sorts of ways:

- We can wave at neighbors when they go and when they come
- We can wave at him when he's leaving for work, out the window, or from the driveway
- We can wave at a friend, with joy, from afar...when social distancing
- We can actually wave at HIM when we wake up in the morning and retire at night
- We can wave at those kids that pass by with their parents, on bicycles
- We can wave at a person driving down the street, just like the little man did to me
- We can NOTICE those that wave at us, not be offended if a person doesn't wave at us, and laugh out loud for joy when the wave occurs

When is the last time we all actually looked for a person to wave to? We've noticed that on road trips in rural areas, people look up when we drive by their houses and wave. Some are curious who this "stranger" is in their town, but most seem to genuinely wave to welcome us, to say "We're glad you're here."

That's what a strong hard wave does. It tells the person that we are so glad they exist, that they are near, and that we are SO GLAD to see them. And if we don't feel those three things, then it's no wonder our wave is limp and pitiful.

Waving. Maybe it's a lost art that needs to return, an exercise that will do a body good, and a gesture of hope for the world...

## **FRESH THYME – Which One? – by Marcy Lytle**

Have you ever heard someone say, “I don’t know whether to laugh or cry,” when they’re referring to some absurdity? For example, we once went on a vacation and a series of crazy unfortunate things happened all in a row, throughout the course of a day, and we laughed...until we cried. They were all frustrating things individually, but strung together so closely, it was crazy and over the top – so we laughed!

*So what about crying...*

I cry almost every day. And that’s the sole reason I wear waterproof mascara, even though it’s clumpy and dry after a while. Crying is just part of who I am, and I don’t really want black streaks on my face when I spill those tears! I know some folks rarely cry. And we could go back and forth on reasons why some people cry more or less than others. I’m thinking most of us either want to cry, or we have cried, about the current state of the world in which we live! So I thought I’d share a few thoughts on crying, since it’s such a part of who I am...

- I cry when I think about my mom, partly because of the great memories, and partly because I miss her terribly.
- I cry when I entertain thoughts about the future and start to worry about what it will look like for the next generation, and for me – as I age!
- I cry when my feelings are hurt...the tears just start rolling...and then I feel better.
- I cry when I hear bad news from a friend that’s sick or divorcing or lost a job.
- I cry when I watch a movie (although not often) if the scene tugs at my heart.
- I cry when I read something that stirs my soul in a good way...or a bad way.

I know that crying is good for us, because it releases pent up emotions, fears, frustrations, and more. We often feel like a load’s been lifted after a “good cry.”

*So what about laughing...*

I realized that I cry a lot more than I laugh. It has to take a lot for me to laugh, and I don’t laugh at all the things most people find funny. I don’t get corny humor, I rarely think jokes are funny, and I don’t laugh at comedic movies either – or at least rarely. I laugh at odd things like...

- I laughed at a funeral one time, because I could only see the nose of the deceased from where I was sitting (casket was open during the funeral back then!)
- I laugh at sarcasm, even though it might not be the wisest reaction, I still find sarcasm humorous.
- I laugh when I’m super tired and “punchy” as my kids used to say...

But my list of funny things that result in laughter is way shorter than the list of emotional things that open up tears.

*So what, you may ask...*

I think we need to do a little of both to release our emotions during this uncertain time. It's great to fall to our knees and cry out for our land, for our leaders, for those who are ill, for those being treated poorly, and all the things we see and hear that just aren't right. Tears flow, and then we need to let it go, and let HIM carry those burdens so that our load is lighter. After all, he gave us an invitation to do just that! After the crying, we need to laugh at the simplicities of life again that we're all experiencing and seeing through eyes that are now less distracted by things out there, and more focused on things right here. Like the antics of a child, the sudden rainstorm on a sultry day, finding a new ice cream flavor we love, or even listening to one more piece of bad news on the TV. It's that crazy now, and we may as well laugh.

I remember that crazy vacation and how good it felt to laugh at the end of the day when the last thing that happened was pancake batter was poured over a steak we ordered, instead of gravy...and one of the utensils on the table appeared to be stained with blood. I recall that my brother actually fell on the floor in laughter, because the day had been one for the record books – an hour by hour absurdity. It was that bad. We could do nothing to cause those things or to keep them from happening. Life just seemed to throw a bucket of curve balls at us in a 24 hour period...almost as if there were being ejected by a timing machine.

However the virus got here, whether or not it's as bad as we're told, or even if we're being duped by outside forces that are lying to us – those frustrations are not meant to swirl so wildly that they topple us over. Life is crazy right now. Cry about it. Life is crazy right now. Laugh about it.

But one thing I know for sure – having no response at all is not healthy nor wise – and a good cry and a rolling in the floor laugh does a world of good in putting a smile on our faces and a spring in our step.

Now go have a good cry.

And then laugh out loud.





A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

September 2020



TIPS

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

I had so much fun shopping styles from Amazon this summer, so I decided to browse there for fall affordable fashion! I scanned articles from designers on what's hot for fall and found some fun ideas that we can wear in the real world...not on the runway. I love trying something new, and I love a good deal. Amazon has been amazing for me, in fit and satisfaction of product!

**Argyle sweater** – in this coffee hue! Yes, I saw argyle sweaters appear once again, but aren't they really a classic? This pretty one will look great with jeans and booties this fall...and maybe a fun hat!

[https://www.amazon.com/GRACE-KARIN-Lightweight-Crewneck-Cardigan/dp/B08BC43DHB/ref=sr\\_1\\_16?dchild=1&keywords=argyle+sweater+women&qid=1596030819&s=apparel&sr=1-16](https://www.amazon.com/GRACE-KARIN-Lightweight-Crewneck-Cardigan/dp/B08BC43DHB/ref=sr_1_16?dchild=1&keywords=argyle+sweater+women&qid=1596030819&s=apparel&sr=1-16)

**Poncho/cape** – Haven't these been around a while? This actual cape showed up on Marie Claire's list of fall trends for 2020! I do love the warm colors and the price, and...it's reversible!

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0185NFI0A?linkCode=ogi>

**Plaid for the Win** – I love plaid and I'm glad it's still around. However, I don't care for the "country" plaid look, so I'm happy to see some different more structured and work style looks for fall! Check out this one!

[https://www.amazon.com/Timeson-Leggings-Business-Collared-Christmas/dp/B08CRPW1KP/ref=sr\\_1\\_33?dchild=1&keywords=plaid+tops+women&qid=1596031842&s=apparel&sr=1-33](https://www.amazon.com/Timeson-Leggings-Business-Collared-Christmas/dp/B08CRPW1KP/ref=sr_1_33?dchild=1&keywords=plaid+tops+women&qid=1596031842&s=apparel&sr=1-33)

*(You'll notice I'm not including any pants in this list because I haven't ordered pants on Amazon yet...so I'm sticking with tops and dresses for now...)*

**Shearling Jacket** – I had a warm camel colored shearling coat last year and loved it. I found this really pretty two-toned one and I love it, too!

[https://www.amazon.com/Daisy-Del-Sol-Womens-Reversible/dp/B08DRSV7TZ/ref=sr\\_1\\_6?dchild=1&keywords=shearling%2Bjacket%2Bwomen&qid=1596557917&s=apparel&sr=1-6&th=1](https://www.amazon.com/Daisy-Del-Sol-Womens-Reversible/dp/B08DRSV7TZ/ref=sr_1_6?dchild=1&keywords=shearling%2Bjacket%2Bwomen&qid=1596557917&s=apparel&sr=1-6&th=1)

**Rust Sweater** – Yes, rust is in this fall, although I've always loved this hue – the same color as lovely fall mums! This one looks sooooo cozy and cute.

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08F7PCRS5/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?dchild=1&keywords=rust+cardigan&qid=1596556184&s=apparel&sr=1-2](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08F7PCRS5/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=rust+cardigan&qid=1596556184&s=apparel&sr=1-2)

**Patchwork** – Are you in to this? I'm not sure I'm a fan, but I do think this flowy blouse updates the patchwork vibe, and looks very fall-ish and pretty! I might be willing to try it...

[https://www.amazon.com/FARYSAYS-Womens-Fashion-Sleeve-Multicolored/dp/B07SKR799Z/ref=sr\\_1\\_6?crid=X17XKVICHA5&dchild=1&keywords=fall+fashi](https://www.amazon.com/FARYSAYS-Womens-Fashion-Sleeve-Multicolored/dp/B07SKR799Z/ref=sr_1_6?crid=X17XKVICHA5&dchild=1&keywords=fall+fashi)

[on+for+women+2020&qid=1596556635&s=apparel&sprefix=fall+fashion+%2Cfashion%2C210&sr=1-6](#)

**Puff Sleeves** – They're still in! I loved this style of sleeve for summer and it's staying on into fall. And the marigold hue is also here for the new season! Check out all the options on this one!

[https://www.amazon.com/SheIn-Womens-Sleeve-Pullover-Keyhole/dp/B08519CVXZ/ref=sr\\_1\\_5?crd=17W3PWMNVKELB&dchild=1&keywords=puff%2Bsleeve%2Btops%2Bfor%2Bwomen&qid=1596557600&s=apparel&sprefix=puff%2Bslee%2Cfashion%2C204&sr=1-5&th=1](https://www.amazon.com/SheIn-Womens-Sleeve-Pullover-Keyhole/dp/B08519CVXZ/ref=sr_1_5?crd=17W3PWMNVKELB&dchild=1&keywords=puff%2Bsleeve%2Btops%2Bfor%2Bwomen&qid=1596557600&s=apparel&sprefix=puff%2Bslee%2Cfashion%2C204&sr=1-5&th=1)

## Seven for You – Porch Appeal

This month we asked our panel of women that contribute to share their ideas for making their porch (front or back or yard!) appealing. We didn't ask for something elaborate, but rather any item or idea that makes them enjoy their space and makes it more appealing to spend some time there! I love all of the ideas they submitted, and hope you do as well:

I love the "Welcome" signs I now that I see everywhere. My daughter and I took a class a little over a year ago and painted these signs. They are quite the trend. I have mine by the door in the garage that goes into our house.

—

We live in the last house on the left of a dead-end street in the country, so I don't spend a lot of time decorating my porches each year. I used to, but since our kids are grown, we don't have a lot of people coming and going anymore. So, I spend my time and effort elsewhere. There is one thing that I do every year and that is plant a couple of citronella plants in our backyard flower beds. I put one between our pool and hot tub and one by our lounge chairs. I am sold on these plants and I do believe they really repel the mosquitoes. Also, they are a durable, pretty plant and well worth the money.

—

Adirondack chairs are most likely on sale this time of year, and adding a couple in the same color as your front door, and then a couple of accent pillows makes a porch pop, for sure!

—

I brightened up my porch by spray painting my outdoor furniture a nice spring green. It matched the green of my plants, many of which are unfortunately now brown!

—

We recently added back porch appeal with an old baker's rack, and filled it with items we found at thrift stores – including a fun # lighted sign! The pitcher was a fun find as well, and the birdhouse was made for us by the kiddos! I love whimsy!

—

I was slow to reply because my patio is not decorated at this point. I removed any plants that were there to make room for children's toys. My cushions are a bit faded and I will replace them next year. It's strictly a functional space right now. I am, however, sending a picture of our new little bird area that we enjoy from the patio.

—

What about a rocker, a pop of color and a huge plant? In Pink? (2 pics)

—

Stair stepping a couple of large planters adds appeal to a small porch – one on the upper step – and one on the lower – and then just change out the plants with the seasons!

It's still really hot where we live, but in a few weeks this little white planter will be filled with fall colored chrysanthemums. This is a tradition started by my hubby. He has the green thumb in our family and takes great pride in his yard. Fall is coming, but it's not here yet.

Sorry for all the pics but here is a look at my outside yard art. I love looking at my backyard and hearing the sound of water. Too bad I can't be out there now it's just too hot. I should spend more time decorating the inside of my house!

## **Tried and True – On the Road Again – by Marcy Lytle**

We took a road trip vacation for about 10 days last month and we wanted to take along some snacks for the cooler (part of an organizer we bought for the car!). We weren't quite ready to fly, so we took to the road and booked hotels along our route! However, snacks and meals might be not as easily accessible, we thought, so we loaded up some goodies...and I thought I'd share the ideas...in case you're heading out this fall!

You'll need a cooler, for sure, and hotel rooms that have fridges so you can then take in your ice packs and refrigerated things at night. Hotel rooms with fridges are not a hard find.

Some basic staples to pack are mayo/mustard packets (so they don't have to stay cold), salt and pepper, plastic cutlery, plates and napkins (and tiny trash bags), baggies, spreaders, spoons and a bowl for mixing. You could pack all of the small things in this one bowl. Oh, and paper towels!

**Bagels, cream cheese, and peanut butter** – These are easy to pack and take along. Include some cute spreaders and you're set for a breakfast or snack on the road or while pulled over under a shade tree.

**Trail mix** – of course we'd include this! There are SO MANY varieties to make. So why not just place all the separate nuts, dried fruit and chips in baggies, and that way you can make your own mix in little to-go cups for snacking!

**Noodles and veggies** – Cook the noodles before you leave, and pack in a to-go container. Chop veggies, and include a small bottle of Italian dressing for tossing right before you eat.

**Broccoli salad** – I know, it has mayonnaise in it! But cut up the broccoli, chop the nuts, include the raisins, then mix when it's time to chow down.

**Board items** – If you take a small cutting board in the car, at night it's fun to have an array of items you've packed like cheese, nuts, olives and salami, and maybe a spread or two. Easy to put together in a jiff!

**Popcorn with mix-ins** – Usually there's a microwave in hotel rooms so take along some popcorn, or pop before you go and nibble each night, with mix-ins, or plain! Include some butter salt or pink salt, too!

**Sandwiches** – A good loaf of multi grain bread, cheese slices, sliced cukes and dressings, are the makings of a good lunch on the go, with chips or carrot sticks on the side.

**Almond butter (or strawberry cream cheese) and strawberries** – on graham crackers! Have you tried this combo? It's so good!

**Tuna/pickles/mayo** – Get the tuna and mayo in packets and mix, then add in the chopped pickles (you chopped before leaving home). One of my faves! Can include little cubes of cheddar cheese too, if you like!

**Dark chocolate squares** (70% or more cacao) – These are great for your health AND your sweet tooth but keep these cold so they don't melt! (It's hot where I live).

**Make Your Own Nachos** – Chips, with grated cheese and other toppings prepared ahead of time, can be great if your hotel room has a microwave!

Packing and gathering ideas and planning food is fun, in my opinion, if you have the time to do it – and it's all organized and ready. It makes road tripping SO MUCH FUN!

Hope you find somewhere to go, hop in the car, and head out safe and sound...with your snacks in hand this month of September!



## Three Moms – Vacay Away

Traveling with the kiddos...some did this summer...some are still afraid...and some just find it exhausting even thinking about it. Our three moms all went on family vacays this summer and are sharing their tips on all things related to the kids! So if you haven't gone yet or last time you did, it was a disaster, we hope these tips will encourage you to pack up and go! Find a weekend or week soon, this fall, where you can escape and play...

Mom 1:

We finally took a family vacation this week to Gulf Shores, Alabama. Our children are 1 and 3, and the thought of flying during COVID-19 made me a nervous wreck. We started planning several months ago and knew we wanted to go somewhere with a beach. Living in Alaska for the past several years, we didn't get much beach time! I started researching beaches that were close enough we could drive but some place we had never been before... we had several friends recommend the Florida gulf or Alabama gulf coast. I picked a place that had a very FLEXIBLE cancellation policy. I had no clue where this pandemic would lead, so having some flexibility in our vacation plans was crucial. I found a resort in Gulf Shores State Park (away from the city/crowds) that would allow us to cancel up to 24-hours before arrival. That was great! I looked for family-friendliness, which they had (pool, beach, outside dining, nature center, etc.) Other than that, that was about ALL the planning I did! Our past year has been filled with a lot of change, challenges, stress and A LOT of planning. I wanted our vacation to be relaxing, chill, and not filled with to-do items.

Our vacation definitely looked a little different due to COVID-19 but it was still enjoyable. To keep us protected, we were:

- Constantly washing/sanitizing our hands...hand sanitizing stations everywhere.
- Wearing required masks indoors - but with our kids so young, we couldn't keep any type of mask on them. We wear tried to have our girls social distance as much as possible.
- Staying away from the big city and keeping to ourselves.
- Sitting outside to eat to avoid crowded indoor areas.
- Packing breakfast items and lunch items so we could minimize our contact with others (and save money) - PB&J, yogurt, granola, milk, cereal, fruit, pop tarts.

Traveling with toddlers isn't easy but they were troopers. Our drive was around 8-hours one way. A lot of time for little kids! To keep them entertained, I some new gifts to explore on our trip - easy to maintain, and no mess!

- These were a hit and I highly recommend! [https://www.amazon.com/Melissa-Doug-ColorBlast-Activity-Books/dp/B01DU1CBD4/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?crd=14S29O2E7VLX&dchild=1&keywords=melissa+and+doug+magic+color&qid=1596659997&sprefix=melissa+and+doug+magic+%2Caps%2C160&sr=8-2](https://www.amazon.com/Melissa-Doug-ColorBlast-Activity-Books/dp/B01DU1CBD4/ref=sr_1_2?crd=14S29O2E7VLX&dchild=1&keywords=melissa+and+doug+magic+color&qid=1596659997&sprefix=melissa+and+doug+magic+%2Caps%2C160&sr=8-2)
- These puzzles were hard for my 1 year old but my 3 year old loved them! Make sure to provide a hard surface for your little one to work on it, in the car. [https://www.amazon.com/Mudpuppy-Ocean-Life-Puzzle-Pieces/dp/073536334X/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crd=2KSEMDX6QXZCN&dchild=1&keywords=on+the+go+puzzles&qid=1596660047&sprefix=on+the+go+puzzle%2Caps%2C157&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Mudpuppy-Ocean-Life-Puzzle-Pieces/dp/073536334X/ref=sr_1_1?crd=2KSEMDX6QXZCN&dchild=1&keywords=on+the+go+puzzles&qid=1596660047&sprefix=on+the+go+puzzle%2Caps%2C157&sr=8-1)

- These doodle boards were a hit as well. The girls used both sides to color w/ crayons but oh well! [https://www.amazon.com/Crayola-Double-Doodle-Drawing-Toddler/dp/B077VYSXB3/ref=sr\\_1\\_20?crid=1V1IYLOFT9UAP&dchild=1&keywords=crayola+on+the+go+travel+pack&qid=1596660112&srefix=crayola+on+the+go+%2Caps%2C157&sr=8-20](https://www.amazon.com/Crayola-Double-Doodle-Drawing-Toddler/dp/B077VYSXB3/ref=sr_1_20?crid=1V1IYLOFT9UAP&dchild=1&keywords=crayola+on+the+go+travel+pack&qid=1596660112&srefix=crayola+on+the+go+%2Caps%2C157&sr=8-20)

We also brought books from home, baby dolls (their favorite), and let them use their tablets for a movie. This broke up a good part of our trip, and they even took a 2-3 hour nap!

Mom 2: (kids ages 8, 7 and 5)

Each kid had a backpack and I attached zipper pouches to each one. In the pouch were their masks and travel hand sanitizer, and then a small package of wipes. We were very clear about wearing masks, what they could and couldn't touch, and we went over everything before we traveled. The kids were great about it all!

We didn't pack snacks out of the gate because we flew. Once we landed and were in our space, we stopped and got snacks like crackers, drinks and each kid picked out their favorite candy.

In order to not pack 5 suitcases, we packed one big one and then a small carry-on. We all had our own backpack for personal items. We limited kids to one stuffy, their tablet, a coloring book and one toy (because on road trips they tend to want to bring every toy). We packed clothing in large baggies to remove air, pack tighter and make room to fit everything in one bag. It worked great!

We planned flights, car rentals, place to stay and a couple big activities. But we tried to leave room open for flexibility. However, we did set a budget for everything. We talked each evening about things we saw or wanted to do and budgeted them. Budget even included souvenirs. We did pretty well. We went over a little, but had some wiggle room there with some extra funds that came in.

Our experience was GREAT! I wasn't sure about flying with Covid, but honestly Frontier Airlines was amazing! They were so clean, so well organized, and they reminded about masks and not "gathering" at restrooms on the plane several times through the flight. The airport was clean, and they spaced people out. Car rental was the same. Colorado and the towns we were in did a phenomenal job on safety and protection.

Breckenridge, Colorado was where we went - beautiful weather, so much hiking and outdoor activities! It's a great place travel on a budget because so many things are free. Breckenridge has free bus system and gondola rides. This is a great way to experience another state, the outdoors and family fun without breaking the bank. We hiked, we explored, we visited a zoo, and walked everywhere! It was just an amazing trip!

TIPS:

- Make it fun, include the kids in your planning, but give options you know are within your budget.
- Create in Word or on computer custom ID tags for their backpacks (they were so excited!) It's a simple way to include them and get them pumped up.
- Limit what they can bring.

- Pre-download videos on tablets so they are set for plane rides. Use an app like Hopper to track plane ticket prices ahead of time. It alerts deals and specials. Include some surprises too and give hints to excite them.... they'll talk about it for hours.
- Don't over plan or plan out every hour with littles. Being able to sleep in and just flow at times was so great. This made the trip relaxing and not stressful.
- Balance the planning and go-go-go with...*let's just hang out, chill and leave room to find "treasures" along the way.* BUDGET! Setting a budget seems in the moment like a barrier, but really it creates freedom to do things so you aren't constantly saying no, or we have to discuss that again, or we probably can't do that.
- Find places that have kitchenettes if you can. This allowed us to buy our own groceries. It saved us tons when it can cost us \$30-\$50 to eat out each meal. We made breakfast and sandwiches and only spent \$100 total for four days. We budgeted in for coffee (because we love coffee), one special lunch and a couple of dinners.

### Mom 3: (kids ages 11, 9, 7, 4)

We went to Jellystone – a camping resort – tons of fun! We packed as normal (but added masks!). It was just a regular camping experience.

Each kid had a suitcase and packed their own stuff. They also each brought a backpack. (We double checked of course).

Planning – we booked our cabin about a month in advance. Everything was on the resort to do. We have our camping gear already ready...but also brought bikes, balls, sports equipment, s'mores ingredients, and fishing poles. We traveled there in two cars and that was totally worth it, so that we had all we needed.

The days were planned for us or we could do our own thing...which is great for a family of six!

Each kiddo had \$50 for the week and that was their spending money – at the gift shop or activities that cost (laser tag) – they budgeted their own money. This was a great learning and fun experience for them.

Each child had a pouch on their bikes to keep their masks handy!

Jellystone was so much fun with all was there to do – definitely worth the money.

<https://jellystonehillcountry.com/>

## **Tried and True – Savvy Shopping – by Marcy Lytle**

We've all been shopping at home more, or shopping safely in a store like Target, but I've heard from more and more women about the frustration of buying clothes without trying them on. Not only is it difficult to choose a size and a fit, but if it arrives in the mail or we bring it home and it's NOT a good fit – then there's the return! And who likes to make returns? Not me! A friend and I were just visiting about this very thing...so I thought I'd share my own experience and what's working...or not.

### ***If you're shopping online...***

- Look for styles that you've worn before that fit you. For example, look in your closet at pieces you love and how they're styled (neckline, sleeve length, bodice, etc.) and shop for similar styled pieces. This ensures a better fit.
- Look for stretchy fabric. I ordered a couple of knit dresses this summer with elastic around the waist – a better chance of them fitting – and they did!
- Check the return policy and the shipping (where it's coming from). If there's no contact info or return info, and if you're buying from a foreign country, expect delays, possibly being stuck with your purchase, and/or your item taking forever to arrive. I ordered a pair of sneakers that took two months to arrive, but they were great. However, I ordered some office supplies that arrived in three shipments, one item was broken. Notes taken...
- Watch out for the pop-ups on social media that demonstrate unbelievable prices on cutesy things. Again, check out the shipping, contact info, return policy, etc. Those are huge – if they're not good at customer service – don't buy!
- Order locally, if you can. Support small businesses. Several coffee shops in my town are offering food packages or pastry boxes, etc. for pickup and they're delish! I have a friend that sells a line of clothing and she lives in my small town, so I like to support her. Another friend is an artist, so I love purchasing her work on all sorts of mediums!
- Pants are the worst, but I've found some good luck at Walmart, on line. They have some really cute jeans that are of the elastic type denim, and the wide leg option is in style right now (with an elastic waist!)
- Read reviews...see what others have said about the sizing of the piece you're considering...does it run small or true to size?

### ***If you're shopping in the store...***

- Wear the right clothes so you can try on shirts/jackets in the store itself, without going to the fitting room that is most likely closed. (Some stores won't even allow you to try on in the store, but many don't notice). Wear a tight tee (under a sweater for cover up if you wish), and then try on tops in front of the store mirror to see if they fit.
- Purchase brands you've bought before that you know fit in that certain size that you wear.

- Unbutton or unzip that skirt and put it around your waist! I did that recently, even though I was wearing jeans, just to see if the skirt was going to work.
- Change your styles to fit this crazy season. Opt for comfortable but cute, instead of stiff and crazy stylish. Look for cute details, but a comfortable fit, i.e. stretchy or knit material.
- Consider just shopping for accessories this fall, to brighten up what you already have: a new scarf or a hat, a cute bag or some new sneakers, dangly earrings or a pretty necklace! You might be surprised how you can revive a plain combo into something snazzy!
- Purchase long cardis or comfy jackets to go over graphic or plain tees that you already have. These are easy to slip on, to see how they fit.
- If you don't mind returning the items, then pull whatever you want, take it home and have yourself a great time trying each piece on!
- Shoes – you can still try these on with ease! So find the deals and enjoy – I recently snagged two pairs from Nordstrom Rack for \$17 each!

There's no reason to stop enjoying the hunt for a new outfit...even at home or in a big box store...without entering a fitting room. It is a bit of a challenge, but a fun one! It will certainly get your creative juices flowing...

And if you find a good deal, share! Or if you're still looking, ask! All of us are in the same boat, in the same sea, swimming around for those great deals that fit, feel good, and look fabulous!



HOME

Carole Gilbert  
*An Adage A Day*, September 2020

### *A Year in Time*

It has been one year that I have been on board with this fun and uplifting magazine. It amazes me how time has gone by. I cannot believe it has been a year! As I reminisced about this I thought about some timely quotes and adages. I thought, "There's no time like the present" to write about them. This quote is meant to get us up and going. To never put off until tomorrow what you can do today. After all, it may be now or never.

The adage, "There is no time like the present," is thought to have been around from the 1400's. It began as an ancient English phrase simply to give advice for the day. It was first recorded in 1562 and has been around ever since. It has always been one of my favorites, I think because I have never really been a procrastinator, except for chores and homework. Those I would put off as long as I was allowed except on Saturdays. It was my Mama's rule that my brother and I could not go play until our chores were done. This was Saturday's in the 60's for us. Did you have chores growing up?

Our chores were not difficult, we just had rather been playing. My brother's main chores were to feed the animals and yard work. I was younger so I was given easier chores. I helped dust around the house, and I ironed. I was small in size, so I had to stand on a stool to reach the ironing board. And all I was allowed to iron were pillowcases. I always wondered if this was a made-up chore, just to give me something to do. And as if our pillowcases were not enough, I also had to go to my grandparents who lived in front of us and iron theirs.

When we got done, we were free to go play. Sometimes I would have something planned to play and therefore hurry through my chores, therefore not doing a good job, only to be directed to do them again. And if I didn't finish in a timely fashion, those chores would still be there the next day and I would not get to play until they were done. So, I learned what it meant to never put off until tomorrow what you can do today, as Benjamin Franklin said, and to do it right the first time. I know this was what Mama was trying to teach me but because of my ironing chore I grew up strongly disliking ironing and I never outgrew this. I looked forward to the day I would never have to iron again.

There is another proverb that states, "Tomorrow never comes." It means that when tomorrow arrives it then becomes today so it is never tomorrow and basically supporting the adage of never putting things off until tomorrow. It has even been made into a song and sung by greats like Garth Brooks and Elvis. But I can testify that sometimes tomorrow does come.

When I got married my husband wore only two kinds of shirts and one kind had to be ironed. The first few months of our marriage those shirts slowly disappeared. I would sometimes think about ironing them another day. Maybe. He did not even notice them missing until several months later. His mom had given him three nice, crisp, needing to be ironed, shirts for Christmas. So, after I washed them, they too disappeared. I still did not think my husband noticed but one day he asked me where they were, and I could not lie. I had to take him to the spare closet that was filled with his needing to be ironed shirts. Remember that adage of "Tomorrow never comes?" Well that tomorrow did come. They say time heals all wounds, but even now, before he buys a new shirt, he asks me if it will need to be ironed. I wonder why?

The years have gone by. We are still married, and I still do not iron his shirts. Time keeps on moving into the future. It is a never-ending cycle. The hands on the clock are like the waves in the ocean, going around and around, both of which only God has the control.

"This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar-the Lord Almighty is his name," Jeremiah 31:35 NIV.

So, I will praise God and cherish this present time that I get to spend writing for this magazine that I love and sharing a little of what I have learned with you. Like they say, "Time flies when you're having fun."



## **Practical Parenting – Don't Stuff It – by Marcy Lytle**

I follow a young mom on Instagram and had watched for months as she and her husband did a complete house remodel, she ran her business of sharing family outings and date nights for couples, she took care of her two little boys, and tried to maintain a happy face all the time while she was juggling all of these plates. I thought to myself that she surely was tired...and before long she admitted that she was struggling. Not only was she tired from all the activities, but she was panicked about the state of the world...and she realized she needed help.

This time of life, with kids at home distance learning, all the fears swirling over the virus (still), moms and dads trying to keep their jobs and homes intact, and yet still make time for romance and family life...say what? It's daunting for all of us, no matter what age our kids are!

One thing is going to be the topic of this article this month, and that's the encouragement to ask for help instead of staying quiet and trying to deal...

- There's no benefit from being a strong mom for everyone else but yourself.
- There's no reason to carry heaviness when you have friends willing to help.
- There's no cause for despair, because you KNOW the caregiver of all caregivers!
- There's no way you're going to be able to do it all, so don't even try.
- There's no good that comes from comparing your family to others.

Okay, now that that's out of the way, how in the world do you unload, unleash, and *unworry* your crowded mind and weary body?

**ASK** for help. This is hard for mom, but it's an imperative. If unloading the dishwasher puts you over the edge, hand that job off. If the never ending piles of laundry depress you, have a laundry party where everyone folds, puts away, and dances to music. Don't continue to do all and be all...there is no winner in that kind of game!

**CRY** and pray...because He hears every heart cry of moms...and HE cares. Visualize rolling your heavy backpack of worries onto his shoulders, and then just holding his hand as you walk daily together and He carries the load.

**TAKE** time to read or listen the word, even if something else has to be left undone. If it's only a one page devo a day, read it. If it's one song you listen to alone in the shower, do it. If it's an escape with your earbuds for a 15 min walk, ask for it and take it.

**GIVE** away some of what's on your plate. You know how you share your food with your toddlers? Share your to-do list with your family. If everyone is overloaded, then sit down together and decide what can be done – erasing some of the to-do's or bringing in help.

**STOP** comparing your kids, your home, your life, your clothes, your body to every other mom you talk to. Don't talk with moms that make you feel less than...only visit with those that encourage you and lift you up!

Yes, we are strong women, we can do all things through Christ, we are mighty and all of that good stuff we want to be. But being mighty often means being humble, resting, acknowledging and receiving. Otherwise we mighty women end up bruised and broken...and sometimes for good.

Moms, I could say, "You've got this. You can do it." But I feel that some of you don't want to hear that, because you don't want it and you don't want to do it! And there's NO SHAME in not being able to do it all. In fact, there's great reward in letting things go and letting others and HIM in...to relieve your load.

Great reward...

## **I Don't Do Teens – Pure Gold – by Marcy Lytle**

By now, our kids have begun to realize that life isn't going back to normal just yet. School has started and learning looks so different and weird. And we are still telling our teens to keep their distance, be safe, and wear a mask. However, they want to hang, live on the edge, and keep their faces uncovered! And yet all we find ourselves doing is barking orders like, "Wash your hands!" "You can't go there!" "You forgot your mask!" It's tiring by now, for all of us!

I remember when it was just trying to get our kids to wear helmets when riding their bikes, and my kids just opted out of riding altogether! They didn't want to ride if they had to wear a helmet. So some teens are going to opt out of going places if they have to don a mask. We never gave in, and they never loved helmets, so that was that! Now they have kids and helmets are required...go figure.

Covid fatigue is a real thing, especially among the teen world. Suicides are up, counselors' virtual offices are full, and our teens are feeling more isolated than ever...hopeless...and without purpose. If we are struggling with covid fatigue, imagine what our kids are going through, and they don't have the decades of life experience and wisdom that we do! And if we're experiencing fatigue, we are sometimes not so well equipped to help our kids.

However, as parents, we have to observe and guide and help, and here are a few ideas to try:

**Keep conversations healthy.** In other words, we can make sure that our dinner and phone conversations are not arguing with others about politics, full of worry over the latest number of cases, etc. Maybe we think our teens are never listening to a word we say, but believe me...they are...and those words affect them.

**Keep doors open.** We can allow our teens to talk about how they're feeling during the pandemic, where life and school is anything but normal. Talk as a family, and see if you can give thanks daily for at least one thing good during this time. Thanksgiving and open doors will keep the family home smelling fresh, in more ways than one.

**Keep news at bay.** If you want to check the latest stats or listen to the chaos on the streets, do so. But be the guard over how much of that is listened to by your teens. If the teens want to watch the news; then watch it with them and discuss afterwards, always offering the truth of the Word over the words they hear as the truth, on the media.

**Keep schedules and chores.** Kids need time to chat with their friends and play games, etc. But have that time on a schedule, along with other things that keep them focused and on task. Besides school work, help them develop a new hobby or learn a new skill. Allow them to make one meal a week, organize a drawer or closet, plant and grow an herb garden, etc.

**Keep worship going.** If you're not meeting in a building, but only watching online, then make sure to include family worship as part of your time at home. Let the teens be the ones that pick the songs, play the music, etc. Let them be the "worship leader" of the home, as they search playlists and hand out lyrics to each family member. How cool would that be?

**Keep the Word** at the center. This is a great time to train our teens how the Word can be a lamp, a light, a comfort, and a seed for all they need. Encourage them to write their friends a scripture to encourage. Ask them to present a thought for the day from a reading, to the family one night a week. Weekly, ask your teens what's bugging them and show them how to search the word for answers and guidance.

**Keep creativity alive.** Let them explore their talents through painting, music, dancing, sports, even while distanced. Allow them creative time to search, let them share with the family, or even with friends. Encourage them to write music, draw what's on their minds, make up a dance or even create and play a new game!

This is a hard time for all of us, and we cannot belittle our teens and their feelings. Their hormones, their worries about their futures, their self-images and desire for friends, their growing pains into adults, all make it hard under the best of circumstances...and much more so during a pandemic. We have to be diligent to love them, listen to them, and learn with them, hour by hour, day by day...

...until we all emerge as stronger families and our teens take with them the pure gold they discovered (or that discovered them) while in the middle of the covid fire.

## **Life in a Nutshell - Growing Pains – by Jill Montz**

My daughter, Dotty, is planning on starting middle school sports this year. In preparation for this, she participated in her school's six week summer workout program. Monday through Thursday I dropped her off at the high school football field at 8:00am and then, depending on what all was planned, I picked her up a few hours later.

Many mornings my sports loving girl grumbled, moaned, and whimpered as she rolled out of bed, stumbled to her closet to dress and then pulled her hair up in a high ponytail to get it off her neck. The days were proving to be long, hot, humid, and hard. Most of the time was spent on agilities, lifting weights and Dotty's favorite (not) running. Dotty was learning a valuable lesson.

### *Growth hurts.*

As her muscles were growing stronger, leaner, and longer, her body was aching from the process. Many mornings she begged me not to make her go, but I have always believed in the sports saying, "You earn your trophies in practice...you collect them at the game." Plus, I am a child athlete of the 90s where gyms didn't have air conditioning and my coach's favorite saying was, "Y'all will run until I get tired," so Dotty didn't get much sympathy from me. Needless to say, she had perfect attendance.

By the end of the program Dotty had visibly developed muscles in her legs and arms, and I have no doubt that she was quicker on her feet. However, what I am most proud of is the growth that happened in things a rack of weights or a stop watch can't measure.

Dotty grew in the intangibles. She learned she was stronger than she realized. She found out that when she was hot, tired, and her legs were wobbly she still had something left in the tank to sprint down the field when the whistle blew. She learned to cheer for her friends to encourage them to achieve their best. She learned that being first is great but being first is not always possible, and we celebrate those who get the victory. She learned there are good days and bad days and there are more days in between. She learned hydration is very important and to never drink chocolate milk before you go outside and run in the heat (no need to elaborate there).

Growth is a part of life and it can be beautiful. When it comes to my flowers it is lovely to watch a plant grow up from the dirt, bud, and bloom. When it happens in our family's pecan orchards we consider it financial success to watch the pecans form their green hull, grow, and eventually open up to produce the pecan inside.

I was working in my gardens the other day and I noticed my crepe myrtle tree was definitely experiencing some growth. The older bark had cracked as the tree swelled in size and it was peeling away to expose the new bark underneath. The process looked kind of painful. All around the base of the tree were dried up grey strips of dead bark that had fallen to the ground as they broke away from the tree. But the new bark looked so healthy and tan.

It kind of reminded me of a chemical peel I once got in my early 30s. My face was bright orange when I left the salon and for DAYS it peeled off in huge flaky strips, and I left a trail of dead skin wherever I went. It was really kind of disgusting. But after about a week my new skin felt so tight and smooth and it looked so fresh! The process of getting there was a bit gross and painful, though.

There have been other times in my life where growth was gross and painful, too. Those days I felt like my heart was cracking and like my soul was being peeled back to expose all the raw areas of me. Those were tough days. Back then I didn't always want to get out of bed and show up to whatever faced me that day. I moaned, whimpered, and grumbled on several occasions; and many of my growth periods lasted longer than a six week school workout program, or even the seasonal shedding period for a crepe myrtle.

Some of my growth periods took years...and some are still happening. But like Dotty, I have learned a few things. I have learned I am stronger than I realized (and probably stronger than some other people thought, as well). When the pain becomes too much to bear and I feel like I am going to crumble, I have learned to dig deep and push through. I have learned that there are good days and bad days and there are a lot of days in between. And I have learned that I have survived every bad day I ever had. I have learned that some days I am strong enough to succeed on my own and some days I need friends to encourage me along the way. I have learned that "this too shall pass" applies to both good and bad days, and so I enjoy the good ones and I know the bad ones won't last forever.

My growth hasn't always been pretty. Sometimes my attitude, thoughts, feelings and words were ugly and sometimes they were directed at people that got hurt by them. And sometimes those people were the ones I loved the most. But like the tree bark, I pray that I am dropping the old ways and emerging with newer, better, and brighter ways of loving and living with those around me.

## **Tiny Living – Still Here** – by Leyanne Enterline

2020 feels like it's never ending!

I don't know about you, but it's been one thing after another in our lives. I mean life is hard as it is; and now with the world completely upside down; life is definitely a bit more chaotic! Besides that, with all the different opinions on how people are dealing with how to handle COVID it's making for more confusion, anger, frustration, depression...

Maybe it's just me, but I'm pretty sure I've felt every emotion possible during this "pandemic." Do we go to church, do we wear a mask, and can we hug? We can play sports and be around tons of people in a grocery store, with complete strangers, but not be with our friends and family? I'm not going to get into my personal thoughts, but rather just write what I see of what's going on around me. This is life right now and I definitely have had my ups and downs.

All that I can truly rely on is the knowledge that *God is good* and He knew all this was going to happen before it happened, and He has a plan for us. I wish I knew what that was and the patience to wait is completely wearing out.

I've cried out to God nightly and feel that He has remained quiet. But in my weakness He is strong, I know that He will work everything out for good, and that He loves us. In the meantime, I will try to work on being righteous, patient and joyful through all this. It is very hard to remain positive at times, but this is only for a season and we WILL get through it. I pray for everyone as they deal with this season in their own way.

On to the positive side of our continued tiny living...we are still living it! Since Brian lost his job in March and my business has been slow, we are thankful for the super low payments on our land and trailer. Brian has gotten some work from a friend in New Mexico, which has allowed us to still travel and have fun on the road! We get to head to Colorado for a second time this summer, and the boys have picked up a fly rod to try some new type of fishing. They were fortunate to have some lessons from our friend on fly fishing, so they can't wait to go and try what they've learned in Colorado!

I am thankful for the friends and family around us that surround us with their love and encouragement. Tiny living may only be for a season (or actually, going on four years) but God knew what we needed at this time and place, and for that we will be thankful.

Love grows best in tiny spaces...

## Chipped China - Being Rehomed – by Jennifer Lytle

“Ugh,” I thought to myself, “The worst time of the day to work from home is this hour. Why can’t he just put his computer down and be present with us?” It wasn’t the first time I had similar thoughts. This was an ongoing point of contention throughout certain periods. Honestly, I thought that I had already passed this stage of disagreement in my marriage. Now, he had picked up a job that had him on his computer until 8 on Sunday evenings.

More significantly than his work hour, however, Jesus was inviting me to develop my inner spirit. Longsuffering was my test. Love was my test, along with peace, joy, kindness, and gentleness. This evening, I wanted nothing to do with this test! I only wanted my husband to be emotionally and mentally available. This test revealed I needed endurance, humility, and sacrificial love. Possibly, it indicated a need for a more balanced schedule and stronger communication, but my heart needed Jesus too.

My inner man is being rehomed.

This is my season.

Some days the silent prayer is easier to embrace than others.

“Whatever it takes, Jesus.”

Have you ever wondered why apartment rent typically increases with each lease renewal? Property owners and management firms understand that moving is both a) expensive and b) requires diligent forethought and planning. Many renters continue to pay rent at an increased rate because of the effort required to put a move into motion. Moving is hard work.

There can be benefits to moving, too. Often, moving creates an opportunity to recognize unnecessary items or clutter that would otherwise go unrelinquished.

“Whatever it takes, Jesus.”

One of the best things to happen this summer during The Great Slow Down, was rediscovering my love for bike riding. My daughter learned to ride her bike and our family enjoyed multiple treks around the neighborhood. My son even learned to ride! We made it up to a 4-mile excursion on a few occasions. Most days, there was only enough time or energy to go back and forth on one especially scenic road. Beautiful homes set far back from this road dot the route with elaborate landscaping and intricate walls or gates. Along this familiar and comfortable ride, one curious site held my attention. An orange construction cone held a caution sign. The sign read:

Caution: Bees being rehomed.

They may be more active and aggressive than usual.

Keep your distance.

This was the most fascinating procedure to witness over six or more weeks. The first step seemed to take the longest, though I should in no way be considered an authority on these facts. A tightly woven black fabric was wrapped around a portion of the tree where the hive was located. It was tightly bound and secured. The next step was the introduction of a new home directly on the location of the old hive. Remains from the black binding, which had been



removed, were lying in a pile at the base of the tree. Honey bees worked to rebuild a hive inside the new wooden structure. After a shorter period than the binding stage, the new wooden structure was secured several inches to one side of the tree, at the same height as the previous hive. Lastly, and I was so grateful to witness the final move, a professional came. Starting with a smoker, the apiarist was slow and methodical. I nearly felt concerned that the apiarist would fall asleep with the prolonged process. Afterward, the apiary gently moved the wooden structure from its temporary side perch to a special area in his truck. Then, it was gone!

With God being omniscient, I cannot believe this was a fortuitous wonder I was fortunate to witness. Much like the rehomed beehive, my soul too needs to be moved. The portion of the tree where the bees were moved from had become dead. If the hive were allowed to remain in the tree, I wonder if the tree ultimately would have stopped growing. Maybe it would have continued growing in a twisted manner until it became hazardous. The bees required needed a new, life-sustaining home. The tree too needed time for its trunk to heal.

How can we grow from glory to glory (please see [2 Corinthians 3:18](#))? Pay those moving fees, and go to the place God is inviting each of us to!

“Whatever it takes, Jesus.”

Jesus, thank you for every soul reading these words. Reveal the hives that need to go, the wounds that need to heal. Help them accept your rehoming. Amen.



YOU

## **Strengthening Your Core - Islands are for Visiting – by Marcy Lytle**

Did you dream all summer of visiting an island somewhere, vacationing far away from the rest of the world, finding some secluded spot where the virus didn't exist, and setting up camp to forget all your troubles? I'm thinking many of us wished for such a trip and such a place! However, I don't know of one person that found such a place, and I don't know of anyone that actually lives on an island (the tiny kind). Secluded islands (for the most part) are for visiting...but they're not really for living.

During these past several months, I've observed that many of us have felt isolated and have either enjoyed it and have shut out the rest of the world...or we're depressed and missed all of the interaction we once had with others. For me, I'd say I felt a little of both.

I've come to enjoy our nightly walks, simple pleasures of being outside more, and even dealing less with people and angst that comes from rubbing shoulders with lots of people. However, I've also missed gathering of crowds for worship, sitting among a full theater for a new release, and hugs and handshakes and smiles and shared meals.

We've all definitely become more withdrawn, because we are mandated to stay away from close proximity with others, even when walking or shopping. Six feet away, we turn our heads and our feet to walk on the other side when we see a person approaching. When we roll down our windows at a drive-thru, we cannot tell whether or not the worker is smiling or frowning beneath that hot and sticky mask they have to wear ALL day long. We have to sit alone on our back porches or only with a family member or one close friend, missing and longing for more connection with those we used to see and visit with...

One reason people love to vacation on an island far away is because of the exotic experiences that can be had. From exotic drinks, to exotic excursions or safaris, we like the thrill of something a bit different and out of the norm of the crowded cities in which we live. But most of us do not take up residence on a secluded island. We only visit it for a while and return home.

Why? We were created for fellowship and connection. Even though introverts enjoy their time alone, and extroverts mingle too much, we all have this innate desire and need to connect. We need affirmation. We need the opportunities to give. In other words, we need people.

While this pandemic is still here, we have to make the choice to look beyond the mask, step outside our comfort zones, and live...not seclude...on our own little islands. And here are a few ways to do that, while we wait for normal life to resume...

- We can make eye contact with those who pass by, and say, "I'm smiling! Have a good day!" instead of turning our heads.
- We can make an effort to meet a friend in a park for a visit apart, while catching up and praying with them to bless them.
- We can spend some of our isolation time thinking about people we miss and offering their names up to Him, in prayer.

- We can analyze our own selves, by doing some deep reflection, and spend time healing at his feet in worship.
- We can create beauty through writing or drawing or building or mending, while we're alone and away.

The beauty of a faraway island is the colors, the sights, the sounds of nature that await...but many are drawn also because of the resorts that offer every amenity we can imagine. But the beauty of returning home is the memories made, the pictures taken, and the experiences had while away on the island.

We're only visiting this isolation island right now in life, I think. Or who knows, isolation could be a way of life for a good long while. But while we're visiting this island, let's observe the beauty as best we can and offer that beauty to those around us in as many creative ways as we can...during this vacation from the norm.

That way, when we return, hopefully we will be rested, ready, and renewed to rub shoulders, really changed for the better and the better of our friends that now sit at our table once again.

## Life Right Now – So Faithful – by Bethany Gomez

“Just put one word on the page,” I tell myself.

The dreaded writer’s block is back or, in this case, it is more like I’m saying, “There is too much going on in my mind concerning several things that I can’t form a single sentence!”

I was staring at that blinking cursor on the blank page for a while, but before I gave up I finally just typed the one thing that I had repeated to myself a couple of times. Lo and behold, it was more than one word! And it sparked the rest of this article.

Sometimes, I would rather do anything else but sit down and write my thoughts out for other people to read because why would anyone care to read about my life or my thoughts? I feel like I have so little to offer, little to no wisdom to impart. But then I am reminded that if by some chance something I write makes at least one person feel like they are not alone or helps them know that God loves them, then that is enough to keep me writing.

I will not bog you down with all of my thoughts, as that wouldn’t be good for anyone. I will share only three that are taking up a decent amount of my thoughts as of late:

**First**, there’s the fact that I will be 33 this month. Another birthday usually brings up thoughts of the previous year and expectancy for the next year and that is definitely true of this birthday, despite everything going on right now. What happened during my 32<sup>nd</sup> year of life? Not much, but at the same time a whole lot. I feel like I stayed in my comfort zone too much. Granted, half of my 32<sup>nd</sup> year was during a pandemic, under quarantine, practically no one was allowed to leave their comfort zone...but I still could have prayed to God for direction for what He would have me do to help others. I hardly did.

Also, I wish I hadn’t wasted so much time worrying about things that I should give over to God. One of the main thoughts is my dream of having a family of my own one day. It is just so hard to let go of that dream because it has been so important to me for so long, but if it is that important to me, then I know that it is that much more important to God. I would rather serve God as a single woman, than enter into something that is not God’s will for my life. If I have learned anything in this past year (or for that matter, in my nearly 33 years of life) it is that God is so faithful. Even when my faith is waning or weak; He remains faithful. Even if I don’t see His faithfulness, He is still faithful.

2 Timothy 2:13 says,

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself.”

**Second**, there’s the fact that I bought airline tickets for a trip to Boston next month with a few of my friends. If this trip does not get cancelled, postponed, or I don’t get sick, then this will be the 5<sup>th</sup> year in a row that I will be blessed to witness the glorious New England fall. Unlike years past, the main reason for going to Boston has sadly been canceled due to Covid. To sum up, we have held an annual fall market at a church up in Norwood, Mass. for the past four years. It is called Market of Hope, a non-profit organization that two of my friends started. You might be wondering, *If the market got cancelled due to the virus then how has the trip not gotten cancelled?* For one, our wonderful volunteers from the church are among the most vulnerable. If I had to guess they are almost all over the age of 65. Two, a flash of optimism took over two months ago when round trip air fare was around \$100! I’m fully aware that things can most

certainly change. As I am writing this, strict travel bans are everywhere including one of our trip destinations. I'm trying to stay optimistic about still getting to go. My friend Katy that's coming has never been able to go over the past years, and I can't wait to show her all our favorite things. I also have a strong feeling that we will all be ready for a getaway in order to rest from our busy, sometimes stressful schedules. At the same time, I am trying not to get my hopes up.

**Third** and final, is the fact that I will be reporting back to my elementary campus for face-to-face teaching this month. The beginning of the school year began virtually for the first three weeks. Instead of sharing some of my thoughts, fears, or opinions on the matter of schools opening for in-person teaching and what that might look like this year, I would love to pray over this school year instead:

*Lord, the first thing I want to do is lay this school year down at your feet. This burden is too heavy for any of us to carry. I ask that you be near to us. Near to the brokenhearted, near to every student, every teacher, every parent, every staff member, every decision maker. I ask that you protect everyone whether at school or at home. Protect the most vulnerable, whether it be those with compromised immune systems or those students living in unsafe homes. Father God, give us peace that surpasses all understanding, give us endurance for this year, and give us patience, grace, creativity. Be our provider, our healer, our friend. I pray for those that are afraid or hurting, may they feel Your perfect love. I praise You in advance for all of the answered prayers and testimonies that will come out of this school year. In Your name, I pray!*

“You faithfully answer our prayers with awesome deeds, O God our Savior,

You are the hope of everyone on Earth.”

Psalm 65:5

## Healthy Habits – Awaken – by Marcy Lytle

It's September, by golly. Summer is over and a new season is here! Fall is my favorite season of the year, even though summer temps linger too long for my liking! And while fall scents are popping up now; which will awaken our sense of smell, we have other senses that need awakening as well! Waking up our senses can feel like breathing in fresh air, and give us strength to face this next season with gusto, not weariness!

### The eyes:

- Plan a drive to see fall color (or watch it on Youtube)
- Purpose to wear a bold fall hue (start with a deep red – on your lips, maybe?)
- Put away your phone when you're outside, and observe the beauty around you

### The nose:

- Purchase a couple of new fragrant candles from Paddy Wax, and burn them each morning (my faves are the ones in the Library collection)
- Peruse the internet for potpourri mixes you can simmer on your stove
- Pick your favorite herbs (rosemary and basil) and smell them often.

### The hands:

- Pick out new linen for your bed or bath according to how it feels.
- Plan a massage night for yourself, or with your family, back and foot rubs included! (Just include lotion, candles, brushes, music, and whatever you find around the house...)
- Present something you've created with your hands, to a friend!

### The ears:

- Pull out some old albums or CDs and play them, enjoying the lyrics that feed your soul, or easy listening jazz!
- Place your ears in a listening position to the truth of God's word as you read or listen to a podcast.
- Press in to really listen, with eyes closed, the cicadas as they make their distinctive sounds.

### The tongue:

- Pretend you're a TV chef and make a meal that's outside your box of normal recipes.
- Prepare something decadent for dessert and enjoy every bite.
- Peek in your fridge and create a combo of flavors you've never tried before.

Awaken every one of your senses this fall, so that you are fully alive and well, enjoying the world around you in all of its goodness and blessings from HIM.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBKGwRJHLXA> - fall colors

<https://paddywax.com/collections/library>

<https://www.cleanandscentsible.com/fall-simmering-potpourri-recipes/>

<https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/homemade-gift-ideas-1251561>

<https://www.fromachefskitchen.com/>

<https://spoonuniversity.com/lifestyle/weird-food-combinations-that-are-delicious>





MARRIAGE

**In This Together – I Pray You Hope** – by Bekah Holland

I think sometimes, hope is all we have. Bigger than our dreams. Bigger than our marriage. Hope in something bigger than ourselves.

*So today....*

I pray you find hope in the uncertain and you catch a glimpse of something that changes you.

I pray you find hope in the small things. A happy ending. A smile from a stranger.

I pray you find hope in a hand reaching out to hold yours, just when you feel most alone.

I pray you find hope in moments of joy and laughter. That they'll lighten your soul.

I pray you find hope in the darkness. That you believe there is light beyond the void you're in.

I pray you find hope in others...that you see the good and the possible in the people you meet.

I pray you find hope in your challenges. That they will teach you to grow and reach for more.

I pray you find hope in your pain. The most beautiful things in this world have been broken and pieced back into a work of art.

I pray you find hope in the unknown....and that you hold tight to your faith despite the circumstances and trust in the unwavering love of God.

I pray that in all things you would find hope in the creator and author of your faith. That you would have "confidence in things you hope for, and conviction in what you do not see."

"Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness."

Desmond Tutu

## **Date Night Fun – Plan a Trip – by Marcy Lytle**

It's September, and there are four weeks, just like every month. So what if date night included planning a trip that you'll take in October? Planning a trip together is so fun, and one of the most rewarding times together...sometimes even better than the trip itself! And since all of our date night options out are still limited, this might be a fun solution.

Here are five date night ideas (one for each week of the month, plus an extra) to get that next road trip on your calendar:

First, the location: Spend time together browsing options for places to drive in your area. Consider ghost towns, small town charm, national parks, historic downtowns, or whatever you enjoy (and whatever is open!). Grab your laptop and a few snacks, and browse. One can browse while the other takes notes. Once you've chosen your destination, step outside and take a walk discussing the dates you'll take off, how long you will be gone, etc. Get excited.

*Tip:* We've found that purchasing an actual paper state map of our area enables us to search for towns in a specific radius, depending on how far we want to travel.

Second, the activities: This night, spend time searching the internet for best things to do in the cities you've chosen. Maybe you've picked a route to three small towns not far from where you live. Search for eateries, shopping, history, events, parks and more (be sure to check to see what's open). Take a drive to your local Target and purchase a folder to keep all your plans and brochures orderly and ready for your trip! Stop for an ice cream on the way home as you talk about what excites you the most!

*Tip:* Type in "itinerary in..." for each place you're going and sometimes individuals will post on their blogs exactly what they did in that place...great info for you!

Third, the lodging: Will you stay in a hotel or bed n breakfast? We've found that in small town travel, bed and breakfast or air bnb homes are the best. They usually offer ambience you can't get in a hotel, and perhaps feel a bit safer because they're isolated instead of housed in a big high rise. This search is the most fun, as you contact hosts and find out amenities and provisions! Book your place! This night, either on line or inside an open store, purchase little toiletry items and car organizers for your road trip!

*Tip:* If the place has a kitchen, consider taking your own food to make – that can be a date night all to its own!

Fourth, the preparation and packing: Spend date night taking care of some fun things like washing and cleaning out the car, packing together (maybe purchase some of those cool packing cubes or a new toiletry bag!), cook some of the food items you can prepare ahead (trail mix!), etc. Put on music and give thanks for this opportunity to go!

*Tip:* Since you're tripping in the car, consider an organizer for your back seat that will keep your books, wraps, shoes, etc. corralled and not rolling around!

Fifth, the extras: Think about things you can take to do while you're resting in the evening, or even pulled over in a state park under a shade tree! For example, include a journal to reflect and record your fun, a new book or puzzle book, a game to play, or even a sketch book and pencils to create! Pack them in a cube or a bag or a box, to have ready! So spend the evening gathering, shopping, and putting these items together...over a root beer float!

*Tip:* On your itinerary, list out these items as options when there's down time. Otherwise, you'll forget and come home sad that you forgot!

There you go! Start planning, and incorporate that planning into date night with him, as you search, shop, pack, plan, and enjoy all the steps in having a good time!

## **After 40 Years – Little Winks – by Marcy Lytle**

I remember when we were dating, decades ago, my soon to be husband would catch my eye across a room full of people and wink at me. Oh my gosh, I felt all sorts of flutters because I loved him so much, and that wink just sent my heart soaring! And truth be told, he still catches my eye and winks at me, and it still happens – that flutter of love!

I realize that those little things are still so important now, the things that maybe no one else would notice, but we do – the things that make each other feel special and loved.

I went to run an errand the other day and he quickly went out in the yard and replaced our yard lights with the new ones we had just purchased a few days before. He also replaced a bulb in the kitchen. He wanted to surprise me when I drove up, with those little jobs completed.

When we're watching a show, he takes my feet, removes my shoes and rubs my toes. I love that! It is so relaxing and it thrills my heart when he gently remembers this kindness to me!

I work in my bedroom at a desk and he knows how I love to have the bed made – first thing – so that my room feels put together and not messy – while I work. Since he's the last to wake up, he always makes the bed first thing. I notice.

When we take an evening walk, he puts out his arm for me to place my hand (unless it's too hot – then we don't touch!), so we can walk arm in arm as the sun sets.

I enjoy filling the tray with a bunch of bananas and keeping them there, because that's his fruit of choice daily, before he starts his day.

I could go on and on listing the little things we both do (he's better at doing them than I am!), and I could also dismiss them as not being important (which I have at times!) But when I stop and take the time to notice and hug him for thinking of me, there's this connection we have that sinks in and satisfies.

I've been known to be so busy and self-absorbed that I'm totally thinking of the big things I wish he'd do, so much that I overlook all of the tiny small things he's SO GOOD at doing to bless me. When I finally stop and observe and give thanks, it makes me want to give back and notice him as well.

Last night, he noticed that my back was hurting and he told me to come lie on the sofa while he rubbed my feet. He prayed for my back before we went to sleep, and yes...he winked at me during the show that we were watching.

And guess what? That wink is still the best, the smallest but the greatest, and it still wins me over.

As I've grown older with him, I'm trying to learn to be more observant and offer him little kindnesses as well. I love grandiose gestures for sure (who doesn't?) but those aren't too easy to come by right now during a pandemic. But I don't feel at all like we're choosing to "settle" for

something less. Sometimes, the very least noticeable kindness is the one with the biggest result...a fluttering heart and a kiss on the cheek in response...because we feel so loved.

Yesterday, I organized his truck seat with a new box full of pockets and he was delighted. It was fun, and I can't wait to find another way to bless him, because I have to work at it. He's just servant-hearted and it comes naturally. That's easy to overlook by a person like me, but I'm trying my best to notice, adore him, and love and relish all of the little winks from across the (now, not crowded) room in the coziness of our own living room with no one else around to see...but him and me.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Rooted in Love - Life Is Like a Gumball – by Kaelin Scott**

I'm pretty sure that everybody, at some point in their lives, has gotten a gumball from a gumball machine. It's just one of those things that you've got to try at least once, especially since it's so cheap and the colors are so tantalizing. But in case you haven't ever tried it, let me try to explain it. You put a quarter in the slot; turn the knob, then wait in anticipation as the machine spits out your gumball. It's exciting to see if you'll get your favorite color, and it's a rush of pure joy if you do. But sometimes you get a color you're really not a fan of, or maybe your gumball comes out all dented and chipped instead of perfectly round and beautiful.

If you're like me, you'll still eat the gumball no matter what shape it's in and no matter what color you get. Because, hey, I spent that twenty-five cents and I'm sure not going to waste it. Even if I don't get exactly what I was hoping for, I still make the most of that gumball and chew it until all the flavor is gone. Usually, they are too big for my mouth and make me look silly while I chomp away, but it's a fun experience and definitely worth the money, in my opinion.

Recently, as I was thinking about gumball machines, I realized that they are very symbolic of life. We each get one chance at living, and we all have high hopes for what our lives will look like. We dream about the perfect job, the perfect spouse, the perfect house, the perfect kids, the perfect friends, etc. But sometimes, kind of like the gumballs, what we get isn't exactly what we were expecting. Sometimes we're handed difficulties, hardships, and painful situations that don't match up with our hopes and dreams. Sure, some people seem to get exactly what they want all the time. But in reality, we all have disappointments and setbacks and broken hearts at some time or another.

But the beautiful thing about life is that we can choose to make the most of it no matter what. Even if we don't get our perfect "gumball," we can still enjoy the life we're given. We can still squeeze every ounce of flavor out of it. We can still be grateful and happy.

God purposely gives each of us a unique and different life because He loves diversity. You might look at your life compared to someone else's and think God gave them the better gumball. Maybe you wish you could demand a refund or an exchange. But your life is beautiful just the way it is, and it's up to you to choose joy and thankfulness. You can hope for perfection and be disappointed in anything less, or you can embrace what you're given and make your life count.

Every gumball has potential, and so do you. Don't be so busy comparing your life to others' lives so that you miss out on its beauty. And don't forget that God doesn't make mistakes. The life He gave you is the one He wants you to have. Make the most of it!

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” John 10:10



I think we can agree that we're living in difficult times and the entire world is being shaken. Even as I write this, I'm weighing my words so as not to offend, I'm asking for help in explaining this deep thing in my heart that grieves me so much. Lately, I find it easier to express through poetry the thoughts and feelings that rise up within me. This poem is about peace and what I see as an obstacle in bringing God's "kingdom on earth as it is in heaven" that *we who believe* profess to want and pray for. Does God really take a "side"? Does he really support one agenda over another? Who is benefitting from the hate, intolerance and accusations slung back and forth—certainly no human being. How can we live in tune with God's heartbeat, ready for the Day? I pray this poem speaks to anyone who has ears to hear.

### *DOVE OF LOVE*

Dove of Love with an olive branch...  
The earth is longing for you  
With hope of peace and promise of release  
From prisons of pain and storm.  
Pure and free, the first and the last,  
With gentle and yet ferric strength,  
Your olive branch is offered to all--  
Every nation, and color, and bent.

But the earth cries out as she sees you fall,  
Deflated and berated, all hope negated,  
The olive branch loosened, but not lost;  
Why do you falter, dove of Love?  
What burden do you bear  
That causes you to dip and waver  
And struggle through the air?

She speaks softly, the dove of Love...  
So quiet yet so resolute:  
"It's my wings you see, they work against,  
They don't move in Harmony.  
The left one cries freedom, mercy, equality--

It will not be bound or constrained.  
The right one cries morality, honor, authority--  
It will not give, understand or explain.  
They defy and deny, refusing to hear  
the heartbeat that sounds as one.  
Yet I fly on, olive branch held tight  
Til righteousness and mercy meet.”

And when will they meet, dove of Love?  
When will the heartbeat be heard?  
“The heartbeat, in Power, will sound out the hour  
When Harmonic angels arrive;  
Then left and right will no longer strive,  
Their strength will diminish and die.

Light and Truth will lift me high;  
The earth will exult as the olive branch falls,  
Bringing hope of peace and promise of release  
From prisons of pain and storm,  
To every nation, and color, and form.”

## **Moving Forward – Good is Coming – by Pam Charro**

Am I the only one waiting for life to get more positive and exciting?

I'm guessing I'm not alone. It can feel so hard to dream right now. Sometimes all I see is how isolated and bored I am, and my accomplishments so far don't seem very impressive. So much failure and disappointment, dysfunction and issues throughout my life...and now there's nothing but time and loneliness to stew in all of it.

*Is this all I will ever be?*

*What will forever define my life and its impact?*

*Will I always be too messed up to make better choices and be a part of something awesome?*

*How can I ever receive the good God created me for when everything is such a mess?*

*And now will I ever be able to live life the way I want in order to try and make something better?*

I had hoped for so much more; now I just feel stuck.

It's easy for me to forget that nothing that has happened has caught God by surprise, not even unwise life choices that have had long-lasting consequences. He still has a good plan for our lives that no crisis or detour can stop, and not a tear will be wasted.

### ***His mercies are new every morning!***

But he also knows that there is a time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:11), even things we wouldn't have willingly chosen, and he already knows the good that is brewing from even our unhealthy decisions and our unhealthy planet during this time of relative stillness. As is written in Isaiah 30:15, in quietness and trust our strength can be found. There is treasure in the nighttime, but it takes eyes of faith to see it.

Maybe part of the purpose of this time is not so much for fun, but to grow in patience and steadfastness, and to learn to be still and listen while we have fewer options to be busy. Whatever its purpose or purposes, I can make the most of it by staying close to him and trusting him to be what he is, which is good. I can also ask him to change my vision so I can experience his highest possible good for me while I'm waiting. So I'm thinking maybe being off-balance is more a matter of perspective than circumstance.

God has had a plan for this so-called chaos all along and doesn't need to wait until things (or we) are better to bring good out of life. We can't stop him from bringing it no matter what we do, but we ourselves will likely be so much happier if we choose to align our view with his. And then, maybe encouraging others with this hope will also help us feel less stuck and frustrated, because shining our light feels good.

Today, tomorrow, and every day that we have life, new treasures are available because God is a good giver. It may not look the way we had anticipated, but that just means we need to ask for different eyes to see it.

## **Simple Truths – Surrounded** – by Marcy Lytle

This is my second month out of three, filling in for our writer, as she is on hiatus. And as I looked at the title of her column, I thought to myself, “Is any truth really simple?” After all, it seems that we hear or read on social media someone’s TRUTH as they see it, and we really don’t know who or what to believe, at all. It’s all so complicated! Politics mixed in with racism mixed in with corona virus makes for a pot of pretty nasty and smelling concoction that’s anything but clear!

Sometimes, when truth becomes complicated, I have to sit back and observe and be still and become aware of the simplicity of truth around me. And that’s why I love the column title that Erica gave to this section of the magazine. Simple truths are the best ones to hang on to, gaze at, think upon, and live by...now aren’t they?

Here are a few of my simple truths, from just looking back through the photos on my phone of things and places that caused me to pause and snap...

- Flowers in a vase – they’re real and they smell divine, and the color is breathtaking, and they remind me of the Creator.
- Ice cream on a hot day – the opposite feeling from the heat around me provides refreshment to my body and soul – reminds me of his rest.
- Herbs and citrus – Rosemary, lemon and vanilla simmering in a pot with aromas that cannot be reproduced because they’re natural and clean – reminds me of His goodness.
- Parting clouds – that hole in the darkness where the sun shines through – reminds me of his faithfulness.
- Smiles – I was able to surprise him with a gift, and his smile of joy and the love behind it – reminds me of the joy there is in giving to someone else.
- Swings – A place to sit and move in the breeze with feet off the ground and the thrill of a child – reminds me that he enjoys just hanging with me.
- Popcorn – a bowl piled high with refillable goodness that’s so satisfying and delicious – reminds me of his open hand full of good things always, never ending and always there.

Take a look back on your own phone and see what made you stop and give pause. Then start to look around for the simplicity in all of the chaos, and see if you don’t find yourself breathing and sleeping a little better, all because of the simple truths that surround you.

Psalm 32:7

*You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble;*

*You surround me with songs of deliverance.*

## Unearthly Thing - “But DADDY...I want it NOW!” – by Angela Dolbear

I asked and prayed, and pleaded and cried. And stomped my feet—spiritually speaking. But in the end, God didn’t come through the way I wanted Him to.

Did He hear my prayers? Yes!  
Did He come through for me? Absolutely.  
My God is faithful beyond my imagining.

But He didn’t answer my cries in the way I wanted. Me. Me. Me. *Yuck.*

The whiny cries of the iconic character from the original *Willie Wonka and Chocolate Factory* reverberate in my head. “*But Daddy...I want it now!*”

God’s blessings are so abundant, I feel like I am beginning to get spoiled. He blessed me and resolved my situation, but I couldn’t see it, because I was blinded by my own will.

Hello, my name is Veruca Salt (today...), and I cringe in repentance.

God’s blessings are abundant. They are part of His character. Jesus talked about how the Father loves to give good gifts to His children (see Mathew 7:11). And in my 29 years of being His kid, I can tell you that is true. Time and time again. Father God often gives good things to those to ask.

Are they too abundant for my human head and heart? My mind tries to reconcile these concepts. I see two areas where I need to make adjustments to address my “I want it now/my way” attitude.

### **Adjustment #1:** My Expectations

I get stuck on a certain way, a certain timing, in which I believe how God should work in answering my prayers. Even typing this out loud screams of its absurdity to me—SO wrong. Utterly ridiculous. God’s ways are not my ways, though I am working on it (see [Isaiah 55:8-9](#), one of my favorite portions of the Bible).

Application: STOP putting limitations on how I expect the Almighty God, the Creator of Universe, Who is limitless, will choose to work, both in timing and result. The fact that He answers my little human requests amazes me. He is faithful and good.

### **Adjustment #2:** King Comfort

I have made my comfort of the utmost importance. Physically (which is a whole other topic to be covered at a later date), as well as situationally (see Adjustment #1). If I am not comfortable with how a situation turns out, I am devastated. I have needed to repent of this false devastation more than once.

Application: No matter what I may think, God is in control. I know this to be true, so I need to live it out. Right now, and forever, I need to remember and rejoice that my God is in control, and He is good, and also His is intimately involved in every moment of my life. (*Author’s Note:* I will be rereading this article at a later date, after another episode of “DADDY! I want it NOW,” when I will audibly moan at my current ridiculousness, and ask God for forgiveness. Repent, and repeat...)

Last Sunday, [Pastor Lyle](#) (July 26 message) preached on the Lord's Prayer (see [Mathew 6:5-15](#), and then [Luke 11:1-12](#)). He reminded us that God's glory has prominence over all, and that God's ultimate desire for my life is NOT my comfort, but for my whole being to be used for HIS glory. And that His kingdom be advanced ("Your kingdom come, Your will be done"). *So good.*

Yes, and amen! It's good to be reminded that my purpose is to glorify His name and expand His Kingdom, in all that I do. The meaning of life simplified.

And yes Lord, Your will be done. NOT mine. When and where did I get the idea that I am in any way shape or form in control? And that I know best? *Ugh.*

The message also talked about how the Lord's Prayer describes our daily submission to God, in all things, and for all things. How else can humans learn to reprogram their selfish thinking to solely glorifying God, and the expansion of His kingdom? I need that. Less of me. More of Him.

**Adjustment Prayer:** Lord, please reprogram my human brain to seek to glorify You and expand Your kingdom.

So the next time I feel my will and flesh rise up and say, "I WANT IT NOW," I look to my Heavenly Father, and say, "Daddy, not my will, but Yours will be done."

Amen.

*ANGELA DOLBEAR is the author of four novels, and several short stories. She also writes and records original music with her husband, Tim Dolbear. Please visit her author page on [Amazon](#) for more information.*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME - Bales in the Field – by Marcy Lytle**

Let me begin by saying I know NOTHING about farming. I know that I don't want to live on a farm, but I do enjoy gazing at farmland on a road trip. And when there's an entire field with bales of hay spread out in nice rows, I almost gasp and beg to stop and exclaim, "I need a picture!" I have so many photos of bales (or wheels) of hay. I love them all. And recently, we walked by a huge field and my husband hoisted me on top of one!

I have no idea why a field of hay rolled up in bales is so attractive to me, but it is. It's a scene that just speaks peace to my soul. It's one of those scenes that makes me want to pull over and stay a while, to empty my busy mind, and look out over these huge objects as they sit, seemingly immovable, softly calling me to sit a while, as well.

And then, this summer I decided to look up hay and anything interesting about those bales! And what I found spoke to me:

While those scenes are beautiful, I read that those wheels cannot lay there very long. They have to be moved.

- The plants underneath get smothered.
- Smothered plant areas make great places for weeds and dandelions to grow.
- Leaving bales in place too long can reduce the next crop's yield by 25% or more!
- Bales left too long in a field soften and flatten, and cause exposure to the elements – thus loss.

After I read about the danger of leaving the bales in place too long, I thought of that scene in the bible where Jesus' friends were with him atop a mountain where all seemed pretty picture perfect. They asked if they could just stay there and hang out and live...and Jesus then escorted them down the mountain back to real life.

I told my husband just the other day that I wish life would just stand still, sometimes. (Of course, I'd like Covid to be gone, first). On days when my kids are well, money is in the bank, health is good, and prayers are being answered, I'd just like life to stop. I want to stay right here and not age any more, not see my kids go through any future troubles, and not experience any more loss of any kind.

In other words, I'd like life to be a field with beautiful hay bales for sitting and gazing and enjoying. But there's this process called refinement, transfiguration, healing, and setting up an eternity with no more sorrow that still has to take place.

I love it that Jesus took his friends up to that mountain, but it wasn't to have them build a tent that excluded those down below. It was to encourage them to reenter the villages, taking with them the great scene they had witnessed, all in the strength they received from time with their Lord.



I was encouraged that day when I sat on top of that hay bale. It was fun. I wanted to stay there a while. But those bales have to be moved, so that growth and life and strength can take place...until it's time to roll out the hay once again.

He always has scenes and oases of rest that he calls us to...green pastures to lie down in...for strength and renewal. And strength and renewal is never just for ourselves, but it's to hoist up a friend, encourage a neighbor, or send out a strong arm to the fallen.

I will continue to enjoy country drives and hay bales, but I'll also have a new respect for what they mean and why they have to be moved...so that what's underneath can survive and then thrive.

## **FRESH THYME - Imagine and Believe – by Marcy Lytle**

One day we were driving around town and I was thinking about the “fall,” you know, when Adam and Eve ate that forbidden fruit and ushered in all sorts of pain and suffering into the world. I was looking at the kinds of businesses around town that only exist because of pain and suffering!

Lawyers are here to defend us when wrongs occur.

Spas and health clubs are here to keep us healthy.

Repair shops are only built to fix things that are broken.

Stores and restaurants exist because we no longer have access to the garden.

Doctors’ offices and hospitals are built to house and treat illnesses and woes.

Counselors and psychiatrists help to heal our broken hearts and minds.

Jails house those who do wrong and inflict pain on others.

I could go on and on, but you get the picture. If pain and suffering didn’t exist in the world, we’d have so much more land, no need for repairs, and we’d be well and healthy and strong...and then what would our world look like? What kinds of jobs would there be? Oh wait, would we even need to work?

Sin is real, and even though many song lyrics talk about doing what feels good no matter what, when we wrong ourselves or others...pain results.

Just yesterday I read about a drunk driver entering the highway going the wrong direction, and when an accident occurred, the person in the other vehicle died. Drinking and driving mixed together is an activity that’s wrong, and it causes devastating results.

For anyone to say that sin (wrong doing) doesn’t exist is to be blinded by the pain in this world that does exist because of that original sin.

I cannot explain or even comprehend why the actions of one couple affected generations to come, but it did. And God says that what we do affects the generations after us. We can leave them with blessings or curses, depending on our actions. If we are so fearful that we hover and prohibit our kids from living, they will experience fear and pass that on to their kids. But the same occurs with the opposite. If we build up the faith in our kids, share with them stories of God’s love and faithfulness, they will swim in that stream...against all resistance.

Sin is real. Sin hurts. Sin permeates our society and lives on our streets. And the only antidote for sin is Jesus. We cannot stop sinning on our own. From the time we breathe our first breath, it’s all about “give me what I need and give it to me now,” unless we at some point in our lives surrender. We can surrender our bent toward sin, and change by bending toward forgiveness.

All of the above places I mentioned that exist to help the hurting are there to help us all, in our quest to be healthy and whole. However, no amount of gym memberships, appointments with counselors, and time spent in jail can fix the original problem – sin. Sin is doing wrong when we know to do good. And that encompasses a whole lot of wrong in all of us.

John 3:16 is probably the most quoted verse in the Bible, and with good reason.

*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son  
that whoever believes in Him shall not die but have eternal life.*

That one verse is the antidote for sin – to just believe in the love of a good, good Father – and that's it.

Next time you take a drive around town, count the businesses that only exist because we live in a broken world, and you'll be astounded. And if you work in one of those businesses, thank you. If you attend one of those businesses for help - good for you. And if you don't yet know Jesus, the One who restores us back to the pre-fallen state of fellowship with the Father, all you have to do is believe.

Imagine a world without sin, without broken, without sick, and without harm.

That's the world that's promised to those who believe.

## **FRESH THYME – One Pair** – by Marcy Lytle

I would NEVER be caught without sunglasses, EVER, because the sun made my eyes squint and hurt. So I had every cute pair out there, from big frames to colorful frames, and I loved wearing them. That was, until reading glasses became a staple. For years I then carried two kinds of glasses in my purse, a reading pair AND the sunglasses, until...about a year ago.

I really found myself in a bad mood when we headed out for a stroll and I carried my phone, and two pair of glasses. The sunglasses went on my head to help my eyes, but then if I had to read my phone or anything else, I had to switch the glasses. This drove me NUTS.

I don't really remember why or how it happened, but I think I just decided I was going to only take my reading glasses (because I could not function without them!) and over time, I didn't need the sunglasses anymore...and now I don't like sunglasses!

That little story I find amazing, even though it happened to ME! I would never have thought I could live without sunglasses, but here I sit not liking them anymore, my eyes don't bother me (in fact, sunglasses bother me), and I'm back down to only having to carry one pair!

So what's the point of this crazy story? I realized that there are things I think I need or must have that I can really do without just fine! I suppose my eyes had grown accustomed to the sunglasses, but now my eyes don't like the shades any more! I'm sure this would not work for everyone, but other things might.

I remember standing by another mom while waiting to pick up my kids from school and she commented, "We just *have* to have a playroom in our new home." My husband and I had just lost our big house and I found myself rolling my eyes as she talked, because I was just thankful we had a home with a garage!

There are all sorts of things we think we cannot live without, and yet we can, and we might, and we might be happier without those things!

People that move to tiny homes and love it find out they don't need all the space they once thought was necessary!

People (me) that went to the movies two to three nights a week thought they'd lose their mind without that activity during the pandemic, but my mind is intact and more walks have been enjoyed!

People lose a job and cannot afford a gym anymore, and find that exercise can be fun at home, in the yard, and around the trail – who knew?

We all have our own lists of things that bring us comfort and joy, things we have come to place on our need list, and things we *must* buy...but sometimes...just sometimes...it's a good thing to reconsider all of those things!

My sunglasses story is just my story. I cannot even explain why my eyes have now adjusted and I'm just fine out in the sun. It seems crazy to me. But I'm no longer switching and carrying two pairs of glasses, and that little difference has made me feel good and free.

We can all think of little annoyances, burdens, must-haves, that dictate our lifestyle and our happiness, and then just take away one of them and see what happens. Sometimes what we think brings us pleasure is really just an extra load.

I found it fascinating to realize that I don't need sunglasses after all, when I thought I couldn't live without them. It still boggles my mind. But here I am, about to head out on an errand, with only one pair of glasses in hand...

## **FRESH THYME – Share the Love – by Marcy Lytle**

A sweet friend of mine recently gave me a clipping of an autumn rose sedum plant, and I was so excited to have it. She had been gifted the same from a friend of hers, so she was passing on the love. I was glad to receive! This same friend has shared with me so often little things that have benefited her or that she's enjoyed, and it's absolutely so fun to be on the other end of receiving such surprises.

So I thought of other things we can all share, things we have or have enjoyed, by just leaving a surprise on the front porch of our friends!

**Stovetop potpourri in a jar** – A bunch of rosemary, two lemons, and one tablespoon of vanilla placed in a pretty mason jar and tied with twine makes a nice gift for anyone. As cooler temps approach, you can totally change up what you place in the jar for scents of the season!

**A good book we've enjoyed** – If we have a book we've read and are willing to share, we can just pass on the love with a little review tucked inside, with a square of dark chocolate to enjoy while they read!

**A succulent in a pot** – Either put together one or purchase one at your local hardware store or nursery, include your favorite scripture verse, and leave it on the doorstep of her house.

**A recipe with ingredients** – Maybe you put together a great trail mix, or a pasta dish that everyone loved! Place the ingredients with the recipe in a large bowl with a tea towel (from the dollar store) and deliver to her door (six feet away, of course).

**A pack of hand sanitizers** – My daughter sells a pack of purse-sized ones that smell so good, and she was having a giveaway for teachers. That's a great idea, or even for your friends. For about \$15 you get five, and they're seriously the best. (insert link here)

**A good buy from Amazon** – Maybe you purchased a cute salad mixer, or a great car organizer, and you loved it. Order one for her and have it delivered in a couple of days max! Share the love!

**A journal and a new pen** – Write an encouraging note to your friend on the first page, and encourage her to fill in the rest with creativity, thoughts, or prayers. She will love it!

Those are seven ideas of sharing the love, and I'm thinking there are so many more ideas swimming in your own head. During this time, especially for moms with kids, teachers and law enforcement wives, and those nursing the sick or the elderly, there are plenty of friends with whom we can share what we have to bring a smile.

So fun!



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

October 2020



TIPS



## **The Dressing – Just a Touch** – by Marcy Lytle

I don't know if you've bought lots of new clothes for this season, or if you're frustrated with the selections in the stores you venture out to, or if you're afraid to buy on line, or where you fall on the spectrum of new clothes buying! However, I'm betting that a lot of us have been limited in what we've found and maybe are a bit sad that we don't have a ton of new clothes, or much of anywhere to wear them!

Maybe...this fall we can add just a touch of an accessory here and there, and create whole new looks with what we already have in our closet! Accessories like handbags, totes, pins, scarves, jewelry, and more can elevate a look so much! And they don't have to "fit." They just have to be worn and enjoyed!

We've searched and here are some of our favorite fall accessories for this season:

**Embellished bag** – Apparently, these are in this fall! And just one bag with a plain outfit will elevate your look, totally! Check out this beautiful gold clutch from Walmart! Carry it out to dinner, even if you're eating on a patio – totally will make your outfit!

<https://www.walmart.com/ip/Scheilan-Aged-Gold-Metal-Crystal-Embellished-Clutch/175931266>

**Retro wide brim hat** - This hat would look so pretty with your winter beiges and whites, or with a flannel tunic, or a jean jacket over a flowy dress. I've found that if I pin my hair on top of my head with a small clip, my hair doesn't go flat when the hat is removed! This hat is so cute, from H&M.

[https://www2.hm.com/en\\_us/productpage.0650511003.html](https://www2.hm.com/en_us/productpage.0650511003.html)

**Kitschy charm jewelry** – Check out this American coin bracelet from Overstock. It's a little bit chunky, it's whimsical, and it's something I would totally wear with a sweater or blazer. I love each little charm and the fact that it's Americana!

<https://www.overstock.com/Jewelry-Watches/American-Coin-Treasures-Goldtone-Metal-Coins-Charm-Bracelet-with-Certificate-of-Authenticity/6031034/product.html>

**Silk scarf or bandanna** – I recently ordered both of these from Madewell and LOVE THEM. Scarves can be doubled (one shorter than the other) around your neck, rolled and worn with a side knot on the head, or even tied on a solid bag! (get my links)

**Pearl earrings** – Take a simple solid crewneck sweater and a pair of jeans, and dress up your outfit with one pair of pearl earrings – these from JCrew Factory are just the pair to try!

<https://factory.jcrew.com/p/womens-clothing/jewelry/earrings/pearl-hoop-earrings/AH124>

**Chunky chains** – I think it would be so fun to layer chain necklaces, because chunky chains are in for fall! These options from Madewell are super cute and affordable! Wear them over your chunky sweaters...or against your tight turtlenecks! (get picture)

<https://www.madewell.com/chunky-curb-chain-necklace-MA013.html>

[https://www.madewell.com/chunky-curb-chain-necklace-99105922843.html?source=googlePLA&noPopUp=true&srcCode=Paid\\_Search%7CShopping\\_NonBrand%7CGoogle%7CMWGGBS00002\\_99105922843\\_1508320939\\_53557875290\\_445706781998\\_m\\_pla\\_online\\_9028279&gclid=EAlaIQobChMIuqKYtcHN6wIVTvdjBx3RzwI1EAQYBiABEgKTdfD\\_BwE&gclid=aw.ds](https://www.madewell.com/chunky-curb-chain-necklace-99105922843.html?source=googlePLA&noPopUp=true&srcCode=Paid_Search%7CShopping_NonBrand%7CGoogle%7CMWGGBS00002_99105922843_1508320939_53557875290_445706781998_m_pla_online_9028279&gclid=EAlaIQobChMIuqKYtcHN6wIVTvdjBx3RzwI1EAQYBiABEgKTdfD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds)

[99105922843.html?source=googlePLA&noPopUp=true&srcCode=Paid\\_Search%7CShopping\\_NonBrand%7CGoogle%7CMWGGBS00002\\_99105922843\\_1508320939\\_53557875290\\_445706781998\\_m\\_pla\\_online\\_9028279&gclid=EAlaIQobChMIuqKYtcHN6wIVTvdjBx3RzwI1EAQYBiABEgKTdfD\\_BwE&gclid=aw.ds](https://www.madewell.com/chunky-curb-chain-necklace-99105922843.html?source=googlePLA&noPopUp=true&srcCode=Paid_Search%7CShopping_NonBrand%7CGoogle%7CMWGGBS00002_99105922843_1508320939_53557875290_445706781998_m_pla_online_9028279&gclid=EAlaIQobChMIuqKYtcHN6wIVTvdjBx3RzwI1EAQYBiABEgKTdfD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds)

**Slim sunnies** – Thin sunglasses are in this fall, and we really like this white cat-eye pair from Amazon. Can you imagine it with a fall scarf wrapped around your head, windows down, and getting those Audrey Hepburn vibes while you cruise! I love these!

[https://www.amazon.com/SOJOS-Vintage-Sunglasses-Goggles-Plactic/dp/B078J87N65/ref=sr\\_1\\_6?c=ts&dchild=1&keywords=Women%27s+Sunglasses&qid=1599653182&refinements=p\\_n\\_style\\_browse-bin%3A3388420011&s=apparel&sr=1-6&ts\\_id=2474971011](https://www.amazon.com/SOJOS-Vintage-Sunglasses-Goggles-Plactic/dp/B078J87N65/ref=sr_1_6?c=ts&dchild=1&keywords=Women%27s+Sunglasses&qid=1599653182&refinements=p_n_style_browse-bin%3A3388420011&s=apparel&sr=1-6&ts_id=2474971011)

[Plactic/dp/B078J87N65/ref=sr\\_1\\_6?c=ts&dchild=1&keywords=Women%27s+Sunglasses&qid=1599653182&refinements=p\\_n\\_style\\_browse-bin%3A3388420011&s=apparel&sr=1-6&ts\\_id=2474971011](https://www.amazon.com/SOJOS-Vintage-Sunglasses-Goggles-Plactic/dp/B078J87N65/ref=sr_1_6?c=ts&dchild=1&keywords=Women%27s+Sunglasses&qid=1599653182&refinements=p_n_style_browse-bin%3A3388420011&s=apparel&sr=1-6&ts_id=2474971011)

Look through your closet and put together your favorite cozy outfits, then think how you could add a pop of something to create a whole new look for fall. It could be a fun animal brooch, a statement ring, any of the above suggestions, or more! Share your looks with us!

## **Seven for You – Fall Faves** – by our panel of women

I love driving down the streets and seeing home décor for fall, pumpkins on porches, and wreaths on doors. I also love fall festivals (not sure many will be happening this year!) and I love the scents and colors of this season. It seems most of us do, and why not share what it is we love and why? Here we go...

---

October is my favorite month of the year. For me, it reminds me of new beginnings. It was in October 1966 that my family first arrived in Germany. It was to be our home for the next four years. Fall was exploding with browns, reds, oranges all set against a bright blue sky. The air felt crisp and clean and new. We arrived during the most celebrated month of the year! Parades and music, beer tents, and bratwurst. Jaunty polka music filled the village square. It was hard to feel sadness with so much jubilation surrounding you. October is my new beginnings month and a time to remember joy. My little Hummel collection reminds me of that time so long ago. Happy children like I was in a land far away. Finde Freude!

---

I LOVE visiting apple orchards and pumpkin patches in the fall! I usually end up buying apple and pumpkin butters from the family farm stores. Recently I had the idea to add Pumpkin Butter to my coffee and cream to make Homemade Pumpkin Spice Creamer! I also like to add cinnamon essential oil or ground pumpkin spice to my coffee brew basket for an extra punch of spice flavor. Yum!

---

My favorite part of fall is fall festivals! Hay bales, pumpkin patches, and carnival rides help put me in the mood for fall, especially when the temperature outside is still in the 80's.

---

My favorite part of fall is that you can almost feel nature breathe a sigh of relief. With the intense heat that we've had in August, many of the things growing around me have shut down. My elm trees are even dropping leaves early because of the heat. But when the temperatures drop and hopefully the rain comes, there will be renewed energy and growth again.

---

I am definitely a summer loving girl, but I do love October, probably because I love Halloween! I love to decorate, and I always enjoyed trick or treating, decorating pumpkins, and everything that went along with entertaining kids in the fall. One of my favorite memories is of a birthday party for my daughter. We all dressed up and surprised her with a haunted house effect. I was the witch that led the tour of the house and the haunted yard. My then young sons loved lying in the graveyard and sitting up from their graves to scare the girls as they walked by. I recommend every young parent have this kind of fun at least once with their children.

---

I recommend something crafty on the adult level and it is such a good time of the year to do this. About thirty years ago I took a ceramic class at our church. I had never done ceramics but the items I made like this ghost was so much fun along with the time I got to spend with the other ladies. It is 30 years later, and I still enjoy putting out my ghost!

---

My favorite part of fall is putting out my fall decor. I have several pillows, pumpkins, and other decor that I love to set out. I'm also a big fan of Hot Caramel Apple Cider. There's nothing like sipping on a hot mug of Cider on a crisp, fall evening!

<https://foodapparel.com/better-starbucks-caramel-apple-cider/>

---

I absolutely love everything about fall, except that the weather is still too warm, for my liking! A few of my faves are pumpkin spice candles, something new in home décor each year (this year it's a shower curtain!), and all the hues of fall in clothing. I enjoy setting out décor in groups of three, and my favorite item is my hearth rug! I wish I could find one for every season!

---

My favorite season is fall, and it's my birthday month as well. Growing up in Ohio the fall trees and leaves were so beautiful, with so many variations of browns, reds, yellows and greens. I loved piling up the leaves in the yard and jumping into them, with my friends. I can recall those wonderful chilly mornings I used to go outside and sit on the porch as a kid. As an adult, I just add a hot cup of tea (green tea with mint is my fave) to those early mornings and that is a great start to a beautiful day!

---

I love fall! After extreme, summer Texas heat, I welcome the cooler temps. I even enjoy cloudy days, feeling cozy in the house while watching the clouds roll in and the rainfall. Also, fall decor is my favorite. I collect various styles of pumpkins and display some of them year round. I'm THANKFUL for fall. It's my favorite time of year.

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

It's October and I suppose most of the country is starting to cool down a bit, and in our area – it's a welcome change for sure! It's the time of year when we start using the oven and stove again, and the aromas of soups and stews and comfort food become desirable, instead of salads and sandwiches (although I like those all year, as well!) We've tried a few new recipes that I think you might like to add to your fall list...as the holidays approach. A couple of desserts...and a couple scrumptious dinners. And of course, we added one spooky fun dessert for us all!

### **Dark Chocolate Bark**

This recipe makes a big batch, so keep in fridge and grab a piece once a day for taste and a satisfying snack. It's so delish!

- 2 12oz bags dark chocolate chips, melted
- ½ c salted pretzels roughly chopped
- ¼ c dried cherries
- ¼ c unsweetened coconut flakes
- ¼ c unsalted pistachios roughly chopped
- Flaky sea salt

Line baking sheet with parchment paper. Pour a third of melted chocolate onto sheet and use an offset spatula to spread into 1/8 in thick layer (don't leave it thicker than this, or it will be hard to break, later).

Evenly sprinkle with half the pretzels, cherries, coconut and pistachios. Pour over remaining chocolate to cover ingredients and evenly sprinkle the same as above, again.

Garnish with flaky sea salt. Let cool one hour (I put in fridge). Break into pieces.

### **Apple Brown Betty**

At first, this recipe's call for firm texture bread threw me off, but I ended up using country scratch bread from the deli, and it the dish turned out great. This is easy, and oh so good with ice cream on top! We took it for a family gathering, and we ate it all!

- 6 slices firm textured bread
- 2 large granny smith apples, 2 large golden delicious apples, cored, peeled and thinly sliced
- ½ cup plus 1 T firmly packed light brown sugar
- ½ t finely grated lemon zest
- 1 T fresh lemon juice
- ½ cup unsalted butter, melted

Preheat oven to 350, butter a 2-qt dish, set aside. Tear bread into food processor and pulse til crumbs are like oatmeal (not pulverized).

Place apples in large bowl and add ½ c brown sugar, the zest and juice and toss to combine. Place one-third of mix in dish and top with one-third of crumbs. Drizzle with 2 T melted butter. Repeat layers, then top with remaining apples and bread crumbs. Drizzle with remaining 4 T butter. Sprinkle 1 T brown sugar on top.

Cover with buttered foil and bake 30 minutes. Remove foil and bake another 30-40 minutes til browned.

### **Beans and Hush Puppies**

We bought War Eagle Mill's bagged beans and hush puppy mix, and are including them here, in case you want to order for Christmas gifts! The beans have the directions on the bag (you'll need to possibly keep adding a bit of water so the pot doesn't run dry.) I used bacon instead of ham. These beans were superb, because of that flavoring packet in the bag! We topped with grated cheese and served in fun soup bowls from Lakeside Collections (another great gift idea!)

The hush puppies were SO EASY and quick to make. We added in the garlic powder and chopped green onion, then fried them (if oil is hot, they fry up quickly!). SO GOOD with the beans!

### **Many Veggies Veggie Soup! (from loveandlemons.com)**

This has a lot of ingredients, but it's honestly one of the best veggie soups I've made. And it feels so healthy to eat and enjoy! A great October staple for your recipe file!

- 2 T EVOO (extra virgin olive oil)
- 1 med yellow onion diced
- Sea salt and black pepper
- 1 medium carrot diced
- 1 small sweet potato diced
- ¼ cup dry white wine (I used chicken broth)
- 1 14.5 oz can diced fire roasted tomatoes
- 4 garlic cloves chopped
- 2 t dried oregano
- 4 c veggie broth
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 c halved cherry tomatoes
- 1 c chopped green beans
- 1 zucchini diced
- 1 15 oz can chickpeas drained and rinsed
- 2 T white wine vinegar
- 1 ½ c chopped kale

Heat oil, add onion,  $\frac{1}{2}$  t salt, several grinds of pepper, cook for about 8 minutes, add carrot and sweet potato, stir and cook another 2 minutes.

Add the wine and cook for 30 seconds, then add the canned tomatoes, garlic, oregano...stir in the broth and bay leaves. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to simmer and cook covered for 20 minutes.

Stir in the cherry tomatoes, green beans, zucchini, chickpeas...cover and cook about 15 min more.

Stir in vinegar, kale, and additional  $\frac{1}{4}$  t salt and more pepper (taste).

### **For Fun...Spiderweb Milkshakes**

4 oz chopped dark chocolate, in 30 sec intervals, stirring til melted. Let cool, then spoon into a ziplock bag and snip off a corner.

Pipe a spiral of chocolate into inside of dessert glasses (or martini glasses) on the sides, then use a toothpick to drag lines out from the center, creating a spiderweb pattern. Freeze until just set, about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, blend 1 pint vanilla ice cream and  $\frac{1}{4}$  c milk in a blender and pour into glasses.

### **Three Moms – Kids in the Kitchen**

It's fall, and it's usually the time for more homemade goodies like soups and cookies and warm and tasty aromas filling the house! And it seems that kids like to be a part of making the food! So many say that if kids are involved in the making of the food, they will then be more likely to eat the food. Do you find that to be true? Our moms are weighing in on how they include the kiddos in the stirring, the making, and the preparation of dinner for the family...or not!

#### **Mom of 4 kiddos, 10 and under...**

Cooking is not my favorite, so I am thankful I have eager kids that want to help and really enjoy cooking. And, YES, I do let them help! The quicker I can train them the less I will have to cook. (Can any other moms relate?) It does get stressful when they are all in the kitchen at the same time, so we take turns.

My oldest, Grace (age 10), has gotten pretty good at cooking, and I can turn her loose while a sibling or two help! One of her (and my) favorites is her homemade cookies. These are a huge hit and are always cooked to perfection. They are iced sugar cookies, so she can spice them up for any occasion or holiday.

When it comes to dinner time, we have a "kitchen" kid for the week that helps clean up the kitchen before and after dinner, and assists in setting the table. Dishes and cleaning are not my kids' favorite chore, but cooking seems to be a fought after activity! So I always have volunteers to stir, add ingredients, help Dad with the smoker / grill, and taste test the food!

---

#### **Mom of 2 littles...ages 4 and 2...**

I've really had to let loose when it comes to allowing my kids to help with meals. They LOVE IT; however, I know that it will create a mess, require patience, and take at least 30 more minutes to make the meal. When I let down my guard and focus on the joy it brings to my girls, I love it too.

Their favorite things to do to help are stirring, measuring and taste testing. I found it easier to go ahead and get all the ingredients out, because if I turn my back once, I know my two year old will have everything poured out on the floor! They take turns pouring and stirring, and always eating. They get distracted easily, so I usually have them help me with simple recipes - scrambled eggs, muffins, cupcakes, and cookies. We talk about the ingredients, what we are making, and I thank them for being big helpers.

Our favorite recipe, no matter what the season, is Banana Nut Bread! The girls love helping me make this and they devour every last bit.

---

#### **Mom of 3 children, ages 8 and under...**

Honestly, I like being in the kitchen by myself, and I like the kids playing outside while I cook!



However, my kids do help with baking. Cracking eggs and stirring – the kids do help with that! (They love turning on the KitchenAid!) The kids each have their own aprons and my daughter has her own set of cooking utensils in a plastic tub. And we have a stool, which is a necessity for kids in the kitchen! Baking works easier for us; because items are measured out. I cook dinner on the fly, so I don't use the kids for meals as much.

We are making muffins this week, which is something fun our family enjoys. Pecan pie is a fall favorite, so they like to toss in the nuts!

My kids are required to take their dishes to the sink after dinner. However, we don't have "sets" of dishes. I plate at the counter and then serve on the table.

And lunch? All three kids have learned how to pack up from the array of choices I've given!

## **Tried and True – Pumpkin Nice** – by Marcy Lytle

Pumpkin spice is my favorite fall scent, but the title of this piece is Pumpkin Nice. Pumpkins are the fall décor that can last right on through Thanksgiving, and I've even seen glittery silver pumpkins for Christmas! Since these orange wonders are so popular, I thought I'd share some decorating ideas with pumpkins, in case you're adding a few around your house this season.

**Pumpkins with lights** – We have two of these. It's so nice to add lights to your home décor any time of the year. In fact, it's one of the four things to have when decorating your table, as well! This pumpkin with lights attached, and this pumpkin with bulbs attached, is a great find and something you can place anywhere for pretty ambience.

**Ceramic or paper pumpkins** – These little guys are nice to nestle around on tables or mantels, in groups of three. That's another decorating tip when placing small items on shelves – keep them in groups of three.

<https://www.kirklands.com/product/Seasonal-Gifts/Harvest/Fall-Decorations/Ceramic-Pumpkins-Set-of-3/pc/2289/c/2404/sc/3029/162798.uts>

**Hanging pumpkins** – I found this really cute pumpkin tree on vacation in Smithville, New Jersey and have loved it ever since. It looks like a fountain tree with branches that grow little pumpkins! It looks great in a corner!

**Pumpkins on porches** – A sweet friend gave me this large metal outdoor pumpkin and I love sitting it on my front porch this time of year!

**Pumpkins on doors** – I just found this so cute welcome sign on Amazon that changes out for each celebration – 14 changing pieces – and it's so affordable. It's new on my porch this year, and it has great reviews!

**Dish towel pumpkins** – One easy way to decorate for fall is to just hang some new dish towels in the kitchen – there are so many cute options from trucks piled with pumpkins, to fall leaves and pumpkins, and more.

**Pumpkins on rugs** – This hearth rug might be my favorite piece of fall décor of all. I found it on a fluke at Marshalls and have been hunting for other season hearth rugs ever since. Providing a new rug at the hearth, the front door (going in AND out) or even in the bathroom gives a fall touch to the entire home!

**Runner pumpkins** – Change out your table décor and add a runner with pumpkins on it! Set the table, enjoy the season, and keep a stash of seasonal runners in a drawer!

<https://www.kirklands.com/product/Seasonal-Gifts/Harvest/Fall-Dining-Entertaining/Gather-Pumpkin-Table-Runner/pc/2289/c/2404/sc/3250/276076.uts>

**Cloth pumpkins** - Have you seen these? We have a couple on our shelves in our work area and I love them. I found them at a discount store, but I've linked one for you here!

<https://www.kirklands.com/product/Seasonal-Gifts/Harvest/Fall-Decorations/Orange-Sweater-Pumpkin/pc/2289/c/2404/sc/3029/281205.uts>



HOME

## **I Don't Do Teens – Hands Up** – by Marcy Lytle

I remember when my son was in high school, and all of the friends he had on his sports teams and in his youth group, and at school. Fast forward 10 years now, and some of those boys grew up and became successful young men with a career and now are starting a family. But several of his friends struggled with the teen years, and caused their moms and dads so much worry. Although friends and family prayed, those boys never settled down from wandering and exploring...in all the wrong places.

What makes one young man grow up without incident, and others grow up with too many incidents? Perhaps you have a teen with a wandering spirit, an adventurous type that wants to explore things a bit too much, hang with the wrong crowd, and dabble in the dangerous. It's so hard to talk to other moms that seem to have compliant children that cause no trouble.

*I've learned two things since watching and observing all of this over the years:*

Never assume that your child is so awful, and her children are so awesome. EVERY child has issues. It's just that some are more visible than others. It's true that some children are more trying in every way than others, but ALL moms everywhere are praying for their kids for some sort of concern as they watch them mature...or not mature. Comparison never does a mom any good, and just because one son might struggle daily, it does not mean that the mom with the compliant son is doing something "right." We all know that every person has their own struggles in life. It might not be now, but it will be later. We are sure to have trials and troubles, and sometimes that comes in the form of our teens and their behavior.

Never try to muster up prayer and faith on your own. There will be days when all you can do is survive, as you wait for your son/daughter to come home when you know they've taken a drink. Or there will be that night on a date, when you worry that they aren't being wise in their decisions with the opposite sex. And there will be times when they lie, they sneak around, and they do things we've told them not to do. It's never up to us to be perfect parents, raising perfect children into perfect adults. It's perfectly okay to throw our hands up in surrender as we say in our most exasperated tone, "God, I can't do this!" That's a perfect response to a crappy day or week or month, or year!

I'm still praying for some of my son's friends that got into trouble, and are still in trouble. And you know what? I'm still praying for my son, as he navigates adulthood, marriage, owning a house, working a job, and handling the stress that life throws all of us daily. And there are still days when I throw up my hands and toss my grown kids to the hands of the Father, and release them into His care.

What I'm trying to say is that no matter how "good" or how "bad" our kids may act, they all have hearts, minds, and souls that are being pursued by God – all the days of their lives. Some of us may struggle a LOT more than others in this area, as our teens wander off. But believe me, that mom over there that seems to have a perfect son has her own set of struggles in another area.

If your teens are causing you more grief than you can bear, and you can't even kneel in prayer right now, because your knees are too sore from the hours you've already spent kneeling,

you're good. Get up and live your life, enjoy your day, and sip on a latte. Do your best, entrust HIM with the rest. It's easier said than done, so ask for help from a friend instead of worrying what that friend will think if you share. And above all, KNOW that you are not alone, you're not a bad mom, and there is ALWAYS HOPE for the most adventurous, lost and confused child among us...ALWAYS.

That son/daughter you gave birth to long ago was created in His image, and there's this awesome plan that awaits them, for good and not evil. Pray big. And when you can't pray big, throw your hands up and sit still. And let the peace that comes from surrender roll over you like the warm ocean waters on a sunny day...as the salt brings healing to your soul. Or better yet, step into the waves and enjoy the ride back to shore.

## **An Adage A Day - Flying High with Murphy** - by Carole Gilbert

For the first half of our marriage, my husband and I used the adage of, "Murphy's Law," quite often. Do you know this quote of, "Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong?"

This adage has a remarkably interesting beginning and it has been around only since 1949. It was during an Air Force experiment of a very advanced innovative USAF high-speed rocket sled that an aerospace engineer, Colonel Edward A. Murphy, Jr. said this quote. He was involved in the experimental safety testing of this aircraft known as the Gee Whiz. There were a few failed tests and because of its speed no man had ridden in it. Finally, a monkey lived through one of the tests.

Colonel Murphy was afraid to try riding in the aircraft himself, but another man, Colonel John Stapp, volunteered. That test run went up to 421 miles per hour giving Colonel Stapp several injuries. This is when Colonel Murphy made the statement regarding the test's failures, "Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong."

Later, at a press conference, Colonel Stapp repeated Murphy's comment and this is how the quote got pinned as "Murphy's Law." And it is interesting to note, Murphy did not realize that he was the author of this adage until twenty years later. He also did not say this quote in a negative way like we use it now. The positive thought Murphy had behind saying this was that it is always good to be prepared for whatever could go wrong.

Murphy went on creating and testing aircraft safety equipment. He worked with the safety systems for the Apollo moon missions along with other well-known aircraft vehicles. He is also accredited with a few other adages of wisdom, basically, all in the name of science. My other favorite is, "Every aquarium will eventually leak." I hope you do not have an aquarium.

Even though Murphy said his quote in a positive way, my husband and I used the "Murphy's Law" like everyone else in the negative way. When our plans for something got changed for whatever reason, we would blame good ole Murphy. It would be "Murphy's Law's" fault. Some people believe these changes are fate, coincidence, or just my luck. I used to believe this way also, but I do not anymore.

Many years ago, I discovered the unusual happenings, the pieces in my life puzzle being put together in astonishing ways, or just the happenstance changes in events or plans really are a product of the Holy Spirit guiding my life. Once I started believing this, so many other things in my life started to fit into place.

Like Murphy, I wanted to fly. I wanted to be an astronaut at NASA, and I wanted to fly to the moon. I wanted a pilot's license. I did not get these things, but one thing I did get like Murphy was the understanding to be prepared for whatever happens. And the best way to be prepared, to me, is to know who is ultimately in charge of our plans.

Murphy's Law states that we plan one thing and something else may, and probably will, happen.

Doesn't this sound like the verse in Proverbs 19:21?

“Many are the plans in the mind of a man,  
but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.”

So, when my plans change instead of saying it is coincidence, fate, or Murphy's Law, I will refer to these changes as being from God and being His plan for His purpose. Now that is a positive thought!



## Chipped China – If We Were Free – by Jennifer Lytle

### *Up to the Atmosphere Up to the Highest Height*

Fridays are family movie nights for us. We have enjoyed this tradition for years now and each week, every member of our family anticipates eating take-out and sitting together, laughing loudly, or holding our breath during a suspenseful scene. It's a time for us all to take a break and is a much needed moment of relief and reconnecting.

One week over the summer, we chose *Mary Poppins* - the original movie. The height of the show is when Father is fired from his prestigious position as a banker. This subplot starts with a special day where Jane and Michael join Father at work. On the way into the bank, they witness a beggar woman crying for passers-by to pay and feed the crowd of crows around her. Michael is moved to give his two-pence to the beggar. Father works to convince Michael, as does the large group of much older and wiser (and wealthy) bankers, to instead open an account with his money. The older group of men goes on to idealize how prestigious, accomplished, and powerful money can ultimately make the young boy.

Michael, however, was forewarned by Mary Poppins about the opportunity to give his two-pence to the woman. He cannot be persuaded to go along with the group. His resistance creates a ruckus and ultimately leads to Father being fired.

### *Let's Go Fly a Kite*

This desperate moment culminates in a beautiful opportunity where Father has the freedom to fly a kite; the very thing which introduces us to the children in the first place. They are free. Now, Father is too.

What would you do if you were free? Would you paint your home emerald green? Would you declare every night family game night? Would you skip dinner to find a creek to skip rocks in or find a place to try out your kayak?

### *Investing in the Pause of this Pandemic*

I pray that this encouragement doesn't come too late for you, dear readers. Our community is pushing forward, moving ahead . . . with life as usual. I wonder if we haven't fully embraced the opportunities the pandemic provided.

Let's paint our cabinets.

Let's dance in the rain.

Let's stop to watch the storm roll through.

Let's enjoy this moment because it won't return.

Has it been hard? Yeah, Buddy.

Has it similarly been [an invitation](#) to [step into something new](#)? Yes.

As I contemplate the required intentionality essential to [embracing today](#), I wonder: Is this biblical? Is this something Jesus would have his people practice? For me, [the answers are yes](#).

### **Updated Bio:**

**Known as Momma to three beautifully wild littles, Jennifer is in the thick of the richest journey she has yet known. She is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Associate in the state of Texas and Founder of Joyful Journeys Counseling. Writing was among her first discovered superpowers. (And thank you very much, Jesus!) Her husband and she have been married for 12 years. She is a bred, born, and raised Texan who loves traveling. She has traveled to Greece, Central America, throughout the eastern US, and Israel. Jennifer is passionate about education, prayer, and being in the center of God's will.**

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

Did you know that about 7 pieces of paper are the limit, in how many you tear together, in half? I wondered how many and looked it up. It's a great exercise to teach the kiddos about being connected and not alone, and the power of being connected to HIM. It all came to my mind when I was observing little kids start back to school. Many had meltdowns over the frustration of online school, missing their friends, and more. Many kids are feeling isolated, since they aren't allowed to sit by, play by, or be near the groups they once were!

So...let's use paper and learn a valuable lesson that hopefully will lift our kids' spirits and remind them of the necessity of knowing that God is with them...

**Preparation:** You'll need seven sheets of computer paper. You can let the kids draw a fall picture on each paper, if you'd like, of one of their closest friends or family members, until you have seven faces.

First, talk to the kids about what it means to feel "torn." It obviously means ripped apart, like when a page is torn into two pieces. But it can also mean damaged...which is how one feels when something bad happens...like being ripped apart in their heart. And sometimes, even our kiddos feel torn apart with all of the craziness of the world.

Take one sheet of paper and let a kid rip it in half: One sheet of paper is easy to rip in half, isn't it? It's the same way with one lone person who has no friends, one person who feels very alone. Any little disappointment can send them to their bedroom in tears.

Question: When's the last time you cried and what made you cry? (Let one person answer). Then you felt torn...that's what we mean in this lesson.

Take two sheets and stack them and rip them apart: This was still fairly easy, but not as easy as one sheet. When we have a friend or a family member that we feel close to, someone we can talk to, someone that loves us, we aren't as easily torn apart by disappointment. For example, if a friend can't come and play, maybe we have a sibling or a parent that can be with us and we can still have fun – two are better than one!

Question: Which person have you been around lately that made you feel safe and loved?

Take three sheets of paper and fold them in half...so now you have six sheets of thickness. Try to rip into two pieces: Maybe mom/dad will have to do this – it's much more difficult to create a tear in a thick pile of paper. When we have lots of friends and family to surround us with love and care, not much can rip us apart, because we are surrounded with love.

Question: Give thanks out loud for a family member that you love.

Take that seventh piece of paper and fold in half four times and try to tear it apart: It's impossible, isn't it?

Jesus is that ONE that we need in our circle of friends to keep us together and safe and loved, even when everything in the world falls apart. He keeps outside forces from ripping our hearts

apart. He's the ONLY one that can do this, because people and situations cause problems, but Jesus is always the answer. He's the one that causes our lives to stay intact and untor. Isn't that cool?

Question: Do you know Jesus? Do you know that there's a verse that says – There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother – like that seventh sheet of paper – and his name is JESUS.

All we have to do is call on his name and he comes to our rescue. The Bible also says that the name of Jesus is a strong tower, and we can run inside and be safe.

Any time you feel torn or sad or lonely or far away from those you love, get a piece of paper and fold it four times (that makes 8 thicknesses) and try to rip it apart. You'll see that you can't do it. And that's your reminder that JESUS is your buddy, your friend, your Savior, and your Lord...the one who holds it all together...when everything else is falling apart.

## **Tiny Living – Four Times in a Tent** – by Leyanne Enterline

What do you do when you're in the middle of a pandemic, travel restricted, career-less, but love to travel?! You tent camp, of course! Not in the middle of the summer in Texas, though! We had to travel a bit farther for cooler weather. I mean, when you're already living super tiny (and for some reason it seems tinier during a quarantine), going even smaller is a super great idea, right? One way to get even closer to family members is to try and set up a tent and all sleep really close together. We decided we actually loved it so much we've gone four times in the past two months. That's probably more camping than we've ever done as a family.

Our first time, we eased into it. We stayed one night in the tent in Colorado in a very nice RV resort on the river. We had nice showers and restrooms. It was a pleasant experience. Our second time, we went back to Colorado for five nights. It was on the river again, a bit more remote area, with an *okay* shower area and restroom. For our third time, we heard we could camp for free in any National Forest. So off the pioneers go! I mean we're professionals now, right?

We decided on New Mexico this time. We looked up an area that looked promising and it sure was! We found a dirt road and started up it! We saw from afar a few other campers, and as we drove up the mountain saw quite a bit more. At least we knew we weren't going to be completely alone, and this seemed like a spot that was doable. It was a bit scary just driving into the woods hoping we'd land on a camping spot! Let me backtrack a bit and say we did look into U.S. government sites first. They seemed more remote and did have showers, but we drove into four different sites and they all said full! It was on a first come first serve basis, and we were arriving on a Saturday so we were out of luck. And *free* definitely is always better!

So into the woods we went, up to the highest we could go and found us a nice little spot. Of course it was dusk, so that's always the best time to put up a tent, NOT! Out came the head lamps and we started a fire as quick as we could. It got into the low 50s so we were getting chilly pretty quickly. Our spot was amazing, there was no one around us, and we hardly even heard animals at night! In fact, it was so quiet our ears hurt! Can you imagine no noise at all? It's the weirdest feeling ever. It seemed as though something was wrong!

We hiked during the day and at one point came across a herd of elk. They were beautiful and so cool to see in their natural habitat. The kids played with a horny toad, their first time to see one! This place was missing one thing though (well two if you want to count a restroom, that's a whole other story though!) It was missing FISHING! All of our places before had fishing nearby, but this part of New Mexico just happened to be barren of large water sources. So we packed up and head farther north, towards Taos. We researched some areas again and found some campsites with great fishing.

We ended up for our fourth tent trip up in a government area that was beautiful! We were on a stream with tons of trout, a mountain right in our view, few people around us, a restroom close by, and it was perfect...until... dusk. Out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of something running across our picnic table. There it was - a tiny, cute, large-eared creature that wanted our food. A bit terrifying at first, but no big deal, we just packed up our food and watched out.

As we watched, more and more came out! Literally by the hundreds! It was a plague of mice! I wish this was a made up story but this is real life, y'all. We decided to get to bed quickly, hoping we didn't let any into our tent or car! This night was the longest one of my life! For one it was so stinking cold. Then, one by one, our tent became a jungle gym for the mice. I promise these were acrobatic mice. They jumped into the air (or fell out of the trees), hit our tent, then slid down it like a real slide and splated onto our tarp. This happened ALL NIGHT LONG! The kids were banged the mice off with their hands. I prayed all night that they wouldn't eat a hole in our tent and come and join us!

If that wasn't enough, we heard a terrifying noise in the trash cans close by. We've heard this noise before and knew immediately a bear was close by! Of course, this was the one and only time we left our trash out! The mice were in our trash bag so we decided to leave it hanging on the tree outside. However, with a bear too close that was not a good idea. So at 3:00 AM, Brian had to go out and throw the trash away so not to attract the bear any closer! That's not terrifying at all! He ran out, grabbed the trash bag with one hundred mice staring at him on the tree, lugged the bag across the hood of our car and rushed in to the giant trash container...where the bear is! Luckily, by then the noise had subsided. We saw our neighbors with flashlights from afar, so hopefully that scared the bear off.

Brian chunked our bag in the container and sped away. That was quite an eventful night and we all slept in pretty late the next morning. One would probably think we packed up and got out of there quickly, right?! Of course not!

We must love this odd adventure. Packing up a tent is such a pain, we decided to endure it all over again! I did get to read up a little on mice and camping and read that peppermint oil is a deterrent. AND by the goodness of God I happened to have an entire spray bottle of peppermint oil in the car! I anointed our tent with so much oil and prayed over it, and guess what? That night we only heard maybe three mice playing their weird games and we had a very peaceful night.

I must say after that last adventure I think we're good on tent camping for a while! These were experiences we will never forget and we are so grateful we can still have fun in the middle of all the craziness!

If you haven't tent camped before with the family, I highly recommend it!

Remember...

Love Grows Best in Tiny Spaces



YOU

## **Strengthening Your Core – Prejudiced, Still – by Marcy Lytle**

On our recent vacation to Arkansas, we heard the Arkansans talk in several mountain towns with their thick mountain/country accent, and it was a reminder again of how just a few miles away...culture, life, and language can vary so much. I know that when we travel to the northeast, people there immediately note that we're from the south by the way we say "y'all" so frequently. And when I encounter someone that's British, I immediately smile because I love to hear their accent so much. In fact, I grew tired recently of my American Siri voice, so I changed it to an Australian!

There was a young girl that took my order while in Arkansas and she proceeded to tell me about her high school, and how her brother was her best friend, where she was going to college, etc. I got in the car and tried to share with my husband what she said, in her same voice, and we were both amused. Then we laughed, because we too have so many phrases that we honestly have tried to change over the years, because we just don't like them! We've worked hard to stop saying "we're fixing to leave" and exchange it for "we're about to leave," a much more proper way to express ourselves!

I kept thinking about the different accents that show up in just a few miles of separation, and how depending on where you live, those around you affect the way you speak. It seems that wherever you spend the bulk of your childhood life, that's the accent you pick up and keep for the rest of your life. I've met folks that have lived in America for a couple of decades, but grew up in England as a child, and they still have a thick accent from their country.

Everywhere we look right now on the media there is social unrest due to racism, depending on the color of our skin. But what about the accents that we speak? Is there prejudice there, as well?

I realized that the answer is yes, even in my own heart. I found the young girl that took my order to be amusing and even deemed her as a bit unlearned because of the lack of grammatical correctness when she spoke. And I felt very ashamed about that. How could I, being a Texan (where every other word is slang!) judge an Arkansan for anything she says? And yet, I did.

That girl was going to college, and the way she spoke had nothing to do with her intelligence, although I attached the two together. Skin color, economic status, and so many other differences among us are the things that divide us, mainly because we attach mental capacity or even social etiquette to others, simply because of their differences. They look different, talk different, and live different than we do, and we stay away, judge, and even chuckle at times because those folks are so "beneath" us.

I realized quickly, when I finished college, that especially education seems to set people apart and cause those condescending attitudes to rise. The higher the education we have, the more we tend to separate peoples and language and status and community. It's very rare to see a



young man or woman with Ph.D. fraternize with someone that never had a chance to finish high school, even though that second person might be “smarter than” the doctor!

I thought a lot about this as we drove back home, because I had hours on the road to do so. I have patted myself on the back about not being prejudiced toward others, but I realized that I have a ways to go. That girl at the food truck sounded unlearned, and I judged her as being so, because of the way she talked. And that’s just not right. I don’t like it when people judge me because I’m from Texas and occasionally pronounce words with a terrible southern drawl, so why in the world did I judge that young lady?

I want to continually take note of my own attitudes and judgments, and start laying more and more of them aside, in favor of noticing others in the light of exalting them above myself. Funny thing, that’s what He said to do – love others as we love ourselves and offer them the preferred seating – because he knew we’d separate and segregate and sit in judgment instead.

That’s all I have to say at the moment *y’all*, but it’s definitely not all I have to think about...

## **Healthy Habits – Holiday Routines** – by Marcy Lytle

I know, it's not quite the holiday season, but it will be, by the next time we publish in November. So why not get a jump start on healthy habits before the holidays begin? It's the holiday season that often sets us all off of our routines, increases our stress, and thus we become more susceptible to illness because we're so run down! I can only say that from experience, that running around and crowding our calendars and squeezing in perfection can make for a way less-than-perfect holiday season! So what are we girls to do?

Here are seven little routines that might be worth noting, so that we actually enjoy the holidays this year, as different as they may look because of the weirdness 2020 has brought us so far:

**Shop now, and spread out the spending:** Even if you're not sure what your family wants for Christmas yet, start putting aside a little money each week, or buying gifts you do know, now...so the crunch of spending all at once is avoided.

**Start planning your foods/recipes - now** - while you're sipping cider and watching movies. Peruse the internet or your cookbooks or your favorite places and make a list of sweets, breads, breakfasts, and more...and place them in a folder. You're done, and all you have to do is then bake when the family's hungry!

**Sleep in peace** (you know, sing *Silent Night*...) by delegating holiday responsibilities. Make a list of all the things – like hanging lights, putting up the tree, cleaning linens for guests (if you have any!), going through wrapping supplies, etc. Make the list, dole out the responsibilities among family members, or among weeks if you're going it alone, then sleep...and get to each item on the list as it comes.

**Step into an exercise routine** and maintain it – don't let it go just because the holidays are here. Don't let life and worry and stress keep you from going outside, to a gym, in your room, or wherever you can escape to run, dance, get some sunshine, or whatever invigorates and lifts your mood and your body to a higher level of health.

**Speak life.** Make sure your thoughts are thinking true things about your Good Father and those around you, and then speak them out loud. Affirm the truth about yourself, your relationship with Him, and the way he cares for all that concerns you. Speak it aloud, so that you hear it, and hear it often.

**Settle into a rhythm that works for your home.** Most likely, there will be less events and gatherings to attend this holiday season, and that may sadden or gladden your heart! If you're sad about that, make a list now of some new family traditions to begin that involve staying home or close by. If you're happy about the lack of gatherings, start making your list of movies and games and fun to be had with your extra family time together. In fact, a few new games might be just the thing to buy for everyone!

**Sink into your favorite chair, close your eyes, and sing.** Singing is good for the soul, whether you make perfect notes or not. Sing your own song to him, bare your soul, praise his Name. Or sing a familiar tune that has words that send your soul soaring. But whatever you

do, sing. You could start with a Christmas carol like “Deck the Halls with boughs of holly, fa, la, la, la, la, la , la, la la.” That’s a happy tune for sure!

Holiday routines. They don’t have to kill us. They can actually send us into 2021 with a little skip in our step!

## **Life in a Nutshell – Simply Reminded, not Shamed – by Jill Montz**

Have you ever been mad at something someone did...like really mad at them...and then soon after you accidentally do the exact same or a very similar thing? Anybody? I know I can't be alone in this boat of guilt on the Sea of Shame. Has it happened with your kid? Anybody? Please tell me I am not the only one in the running for Bad Parent of the Year.

Here's my story. See if you can relate.

The first week of school my daughter, Dotty, had a dentist appointment. Normally I wouldn't schedule a dental visit that week but (thanks to Covid) our summer appointment was cancelled. Dotty has some teeth issues so we try not to skip appointments in order to stay on top of things. The day of her appointment I told Dotty I would pick her up after second period. I reminded her she would need to check herself out of school since visitors are currently not allowed on the campus (again...thank you Covid).

I arrived a few minutes before classes let out and waited. When I saw her emerge from the building she was already in full on teenager grumpiness mode about something that had occurred in class. We pulled away from the school to head to her dentist office and Dotty rambled on about what had ruined her morning...the whole 105 minutes she had been there. When she took a breath, I just happened to ask her if she remembered to check out. She got very quiet.

Silence is golden except with toddlers and teenagers. When they are quiet, something is usually up...or at least it is so with mine.

She winced and said she had not. I pounded my fist on the steering wheel, whipped the car around, and headed quickly back to the school. The whole way there, I was berating her on how she has got to pay more attention, she cannot keep forgetting to do things I ask of her, she needs to be more focused, and on and on and on...the four blocks and two stop signs back to the school. I even went so far as to say if we were late for her dental appointment and I got charged for having to reschedule she would have to pay for it. (I am not even sure if her dentist does that, but it sounded good and Dotty believed it.)

Dotty ran back inside to check out then ran back to the car. We didn't speak the 20 minutes it took to get to her dentist. We didn't speak in the waiting room. We didn't talk much on the way back to school. We finally both talked a little that evening but not like we normally would. My frustrations were still there and so were her hurt feelings.

Now fast forward four days. Early on a Saturday morning I was watering my flowers and working in the backyard. Around 10am I decide to run some water in our pool to fill it up a little. I told myself I would turn it off in an hour or so when I came back out to feed the dogs before we left for the day.

I spent longer than I planned weeding my flowers and before I knew it I was running late to take Dotty and some friends to a birthday party. I threw dog food in the bowls and headed inside to quickly shower and get ready to leave. (I am sure you can guess what happened, but humor me.)

We were gone all day and didn't get home until dinnertime. I threw together an easy meal, we went through our nightly routine, and we both said our goodnights and headed off to bed.

Around 2:30am on Sunday morning I was awakened by the sound of thunder. Just as I started to snuggle down deep into my covers thinking how lovely it is to sleep through a thunderstorm, my brain started to trigger a chain of thoughts in its drowsy state of being. Thunder...rain...water...pool water...I won't tell you what I thought next but it was four letters and not a Baptist curse word.

I sprang to my feet, grabbed my glasses and peered out my bedroom window to the pool in the backyard. As sheets of rain poured from the sky and lightning danced across it I could see my backyard, patio, and sidewalks were covered in a thick layer of water. The pool had overflowed and the rain was just adding insult to injury. I ran to the back door, flung it open, and splashed through the water to turn off the spigot. As I sloshed through the back patio to get to the pool pump on the other side of the house in order to backwash the water out of the pool, a huge crash of thunder and a big bolt of lightning startled me. I prayed to God...*please, oh please* don't let me get electrocuted. Dotty would kill me if people found me dead in nothing but a t-shirt and undies.

By the time I got the pool started backwashing the excess water out I was soaked to the bone and madder than a hornet at myself. It took almost an hour to get the pool drained low enough to handle the extra rain headed our way, but it took me much longer to calm down. I was mad at my forgetfulness. I was mad at the money that was quite literally down the drain. I was mad at how I had treated Dotty earlier that week.

When Dotty woke that morning, I had to ask for her forgiveness. I told her what had happened with the pool (she too was glad I didn't get electrocuted, but she said it was for several reasons...though what I was wearing was definitely one of them). While she accepted my apology, she never gloated or condemned me or my parenting skills. She simply reminded me that we all forget sometimes.

The following Wednesday Dotty called me just as I got home from dropping her off at school to tell me she had left her Chromebook on the charger at the house and asked if I could bring it back up to the school for her. I told her I could. She sheepishly asked me if I was mad at her. I smiled into the phone and told her that I wasn't...because we all forget sometimes. However, I have asked her every morning since then if she has her Chromebook before we leave the house, and she in turn asks me if I have water running anywhere. Both seem like fair questions.

Many times in the days that passed since those events I have thought about other things I have forgotten. Things like...

Going to God in prayer before I go to worry.

Asking God for help before I ask others.

Seeking God's guidance before I make my own plans.

Searching God's Word before I search the internet for its worldly advice.

Some days (especially lately...thanks again Covid) I forget that God has a plan for me. That He is working all things for my good. That He loves me and He cares about me. Some days I forget that God wants a relationship with me not just a ten minute morning devotional and a five minute prayer before I drift off to sleep. Some days I forget that God never leaves or forsakes me, but rather I am the one who goes all prodigal-daughter at times. Some days I forget that God will forgive me...even when I have a hard time forgiving myself. Some days I forget that God is still in control even when this fallen world feels so out of control.

Sometimes I forget that I am just human. Sometimes I forget that Dotty is still just a kid. Sometimes I forget that little things don't matter in the big scheme of things and most of life is made up of little things...

## Healthy Habits – Need to Breathe – by Tanya Dorris

*Have you caught yourself holding your breath as you go about your day? Do you need healing in your body and improvement in your quality of life, especially as the holiday season approaches?*

Deep or slow breathing brings a sense of well-being when practiced regularly. It benefits you in remarkable ways whenever it's carried out slowly, rhythmically and deeply...when your breath goes way down, deep in your gut.

Here are proven benefits of practicing it:

- *Regulates stress and anxiety.* Our entire body and mind enter a state of calm.
- *Eliminates toxins.* This is an interesting fact: our body is designed to release many of its toxins when we exhale.
- *Reduces the sensation of pain.* Something we often do when we feel pain is hold our breath. It's best if we breathe deeply rather than hold our breath. This is how we'll release **endorphins**, which are natural analgesics created in the body.
- *Helps improve posture.* By filling your lungs with air, you stimulate the spine to place it in a more harmonious, balanced and healthy posture.
- *Stimulates the lymphatic system.* It helps you achieve this by allowing blood plasma to flow properly so your body can work more efficiently.
- *Takes care of your heart.* Improves your cardiovascular health and helps you burn fat cells.
- *Improves digestion.* Enables your digestive organs to work more efficiently.
- *Helps regain composure and peace.* I have learned to recognize when my chest is tightening up and I'm hold my breath. It's usually during hectic or stressful times. Slowing down and taking a deep breath while counting to four, holding it for six counts, and then counting to six as I exhale several times creates calmness again.

Spending 10 minutes breathing deeply at least two or three times a day can benefit your body and emotional well-being. Quoting scripture as you breathe in and out does a double whammy to help you feel calm, empowered, and healthier.

Enjoy the upcoming season as you find the need to breathe...and take time to do it.

## Life Right Now – The Best Fall Yet – by Bethany Gomez

We had a crazy early, cold front last month that came in at the end of the second week in September, here in Central Texas! It got everyone excited for fall, including myself. Even though we all knew it would be short lived, it lasted one whole day! But hey! One day is better than none.

There are things I love about every season, but fall is my favorite. I love it because it brings refreshing, cool weather after months and months of seemingly endless heat. I love it because I can go for a run whenever I have time and not when it's the coolest time of the day during the summer months, which (where I live) is before the sun comes up. I love it because of the colors, scents, and flavors that come out during fall. I love it because it's leading up to some of my favorite holidays. I love it because of how cozy it feels to snuggle under a blanket watching a good movie or show. I love it because I can enjoy hot coffee and tea again; with *enjoy* being the key word. I love pretty much everything about fall.

My love for fall has grown over the years. It hasn't always been my favorite, partly because we don't get much of a fall here. However, traveling to New England during their spectacular fall season for the past four years, soon to be five (fingers crossed) and living with my best friend, Abby, a lover of all things fall has forever caused my favorite season to be fall. Abby introduced my sister and me to what she likes to call "Fall Day." It is the first Saturday in October, when we pull out all our fall décor, candles, and blankets in preparation for the first true change in temperature. We visit a pumpkin patch, make a fall desert, and watch something fall-ish.

I watched a funny video of a wife getting excited for fall even though it was still 90 degrees outside at the time. She kept saying, "Fall will fix everything," and her husband kept looking at her like she was crazy. I know fall won't fix everything, but it will be a welcome change.

Speaking of change...By the time you read this article, my sister and I will be settling into a 2-bedroom apartment. It will be my first apartment experience. Sadly, we won't be joining Abby for "Fall Day" this year, but my sister and I will definitely be doing our own version. It will mainly involve unpacking and at the same time decorating our new living space with all our fall décor.

This will be a big change, moving from a house with wide open spaces to a small apartment in a 3-story apartment building. There are definitely pros and cons to living in either place, but here are a few for the apartment.

Pros:

-Less to clean and manage.

-It's cozier.

-This particular apartment complex is closer to both our jobs, but not too far from family and friends.

Cons:

-less space to move around

-2<sup>nd</sup> floor apartment, people above and people below

-it costs to live closer to work



No matter where I live, I want to try to be a good neighbor and an even better roommate. There are many things I can improve on in both of those instances. In the instance of being a good neighbor, I want to think of ways to reach out to people around me, whether it's the people that live in the same apartment building, the people in the checkout line at our local HEB, or my coworkers. I sometimes fail miserably at being the kind of neighbor I want to have someone be to me. It all goes back to the first and second greatest commandments that God has for us:

We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul, and with all our minds. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, when we are told to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39.) It all starts with knowing and loving God, so that I can know how He would like me to treat my neighbors, of course, always with love and kindness.

In the instance of being a better roommate, I have definitely been lacking in being the kind of roommate I would want to live with. I am guilty of not caring about changing some of my bad habits because my roommate is my sister and she will love me no matter what. If anything, I should work harder at changing my bad habits because my roommate is my sister, who I love so much and I know she loves me, and I don't want us to resent each other. I always want us to become closer and closer.

In this new season, I will do my very best to listen better, serve others more, support my sister, and be more present because our time that we get to live together is a gift. I love my sis!

Let's all have the best fall, yet, as we welcome the change in weather...and in season...and (for me)...in location!



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Better Off** – by Marcy Lytle

If I've heard it once I've heard it a hundred times, that spouses "backseat drive" when the other one is behind the wheel. It's so true, for both of us. He drives most of the time, and I'm often commenting on how close he gets to the back of another car, or that he didn't stop behind the stop sign, or something else that I note. It's annoying to him. Yet, when I drive, he does the same thing. It's SO HARD to sit in the other seat without control of the wheel...so hard!

Once in a while, I will be preoccupied with my phone or even work, and I don't look up at all. Therefore, I don't see how he's driving (unless he throws on the brake!) It's those rides that are much more peaceful for both of us. He drives without hearing my comments, and I don't make comments because I'm not even aware of what he's doing. I'm just riding!

I was thinking about this the other day and how riding with a spouse teaches us a valuable lesson about life in general. When I'm looking at unanswered prayer, illness on the rise, lack of funds, or anything else scary along the "road," I'm panicking and shouting out to the driver (*you know*, Jesus) and shaking my head at his carelessness...as I see it. I mean, wouldn't a good driver obey all the rules and grant me peace by doing so?

Driving is one of those activities where you just can't make a mistake, or it could be deadly. I remember telling my kids that when they were learning to drive. So I think when my husband is driving, or when I'm driving, there's this fear that a mistake will be made that will hurt us, or someone else!

Back to that analogy of life...I realize that when I'm busy or preoccupied with giving thanks, serving others, and working and praying and living...I'm less anxious about all the stop signs and red lights and storms slick roads that I think the DRIVER is missing. I'm less afraid that I'm going to die or someone else near me is going to be hurt.

We've often gotten in arguments in the car, when I take note too much and try to take the wheel from the passenger side. Sometimes, I've even thought I saved our life by my directive when I tell him to stop because it seems he's not going to, in time! And each time we take a road trip, I think about my mouth, my attitude and my words so that I can be quiet and just trust him and let him drive.

Marriage is so much a picture of our relationship with HIM, isn't it? Our spouses are not perfect drivers, and I'm pretty sure that's why we think we need to help them out while changing lanes or passing through lights. But HE is a perfect driver, and yet we treat HIM the same way, with mistrust, fear, and directives that aren't ours to make.

We just came back from a road trip and we managed pretty well this time, without any arguments over steering and braking. We made it to and from every destination with no mishaps, even though we took a lot of winding roads. And we arrived back home safe and sound, with no memories of arguments over managing the car!

I'm taking note of that, because I really want to be a good passenger in the trip of life that we're on. I really want to be able to close my eyes and rest my head, and become unaware of all the dangers that "could happen" because I'm so at peace with the Driver behind the wheel.

We've both got a ways to go, but as long as we're married and still traveling, we're both still learning and still growing...and we're better off after each trip...as we grow and learn and trust...close our eyes and ride.

## **Date Night Fun – Off the Grid – by Marcy Lytle**

Okay, date nights are supposed to be romantic, expensive, and picture perfect, right? NO! Date nights can be spur of the moment, crazy goofy, and only loved by you and him alone! Since it's the month for Halloween and weirdness, we thought we'd offer some date night ideas that might be out of the norm, off the grid of normal things that couples do. After all, the whole year has been weird, so why not make date night weird, as well?

**The Zoo** – On our recent vacation we missed going to the zoo because of a hurricane storm that came through the town, so we are planning a date to the zoo. Zoos are usually for families and kids, but why not couples? Pack up some animal crackers and your favorite soft drink, and head to the zoo of your choice. Hold hands, make faces, and enjoy the smells...and the sights!

**Rent a Convertible** – If October is still reasonably nice weather, consider driving around town with the top down, and a cute scarf on our head – Audrey Hepburn style! Throw a warm plaid picnic blanket in the back, and pack some sandwiches and enjoy...stop at a roadside park to eat.

**Finger paint** – Visit your local craft store and grab a canvas, one for each of you, any size. Buy some finger paint and then drive around town for inspiration. End up at a park or back home in your own backyard and spread a tarp. Finger paint your masterpieces and find a place to enjoy them in your home! For a snack, consider gummies of different colors!

**Believe it or Not** – Visit your local bookstore and find Ripley's Believe it or Not book and read through it together. Buy a weird novelty game or item, to take home. Try something completely off the grid of your normal plate choice, from the pastry counter. Try a drink at the coffee shop you've never tasted. Enjoy the weird.

**Only Vintage, Please** – Find the area of town, or the small town you need to drive to, that has vintage stores. Decide you go what you can spend, say \$50 each, or \$20 each. Go hunting for treasures, either to wear or to set in your house. Then find a candy shop and only buy retro sweets, like Razzles or Lemonheads. Enjoy what used to be...NOW.

Happy October! Enjoy all these wacky ideas...and I hope it inspires you to think of your own and share!

## **After 40 Years – Snappy and Nappy** – by Marcy Lytle

After being married for decades, there are some things we just realize and some things we just know. And one of those things is that when either of us is tired, we are snappy.

“Where did you put that paper I just printed?”

“What paper? I haven’t seen any paper.”

“Argggghh, you heard the printer going and you were just in that room, and now the paper’s gone.”

“What’s the matter with you? Your eyes look tired. Maybe you need a nap.”

Do some conversations similar to the one above seem familiar? One of us starts falling apart at the seams and starts accusing the other of something small (or big) and we just know they’re the one to blame. When in reality, we’re just simply tired.

“I’m going to lie down a few minutes, I’m tired.”

“Seriously? You slept in, this morning.”

“I feel so groggy.”

“Okay, go lie down. I’ve got to unload the dishwasher, put away clothes, and get dinner. Wish I could take a nap.”

That’s what I like to call marriage martyrdom. It’s where we take on the attitude of a martyr, when we feel as though the loads are unshared, and we become incensed and angry that he needs a nap! But, it happens.

Naps are necessary in our house, especially with him. I don’t need them very often, but sometimes I take them, too. I’ve pushed him before to keep going when he’s tired, and we both have suffered because of it. Words slip out, attitudes deteriorate, and fun evenings end up in angry bedtimes. I’ve also pushed myself when I need to lie down for a few, and yes – I got a lot done – but my crappy attitude then turns into releasing condescending words toward him, and adjusting a halo on my head, for me. And halos are for angels, not for disgruntled wives.

Being snappy to each other isn’t a fun conversation. Snappy innocent words then become mean, hateful jabs.

Taking a nap is such a simple thing and usually takes no more than 30 minutes, and yet it saves hours of angst and anger. In fact, very often he rises with energy ready to go, and I’m pleasantly surprised at his kind demeanor.

He told me today that I look tired, and I had just snapped at him. So I’m going to take note and go lie down for 15 minutes so that I can rise, too, with a kind demeanor, and we can have a happy night instead of a crappy one.

Snappy, crappy, or happy...sometimes we just need a little nappy.



ENCOURAGEMENT



## **Firmly Planted - Birthday Water** - by Dina Cavazos

Water is a wonder. It's essential to Life. It's a liquid composed of two gasses: oxygen and hydrogen. We are made mostly of water, and the earth is covered mostly by water. It's the only substance that can exist naturally in three different states: liquid, gas, and solid. These are a few interesting facts about water that are well-known. Water is extraordinary and the science behind it is fascinating, but that's not what I love most about water. The substance of water lures me: its purity, its clarity, its simplicity, its buoyancy.

I developed a deep yearning for water about two years ago—I began to drink more of it, but mostly I wanted to be in it. A perfect storm of circumstances fed my desire: I no longer cared if I looked good in a bathing suit; I experienced swimming in heavenly pool in the country (salt-water, peaceful quiet setting); garden time was limited by seasonal heat. The idea of spending time in the water took root and grew like a weed. Before this, for years, the thought of immersing myself in water, except for bathing, never crossed my mind.

The popularity of plunge pools had me looking around my yard for a spot to tuck a tiny one, but with well-established landscaping, underground electric and water lines, and, finally, after all these years, shade—there was no place for a pool. Then, in mid-summer, a crazy thought came to me—I could put one right under the pergola! The concrete patio could be torn up because there is nothing under it! I had a consultation with my pool-builder friend. Yes, it was definitely a crazy idea. It would cost way too much and years of work would be destroyed. It was disappointing, but it had been fun looking out there and imagining it for a while!

Did the dream die? No. Did the desire subside? No. I told my daughter the disappointing news and she said, "Why don't you get a stock tank pool?" A stock tank pool! I'd seen them but didn't seriously consider it until that moment. In fact, I'd recently met a new friend who had one. I asked if I could come over and check it out to make sure it would satisfy. I loved it, and then the light came on. That's it--it's small, it's affordable, it's above ground, so no digging....and I have the perfect ready-made spot for it! In 2011 when I had the concrete patio poured as a first step of faith in creating a prayer garden, I decided on a large rounded shape. I left a section jutting out from under the patio for star-gazing. Stock tank pools require a very solid, level surface because 700 gallons of water is heavy. It would fit nicely along the rounded edge, and the spot gets a mix of sun and shade—perfect.

I wasted no time—it was already mid-July! Little did I know that the entire nation was ordering stock tanks! All stores that carry them had a 3 month wait! Then I thought of a place that wasn't as well known. They said they had ordered fourteen that should come in at the end of the month and they had five left that weren't paid for. I was so thankful! As it turned out, the order was delayed more than three weeks.

My birthday was late August and there was nothing I wanted more than to float in cool, pure, clear water, in my own backyard. I called my pool friend and immediately ordered a pump and filter so I would be ready—he said they could connect it for me. I waited. No stock tank. I called two or three times a week checking on the delivery. Finally, two days before my birthday it was delivered curbside. My friends who have the stock tank pool were the kindest! It was one of the

hottest afternoons, but they came and helped wrestle it into the back yard. You don't realize how big eight feet is until you try to move a metal stock tank. David had to dismantle the arbor over the gate and we wove it through an obstacle course to its resting place.

The next day I was so excited and ready! John was coming to connect it I wanted an early start so I could fill the pool and enjoy it with a friend coming over for an early celebration that afternoon. I waited, not oo patiently—no John. Finally, I call and he explained he had to drive to Austin to get the pump. I thought it had already come in, but, just like the stock tanks, they were on back order because of the nationwide demand. He said that this one had unexpectedly come in to the store that morning! At long last, he arrived around one and had it installed in about three hours. It was filled in another two hours, and we were soaking by 6pm.

It was a wonderful birthday gift to myself, but not just from me....my friends Karen, David, and John helped make it happen, and I give credit to God for blessing me with friends like them, and for making it happen, just in time.

## Firmly Planted – Even More – by Dina Cavazos

---

Water is a wonder. It's essential to Life. It's a liquid composed of two gasses: oxygen and hydrogen. We are made mostly of water, and the earth is covered mostly by water. It's the only substance that can exist naturally in three different states: liquid, gas, and solid. These are a few interesting facts about water that are well-known. Water is extraordinary and the science behind it is fascinating, but that's not what I love most about water. The substance of water lures me: its purity, its clarity, its simplicity, its buoyancy.

I developed a deep yearning for water about two years ago—I began to drink more of it, but mostly I wanted to *be in it*. A perfect storm of circumstances fed my desire: I no longer cared if I looked good in a bathing suit; I experienced swimming in heavenly pool in the country (salt-water, peaceful quiet setting); garden time was limited by seasonal heat. The idea of spending time in the water took root and grew like a weed. Before this, for years, the thought of immersing myself in water, except for bathing, never crossed my mind.

The popularity of plunge pools had me looking around my yard for a spot to tuck a tiny one, but with well-established landscaping, underground electric and water lines, and, finally, after all these years, *shade*—there was no place for a pool. Then, in mid-summer, a crazy thought came to me—I could put one right under the pergola! The concrete patio could be torn up because there is nothing under it! I had a consultation with my pool-builder friend. Yes, it was definitely a crazy idea. It would cost way too much and years of work would be destroyed. It was disappointing, but it had been fun looking out there and imagining it for awhile!

Did the dream die? No. Did the desire subside? No. I told my daughter the disappointing news and she said, “Why don't you get a stock tank pool?” A stock tank pool! I hadn't seriously considered it until that moment. I'd recently made a new friend who had one so I was able to check it out to make sure it would satisfy. I loved it, and then the light came on. That's it—it's small, affordable and above ground, so no digging....and I have the perfect ready-made spot for it! In 2011 when I had the concrete patio poured as a first step of faith in creating a prayer garden, I decided on a large rounded shape. I left a section jutting out from under the patio for star-gazing. Stock tank pools require a very solid, level surface because 700 gallons of water is heavy. It would fit nicely along the rounded edge, and the spot gets a mix of sun and shade—perfect.

I wasted no time—it was already mid-July! Little did I know that the entire nation was ordering stock tanks! All stores that carry them had a 3 month wait! Then I thought of a place that wasn't as well known. They said they had ordered fourteen that should come in at the end of the month and they had five left that weren't paid for. I was so thankful! As it turned out, the order was delayed more than three weeks.

My birthday was late August and there was nothing I wanted more than to float in cool, pure, clear water, in my own backyard. I called my pool friend and immediately ordered a pump and filter so I would be ready—he said they could connect it for me. I waited. No stock tank. I called two or three times a week checking on the delivery. Finally, two days before my birthday it was

delivered curbside. My friends who have the stock tank pool were the kindest! It was one of the hottest afternoons, but they came and helped wrestle it into the back yard. You don't realize how big eight feet is until you try to move a metal stock tank. David had to dismantle the arbor over the gate and we wove it through an obstacle course to its resting place.

The next day I was so excited and ready! John was coming to connect it I wanted an early start so I could fill the pool and enjoy it with a friend coming over for an early celebration that afternoon. I waited, not too patiently—no John. Finally, I call and he explains he had to drive to Austin to get the pump. I thought it had already come in, but, just like the stock tanks, they were on back order because of the nationwide demand. He said that this one had unexpectedly come in to the store that morning! At long last, he arrived around one and had it installed in about three hours. It was filled in another two hours, and we were soaking by 6.

It was a wonderful "birthday gift to self," but I couldn't have done it without my friends Karen, David, and John. I'm thankful to God for friends like them, and for making my dream a reality, just in time. Water is restful, it restores and refreshes...just as the prayer garden does, even more.

## **Rooted in Love - Positive Parenting – by Kaelin Scott**

At the beginning of August, I undertook the process of potty training my son. He was a few weeks shy of two years old at the time, and I was getting tired of changing diapers. So I bought him a couple packs of big boy undies and started putting him in them during the day. Like most parents, I wasn't excited about the experience. I had already been through it with my daughter, but I had heard that boys are much harder to potty train than girls. Needless to say, I was dreading the messes I would certainly have to clean up for several days until he figured it out. My expectations weren't high, and I figured it would take a while before he got the hang of it.

But he absolutely blew my expectations out of the water. Yes, he had a few accidents, and it did take him a little longer to figure out #2. But he did an amazing job! I created a sticker chart for him to use, where he would get a sticker each time he went on the potty without having an accident, and he filled the entire thing up in the first two days. He understood what he was supposed to do, and he really tried hard to do it. I think it helped having a big sister around to encourage and support him, and I'm really thankful for that. I was also so impressed by my son's determination and success.

Looking back on the experience, I realized that my attitude wasn't the greatest going into it, and that realization led to another one – my attitude isn't the best going into a lot of things. I'm guessing that most of you can relate. All too often when we encounter a challenge or undertake a new endeavor, we take on an attitude of defeat before we even get started. Instead of hoping for good results, we dread what could go wrong. We become our own worst enemies because we allow our minds to be controlled by negative thinking.

If I had chosen a better attitude going into potty training, I might have enjoyed it more. It's something you only do once with your child; and while it might not be exactly fun, it's an experience I want to remember. Throughout the process, I was able to see glimpses of my son's character. He might only be two, but he is pretty determined and quite clever. I can only imagine the challenges he will courageously conquer as he journeys through his life, and I want to be a voice of encouragement through those times.

I want my children to know I believe in them, which means that I have to be positive. I can't go into things with a negative attitude or one of defeat. I can't doubt their abilities or lower my expectations for their success. I have to be positive and encouraging, and I have to hope for the best. If I expect good things, I will create a healthy environment for growth. But if I am always expecting the worst, I will only hinder their confidence.

Now, before I finish up, I am not saying that positive thinking alone will lead my children to success. There are many ingredients that will go into it, most of all faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His calling. But positivity is a must for their self-esteem, and it also helps foster a healthy pattern of growth. If my home is a garden and my children are the flowers, then positivity is the sunshine that helps them bloom. Their roots are watered and their souls are nourished through a relationship with God. That is the foundation that will ultimately set them up for success. But without the sunshine of positivity, their colors won't be as vibrant and their petals will start to wilt.

Whether it's potty training, learning to drive, or choosing a college, our babies need to know that we believe in them. They need our support, our encouragement, our positive contribution. When we hope for the best in their lives, they will be more confident in going after their dreams. When

we shine a light to them, they will know how to shine a light to others. A good attitude goes a long way, and it's up to us to set that stage.

“Encourage one another and build each other up.”  
1 Thessalonians 5:11

## **Moving Forward – Pursued – by Pam Charro**

I haven't always considered myself pursued by God; in fact, for many years of my Christian life I resented feeling that I needed to pursue him.

We have an enemy who so effectively misrepresents God, and I got so focused on what I felt he wanted from me that I was unable to receive God's love. Sadly, I had been blinded to what my loving creator sees in me and I was unable to respond to him.

But eventually, I learned that he is the one who initiated the pursuing in our relationship even before I was born.

- Psalm 139 says he saw me while I was still in the womb and that he has amazing thoughts concerning me.
- Ezekiel 16 says that I had been cast into an open field and was kicking about in my own blood when he passed by and rescued me.
- Matthew 13 contains two parables which suggest that I am part of such a valuable treasure that Jesus gave up everything to obtain me.
- In the first chapter of Isaiah I find God attempting to reason with me because he wants to offer me freedom from my bondage.
- Hebrews 12 tells me that Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him, he had his eyes on the prize, and I am part of that prize.
- As Jesus' bride, Song of Solomon declares that I am altogether lovely and there is no flaw in me.

*How can I respond to such love?*

Even though I haven't always known what God was getting when he paid for me, he has known all along. His word makes it clear that he is absolutely smitten with the beauty he sees in me, beauty that came from him in the first place and that only he could redeem.

All I can do, now that I finally understand that, is pursue him in return.



FRESH THYME



## **FRESH THYME - A Magic Wand? – by Marcy Lytle**

I have wished many times in my life that God would be like the Fairy Godmother who waves her wand and – poof! – Change takes place. Visible, beautiful change, from drab to fab. I'm not talking about God outfitting me in a ball gown and glass slippers, but rather wiping away all my weaknesses with a pass of his hand and a quick wave over my mind. I know that he did “zap” one guy named Saul and he was changed instantly, but that doesn't seem to be his method of operation most of the time...

*Most of the time*, God gently nudges us to remember his goodness and give thanks in everything so that we can rise out of our despair.

*Most of the time*, God reminds us of his faithfulness in the past and his promises for the future, so that we train our hands to fight the good fight of faith for the next hurdle in our path.

*Most of the time*, God uses others to prod us and aid us, when we are in need, so that we humbly learn to receive.

*Most of the time*, God invites us to his feet to pray and worship for long periods of time, until we are soaked and see his face of love and kindness toward us.

*Most of the time*, our trials linger and reappear causing us to pull up and adjust that full armor suit he gave us – of salvation, faith, and peace – to stave off the darts that fly at us by day...and night.

*Most of the time*, circumstances and people around us cause us angst and worry and frustration, and we are once again invited to lay our burdens down at his feet, and walk away rested and weary no more.

In other words, most of the time there is no magic wand or genie in a bottle that grants us three wishes daily, so that our lives are perfect and joyful. Our joyful lives come from leaping for joy in the most inopportune times, reaching out in faith when we can't see a hand to take hold of, and closing our eyes and lying back in green pastures, when the shadow of death is just over the cliff nearby.

There are days when I just hope so badly for a one and done deal – I pray and he answers and removes all that is causing me grief. In fact, I'd love it if he'd do just that so that I can never have another worrisome thought, never wonder about provision, never be daunted by illness and loss, and never stray in my faith – ever.

But here I sit, after having a day full of swirling thoughts that were anything but good ones. Mostly questions of “what if” plagued me yesterday and zapped my joy. And I felt bad about it when I went to bed and even stated so, to my husband. Being the one in our family that never worries about anything, he wisely said there was nothing to feel bad about. He prayed for me, and we shut our eyes and went to sleep. He told me he just lives each day and KNOWS that whatever happens, the Lord will be with him, as hard as that happening might be.

I'm not cut from the same faith cloth as my husband. Oh, I have immense faith when I pray for others, but I tend to struggle daily with my own mind and what could or might take place. It's a daily climb up the stairs of good thinking for me. I start with the truth, step up to higher thoughts, and keep stepping until I can praise His name and see His face instead of gazing at the field below where the floods and storms still rage.

No, it's not working hard that brings me peace. It's obedience to His word to ask for daily bread and not bread that will last on my shelves for months. That kind of bread is not fit to eat.

Most of the time, if not all of the time, it's that kind of prayer that He honors and grants – the prayer that starts with *Father, In heaven, hallowed be Your name – your kingdom come – your will be done*...you know the rest.

Fairy godmothers aren't real. And genies in bottles are only for fun, as well, to imagine. But God the Father, the good good father, is more real than we can even imagine. And he's at work to will and to do of his good pleasure in our lives. That's a promise, in the middle of the darkest night, and one we can take to the bank ALL OF THE TIME.

Philippians 2:13

*... for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*

## **FRESH THYME – Sad and Noted – by Marcy Lytle**

By now, you've probably had lots of stores close in your area. Here in our city, Sears, Steinmart, Pier One, and so many more are closing their storefronts, and it's so sad. However, years ago I noted to my husband that some stores weren't "keeping up" with the styles and the times.

I recall shopping in Sears and thinking that the styles of clothing were drab and old-fashioned (my opinion, I know). Steinmart seemed to cater to just one crowd of people, maybe the more middle-aged crowd, and wasn't changing out merchandise, either. And even Pier One had the same look for decades, in their home décor. And perhaps they didn't change for good reason, or maybe they just weren't aware of the changes going on in culture and didn't care to keep up.

I don't know the real reason for so many store closures, but I've always noticed things and pondered situations, perhaps a little too much. I've noted that as some folks grow older, they become less tolerant of change and of the younger generation. And then there's this separation and judgment that occurs when the next generation has new ideas, new styles of clothing, new music, and there's a great disconnect. Our doors that were once open to change and listening and loving those young people are now closed in critical assessment that the kids have gone "to the dogs."

I think it's hard to keep up with changes, but we just have to. If we want to thrive in a changing world, then we need to be observant and love what we can, and detest only what's sin, not what's different. And that's a big thing to note! Wearing torn clothing or getting a tattoo or eating vegan isn't sin, but oftentimes we older ones act like different is sin. And we have to be careful, or our proverbial doors will slam shut for good.

What I mean is that if we don't keep our doors open and our hearts and ears open to listen to those around us that are different than we are, people won't come and "shop" for what they need at our place. Our homes won't be welcoming, our seats will be hard and rigid and uncomfortable to sit on, and our windows will be closed with only stagnant air remaining.

There are so many comments made by so many people that I hear and listen to, that make me cringe. Judgments against youth that are protesting, railing against those that do or do not wear masks, criticizing the youth and dubbing them as stupid and lazy, and all sorts of things! To me, this is like keeping a store's merchandise on the shelves that no one wants to buy, because we're just too stubborn to change and grow.

Of course, I have no idea why some of these stores really closed. But I've lived long enough to see that separation of generations occurs big-time, when we don't grow and try to understand and listen, and then offer prayer and kindness and love instead of critical snubs. Only God can change the heart if it's bent toward wickedness, but often what we see as wickedness is just souls searching for an older generation that will love them. They are often missing a parent that gave them love, so they're angry and hurt.

I am sad to see so many stores closing, especially if they just failed to keep up. I want to keep up by wiping my shelves clean of dusty old thoughts, I want to set out things that are attractive

to customers like love and joy, and I desire to fill my home with music that creates an atmosphere to dance, not mourn.

Next time you see a store close, pray for the people losing their jobs. And also pray for yourself, that you will take notice of your own shelves and stock, and see what you can do to spruce things up so that your doors can stay open...so that those passing want to enter in and stay, and leave with something good.

## **FRESH THYME - Tonight's the Night – by Marcy Lytle**

Tonight, after the day is passed, will I be in the same state of mind as I am this morning?

Will I have noticed the colored leaves falling in beauty, or will I miss every hue because I'm in a hurry to leave?

Will I have seen the clouds part so that the sun shines through, or will I only gasp at the short downburst of rain and curse the fact that I left my umbrella at home?

Will I remember to give thanks for the jobs and provision that is ours, or will I grumble that I have to work on a holiday and that my computer needs repair?

Will I have stopped to text a friend to say I'm praying for her illness, or will I play a game of Scrabble instead and forget?

Will I listen to good music with good lyrics that lift my soul today, or will I read the news and become angry at a friend for the post she shared instead?

Will I listen to the laughter and the banter of children around me, or wallow in the whining of the adults that are cursing the government and leaders above me?

Will I love the ones that have left and abandoned, or will I hold onto hurt and avoid and hate?

When the sun starts to set and I think back over my day, I wonder what state of mind I will have, after the morning rush, the busyness of the day, the interruptions and the disappointments, the tiny failures and the big successes, the broken light bulbs and the working refrigerator, and all the minutes of the day that add up to 24 hours.

There have been many times when I've arrived at a destination after driving for miles, so preoccupied in my thoughts that I've wondered about all of the stop lights and signs – because I didn't recall any of them! I didn't pray for that homeless man at the corner because I never saw him, and I missed the sunrise right before me because I was fumbling through my purse looking for that list. I honked at the driver that cut me off and never realized that she had three children in car seats behind her. And I sizzled in anger at something someone said to me, the entire drive, and missed an opportunity to sing behind the wheel.

It's early morning as I write, and I'm taking note of my own directive, as I purpose to look up and out and see today – others and their needs and their beauty. I'm thinking that tonight, when the day is done, I'll be in a better state of mind that I was when the day began.

Won't you join me?

## **FRESH THYME - Pray Big – by Marcy Lytle**

Prayer is one of those things that puzzles most of us. Does a certain verbiage move the hand of God, does a lot of crying and pleading need to take place, or do we just need to bow our heads and whisper and believe? And are we to stop praying after a certain length of time, assuming God is saying no? And what specific things are just too miraculous to expect, this side of heaven?

The other day I was thinking about the future (which always causes worry) and I realized that I don't really ask BIG things from God, expecting them to happen. I'm not sure if it's because I don't feel worthy, or if I feel too presumptuous to ask for things other than needs.

However, a light bulb went off in my mind and I realized that prayer isn't JUST something we do to move the hand of God so that he doles out favor in our direction. It's also a movement we are to make, in order to settle our hearts. And I had this thought, "Why not pray big?"

There's a book I once read called *Disappointed with God*, and the author was a rabbi that had lost his son. He was quite bitter and angry at God for not answering his big prayer for healing. He posed a question in that book that I'll never forget. He asked which is the bigger miracle, to get what we ask and demand from God in prayer, or to receive complete peace in the middle of disappointment? He realized that the latter is indeed the greater miracle.

Jesus showed up on the scene of people with great needs, and he healed people, provided wine for a wedding, and even raised the dead. But when we have a friend with cancer, or an impossible situation, we grow weary quickly if we don't see the results we expect. Once I had a friend that was very ill and she was more at peace than I was, about her situation. That blew my mind.

Sometimes, I have to daily visualize laying my worries and fears at His feet in a drawstring bag and walking away, leaving them to do with as He pleases, for the best. Because that's who God is. He's a God that works all things together for good.

So, why do we need to pray, if He's going to work out things according to His plan, and not the plan we give him? The best answer I know to share is to say that He said to pray, in faith, and we are to obey that directive. Remember when your parent's answer to your, "Why?" was the simple flat response, "Because I said so"? There's something beautiful about a child that just obeys because he trusts his parents and doesn't question them. I'm pretty sure all kids question, but as they grow they realize the wisdom when the answer was no.

I have decided that I'm going to pray big prayers, asking for big things, but not set them out on a table in order for God to give his stamp of approval. Because the even bigger answer to any of my prayers is to offer me peace in the waiting and the not understanding, which he has promised to us all, while He answers.

He's always at work, his eye never misses a thing, and he holds our hearts and minds and bodies in the very center of his own heart. If the answer is no, then he sees something ahead

that we do not. And if the answer is yes, then we can leap up and down for joy. And if the answer is wait, then we can hold his hand and sit in his lap and let him hold us still.

Go on. Pray Big. But expect great peace if the big you see doesn't happen just yet...because that's the bigger miracle.



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

November 2020





TIPS

## **In the Kitchen – Easy and Fun** – by Marcy Lytle

You're going to be tired, that's a given, when preparing for Thanksgiving dinner. So you'll need ideas for the leftovers, or quick meals for the few days before, for your family or yourselves. We've got you covered below! And...what if you made meal time with the family (however many of you gather this year) full of planned conversation? We've got ideas for that too! Enjoy...

### Quick Meal Ideas:

Mad Dash Mixes are the way to go – have several of them on hand! Their **tortilla soup** is SO GOOD, and you could use your leftover turkey instead of chicken for your protein. <https://www.maddashmixes.com/>

Take that leftover turkey and slice it, and top it on top of a **bowl** made with all the veggies and greens from your fridge, and roast up some butternut squash as well!

Grab **links of sausage**, wrap them in a cheese lined tortilla, secure with a toothpick and bake til browned! Dip in mustard, add a leftover side from the Thanksgiving table, and you've got a fun dinner!

Consider frozen **fish sticks** – they've come a long way! Crunchy tilapia fish sticks by Gorton's are SO good! Bake some frozen fries, then make your own tartar sauce and you're good! Mix mayo with capers, pickles, lemon juice and black pepper. You've got your own sauce, and dinner is made.

Just **arrange and eat** whatever you've got, and make it pretty! Maybe a circle of Brie, topped with jam and sliced almonds for the center. Two kinds of crackers, a bunch of grapes, some squares of dark chocolate, and a small bowl of pecans leftover from your pecan pie baking!

### Conversation Fun:

Consider a **Thanksgiving tree** for your table with ornaments, and let each person go one by one to hang an ornament and give thanks. What a great and fun activity!

[https://www.amazon.com/amscan-Thanksgiving-Tree-Activity-Parties/dp/B00RAEI3MG/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?dchild=1&keywords=thanksgiving+tree&qid=1601586321&sr=8-4](https://www.amazon.com/amscan-Thanksgiving-Tree-Activity-Parties/dp/B00RAEI3MG/ref=sr_1_4?dchild=1&keywords=thanksgiving+tree&qid=1601586321&sr=8-4)

Ask the **same question** of everyone at the table, to get their answers. For example, ask everyone to share their favorite animal and why.

Ask someone to **start a story**, and then let each person around the table add to that story with a sentence or two, until you have a completed book at the end of the conversation!

**Place a shape** under each person's plate (triangle, rectangle, circle, or square.) During the dinner, each person discovers their shape and finds something in the room that most resembles that shape. Sort of like I Spy...

**Purchase a set** of family cards and hand one or two to each person. That person can then ask anyone at the table to answer the question from their card. [https://www.amazon.com/After-Dinner-Amusements-Family-Time/dp/1452164886/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?dchild=1&keywords=thanksgiving+family+conversation+cards&qid=1601586807&sr=8-3](https://www.amazon.com/After-Dinner-Amusements-Family-Time/dp/1452164886/ref=sr_1_3?dchild=1&keywords=thanksgiving+family+conversation+cards&qid=1601586807&sr=8-3)

## **Seven for You - Stocking Thyme – by Marcy Lytle**

We asked our panel of women to share their favorite ideas for stocking gifts, because it's time to start shopping! We also thought maybe some are giving a bit less this year, and need some ideas to fill those stockings instead of pile up under the tree! Or maybe you're still able to do both. Either way, we wanted to offer you LOTS of options for giving those kids, spouses, friends something fun and special this Christmas!

### **The Accessory:**

Earrings – These cute ceramic earrings are unique and so artistic – a great idea for her!

[https://www.etsy.com/listing/725057443/pink-button-floral-stainless-steel-stud?ga\\_search\\_query=earrings&ref=shop\\_items\\_search\\_1&frs=1](https://www.etsy.com/listing/725057443/pink-button-floral-stainless-steel-stud?ga_search_query=earrings&ref=shop_items_search_1&frs=1)

Vintage pouches: I've fallen in love with these little vintage zippered pouches. They run anywhere from 25-125 depending on color, seller, condition etc. They are the perfect size for Covid shopping. The larger ones are big enough for my phone, my keys, cash, and CC card. They can be used for wipes, money, makeup, or maybe 500 paper clips...who knows! You can put several of them in your larger bag and then grab one out to run into the store. These little pops of color are from the late 80s to 90s...leather and have stood the test of time. You can find them on Ebay, Poshmark, Etsy, or other resale sites. Pick a fav color to give....just the right size to go in a stocking.  
[https://www.etsy.com/search/vintage?q=leather+zipper+pouch&term=vintage\\_mailbox](https://www.etsy.com/search/vintage?q=leather+zipper+pouch&term=vintage_mailbox)

Scarf: A small scarf that can be worn around the neck or the head is a fun find in a stocking! Madewell has so many cute ones!

[https://www.shopbop.com/washed-bandana-madewell/vp/v=1/1503241319.htm?fm=pd\\_sb\\_pd\\_browse\\_1\\_bstslr&os=false](https://www.shopbop.com/washed-bandana-madewell/vp/v=1/1503241319.htm?fm=pd_sb_pd_browse_1_bstslr&os=false)

Hair scrunchies – Attic Salt has a cute variety, but so do lots of stores! Buy a couple and slip them down in her stocking.

Barrettes – They're so cute in your hair! Madewell has some beautiful clips for pinning your hair back, up, or to the side!

### **Food Stuff:**

Mad Dash Mixes – I love these and they've all been super delicious. First found them at a festival, and started then buying them on line. Lots of choices – get a bundle!  
<https://www.maddashmixes.com/>

Salad dressing shaker - Durable plastic with sealed flip top. Different sizes available

[https://www.amazon.com/OXO-Grips-Little-Dressing-Shaker/dp/B00CYDFTP2/ref=pd\\_bxgy\\_3/146-4881736-](https://www.amazon.com/OXO-Grips-Little-Dressing-Shaker/dp/B00CYDFTP2/ref=pd_bxgy_3/146-4881736-)

[7229844?\\_encoding=UTF8&pd\\_rd\\_i=B00CYDFTP2&pd\\_rd\\_r=b2724fee-c98a-4bbf-8790-956c29c691e2&pd\\_rd\\_w=wO4jD&pd\\_rd\\_wg=BakOc&pf\\_rd\\_p=ce6c479b-ef53-49a6-845b-bbbf35c28dd3&pf\\_rd\\_r=WE7JW5P7RM395FW27PRR&psc=1&refRID=WE7JW5P7RM395FW27PRR](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00CYDFTP2?encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=B00CYDFTP2&pd_rd_r=b2724fee-c98a-4bbf-8790-956c29c691e2&pd_rd_w=wO4jD&pd_rd_wg=BakOc&pf_rd_p=ce6c479b-ef53-49a6-845b-bbbf35c28dd3&pf_rd_r=WE7JW5P7RM395FW27PRR&psc=1&refRID=WE7JW5P7RM395FW27PRR)

Salad dressing maker – I have this cool bottle with markings on the side – you just fill and shake – and you have homemade dressing for salads!

Dressing to go - great for picnics. Salad dressing, ketchup, mustard, etc. I've even put soft butter in them to go.

[https://www.amazon.com/Evriholder-D2G-3PK-AMZ-Dressing-Container-Green/dp/B00LPZQUS0/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=evriholder+dressing+2+go&qid=1601566556&s=home-garden&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Evriholder-D2G-3PK-AMZ-Dressing-Container-Green/dp/B00LPZQUS0/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=evriholder+dressing+2+go&qid=1601566556&s=home-garden&sr=1-1)

My daughter loves hot tea, so a new flavor of tea and a fun mug are on my list.

I love to shop World Market for mini food gifts, small packs of cookies, etc...and always a chocolate orange!

Lindt 70% dark chocolate bars are the best – especially kept in the fridge – for a snack – give everyone one of these!

These mini prep bowls are one of my favorite gifts ever – I use them all the time when cooking or for tiny pinches on a food board.

Have you seen these peanut butter knives – they are long and get to the bottom of the jar – a must have!

### **The Whimsical:**

Fun hosiery – My sister and I love these! Look at the fun patterns!

<https://www.amazon.com/Summer-Transparent-Elastic-Cityelf-Anklelets/dp/B07FBZGXRS>

Circle of 5<sup>th</sup> - Wear it while you're playing and it helps you find the key of a song.

<https://shopretroworks.com/products/musicians-ring-musicians-transposition-spinner-ring>

Lavender Spray: If you're a fan of essential oils you'll love this product. Just one or two sprays on your pillow before bed and the sweet aroma of lavender will fill your senses and the feeling of calmness will put you right to sleep. [https://www.bathandbodyworks.com/p/lavender-vanilla-pillow-mist-023531114.html?q=pillow%2Bspray&lang=en\\_US&start=1](https://www.bathandbodyworks.com/p/lavender-vanilla-pillow-mist-023531114.html?q=pillow%2Bspray&lang=en_US&start=1)

Head massage/scratcher – These are cute, feel good, and a conversation starter for sure!  
<https://www.amazon.com/Massager-Scratcher-Massage-Scratches-Tangling/dp/B077RVN297>

When I'm shopping for stocking fillers, I like to find candies and snacks from different countries. I find a lot of fun items from World Market. They have many choices, and it's fun to shop for them. I also find many items at grocery stores. I try to find flavors only sold at Christmas, or that are different from the kind I usually buy. (One year I bought jalapeño flavored M&Ms.)

There are those things that are "guilty treat" items that my family loves, and I only buy them at Christmas. One of those items is spray cheese (that's what we call it anyway.) I think it's really called Easy Cheese. <https://www.amazon.com/Easy-Cheese-Cheddar-Snack-Ounce/dp/B00H46SBY0>

Funny socks

This tabletop cornhole game is a sure hit for him, and fun for all – from Attic Salt.

### **The Kids:**

Highlights Puzzle Books – they will love these!

Bubble Bath

Farm in a Tin

Magnetic travel games

Tiny Rubiks cube or Lincoln logs

Tiny squishies!

Pez – they're still around and the kids love them – check out World Market for the latest.

### **The Practical:**

Nail file <https://www.amazon.com/Best-Crystal-Glass-Nail-File/dp/B0796VJN2B>

Razor blades

Stylus

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01B7X4JJ6?ref=ppx\\_pop\\_mob\\_ap\\_share&fbclid=IwAR3ale4\\_a8nmlNzyMyc281SGu0t1PfvAEUdTF5nSk564PSpt3EXISOQC08Y](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01B7X4JJ6?ref=ppx_pop_mob_ap_share&fbclid=IwAR3ale4_a8nmlNzyMyc281SGu0t1PfvAEUdTF5nSk564PSpt3EXISOQC08Y)

Match sticks - I love these cute matches that you can find at target! They look great next to any candle as decor and even have a place to strike the matches at the bottom!

Pencil

case/bag

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00N7AADQG?ref=ppx\\_pop\\_mob\\_ap\\_share&fbclid=IwAR34jnDUNpRc4zoPEvCJ-RiRppqahiU-Sh-sTsLd9K9Jw41vcJG7mk4nTLI](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00N7AADQG?ref=ppx_pop_mob_ap_share&fbclid=IwAR34jnDUNpRc4zoPEvCJ-RiRppqahiU-Sh-sTsLd9K9Jw41vcJG7mk4nTLI)

New garden gloves are a great stocking stuffer idea. Even in the winter months it helps my disposition to be able to work in the yard. [https://www.amazon.com/COOLJOB-Gardening-Breathable-Outdoor-Protective/dp/B08F4Z4X2S/ref=zg\\_bs\\_3480678011\\_1?encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=P8YB1M177SRFE7JX66Y9](https://www.amazon.com/COOLJOB-Gardening-Breathable-Outdoor-Protective/dp/B08F4Z4X2S/ref=zg_bs_3480678011_1?encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=P8YB1M177SRFE7JX66Y9)

Fast food gift cards – These are the easiest, probably the most used, and they fit perfectly in the stocking!

Cash! – Just fold some up, or roll it, tie a bow, and slip it in!

Batteries are a great stocking stuffer for those getting toys or electronics – for sure!

### **The Body:**

Supergoop sunscreen – This is one of my all time favorites when it comes to facial products. Sunscreen is such an important part of a morning routine and this cute little bottle makes it so easy to protect your skin throughout the day!

<https://supergoop.com/products/unseen-sunscreen>

A rich nourishing lip balm is great for dry winter days.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0070XAL0E?tag=byrdie01-20&linkCode=oji&th=1&psc=1&ascsubtag=4593485%7Cn9a468174a965463d9cae03ebb48ddc7b11>

Bath salts for a long evening soaks - in the tub. We are shower people the other nine months of the year, so salts are soothing!

[https://www.macys.com/shop/product/french-girl-mint-sea-soak-enlivening-bath-salts-10-oz.?ID=7988909&pla\\_country=US&CAGPSPN=pla&nrtv\\_cid=ae501d27f6d640053b92cad87d7164c6447b169ee12c445a82ab81239da2b3c4&cm\\_mmc=narrativ- -nhealth+%26+beauty- -beautyeditor- -1719789670981294908&m\\_sc=sem&m\\_sb=narrativ&m\\_tp=PLA&m\\_cn=health+%26+beauty&m\\_pi=beautyeditor\\_NAME&m\\_ac=narrativ](https://www.macys.com/shop/product/french-girl-mint-sea-soak-enlivening-bath-salts-10-oz.?ID=7988909&pla_country=US&CAGPSPN=pla&nrtv_cid=ae501d27f6d640053b92cad87d7164c6447b169ee12c445a82ab81239da2b3c4&cm_mmc=narrativ- -nhealth+%26+beauty- -beautyeditor- -1719789670981294908&m_sc=sem&m_sb=narrativ&m_tp=PLA&m_cn=health+%26+beauty&m_pi=beautyeditor_NAME&m_ac=narrativ)

Kensie perfume for the purse or travel – it smells great – and it's just the right size!

[https://www.amazon.com/ideas/amzn1.account.AFGMY23AF4JI2JNTTWLXIE3ZJVCQ/22JY2KVHIDNA3?type=explore&ref=idea\\_cp\\_vl\\_ov\\_d](https://www.amazon.com/ideas/amzn1.account.AFGMY23AF4JI2JNTTWLXIE3ZJVCQ/22JY2KVHIDNA3?type=explore&ref=idea_cp_vl_ov_d)

My two favorite products for skin care are from Gruene Witch Apothecary – their toner and moisturizer smell and feel amazing.

<https://gruene witch.com/>

Lynda's Pride soaps not only smell amazing, and there are so many choices, but they're priced well, too. We just got some on vacation – they slip easily into stockings!

<http://lyndaspride.com/>

### **The Inspirational:**

Be the Gift by Ann Voskamp – a great read and motivator for the new year.

What about a magazine subscription, like Eating Well, or Magnolia Journal or Family Handyman? Roll it, slide it in the stocking, and you're done!

### **For Him:**

Pens – My husband loves a nice pen so I'm always on the hunt for something cool for him.

Soaps – Why not stuff a scented soap bar in his stocking, he might get hooked and want them all year!

Bend Lotion – This treat has healed my husband's dry rough skin and he swears by it.

Honey scoop – If he stirs honey in his morning coffee, he'd like this stirrer. If he doesn't stir honey, then buy him the honey as well!

Look at this unique tiny tool for keeping him well and getting in doors! Have you seen it! So cool!

### **The Splurge:**

Zymbol bracelet – One of my favorite pieces of jewelry I got last Christmas – and I think I'll love it forever. Check out the options and the story behind the jewelry!

<https://www.zymbol.net/>

Guitar capo - Allows the player to easily slide cap on guairt neck while playing. Comes with lifetime warranty

[https://www.thaliacapos.com/collections/capos?wickedsource=google&wickedid=439189349716&wtm\\_term=&wtm\\_campaign=10207049455&wtm\\_content=101721245013&wickedplacement=&wickedkeyword=&gclid=EAlalQobChMlv8ffrZ-U7AIVDbblCh0CRg4AEAQYASABEgKSqPD\\_BwE](https://www.thaliacapos.com/collections/capos?wickedsource=google&wickedid=439189349716&wtm_term=&wtm_campaign=10207049455&wtm_content=101721245013&wickedplacement=&wickedkeyword=&gclid=EAlalQobChMlv8ffrZ-U7AIVDbblCh0CRg4AEAQYASABEgKSqPD_BwE)



Names necklace – It's tiny and will be a sweet surprise in her stocking – a necklace with kids names on disks!

[https://www.etsy.com/listing/107771864/personalized-mini-mom-necklace-petite?ga\\_order=most\\_relevant&ga\\_search\\_type=all&ga\\_view\\_type=gallery&ga\\_search\\_query=mom+personalized+baby+necklaces&ref=sr\\_gallery-1-3&frs=1](https://www.etsy.com/listing/107771864/personalized-mini-mom-necklace-petite?ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=mom+personalized+baby+necklaces&ref=sr_gallery-1-3&frs=1)

Initial and message – This initial necklace with “one in a million” inscribed on the back would be a nice surprise in the stocking. From Macy's.

## **The Dressing – Sweater Weather** – by Marcy Lytle

Hopefully by now, fall temperatures have arrived where you live. We hope so, here in Central Texas, as we wait for them a long time! It's a good time to stock up on sweaters for the weather ahead during winter. Good sweaters bring coziness and comfort, and we can all use both of that as we near the end of 2020. Can I get a nod and a yes?

Here are a few of our faves:

Look at this cute hedgehog sweater from Banana Republic! He's sitting in a coffee mug – what a great gift idea or a treat for yourself!

[https://bananarepublicfactory.gapfactory.com/browse/product.do?pid=571067001&vid=1&tid=bfpl000002&kwid=1&ap=7&gclid=EAlaIqobChMlo-mB1Paf7AIVNQPnCh1b-w4uEAQYASABEglae\\_D\\_BwE&qclsrc=aw.ds#pdp-page-content](https://bananarepublicfactory.gapfactory.com/browse/product.do?pid=571067001&vid=1&tid=bfpl000002&kwid=1&ap=7&gclid=EAlaIqobChMlo-mB1Paf7AIVNQPnCh1b-w4uEAQYASABEglae_D_BwE&qclsrc=aw.ds#pdp-page-content)

There are four colors to choose from in this mock turtleneck, and I love them all! This sweater looks super comfy and cozy! From Target!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-mock-turtleneck-pullover-sweater-a-new-day/-/A-79605195?preselect=79394127#lnk=sametab>

I have a couple of these cardigans with the snap buttons, and they are my favorites! And I've bought this brand of clothing before, on Amazon. You might want a couple of these, as well!

[https://www.amazon.com/MEROKEETY-Womens-Sleeve-Neckline-Cardigans/dp/B07FMJHT92/ref=sr\\_1\\_20?dchild=1&keywords=sweaters+for+women&pd\\_rd\\_r=8d0ca9c7-06a9-42be-8d77-b9e1908c52f6&pd\\_rd\\_w=MGadS&pd\\_rd\\_wg=ioiaX&pf\\_rd\\_p=0ec05f25-9534-48fe-9c3e-40b89957230e&pf\\_rd\\_r=SJ50F8KS8SXBEST2YB1Z&qid=1601987081&sr=8-20](https://www.amazon.com/MEROKEETY-Womens-Sleeve-Neckline-Cardigans/dp/B07FMJHT92/ref=sr_1_20?dchild=1&keywords=sweaters+for+women&pd_rd_r=8d0ca9c7-06a9-42be-8d77-b9e1908c52f6&pd_rd_w=MGadS&pd_rd_wg=ioiaX&pf_rd_p=0ec05f25-9534-48fe-9c3e-40b89957230e&pf_rd_r=SJ50F8KS8SXBEST2YB1Z&qid=1601987081&sr=8-20)

I LOVE the way they paired this crewneck pullover from Target with the floral skirt. The bottom of the sleeves are tapered, providing shape and elegance. I want this one!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-crewneck-pullover-sweater-a-new-day/-/A-79610375?preselect=79393825#lnk=sametab>

Do you like sleeve detail? Look at this sweater from Amazon, in so many color choices! Oh my gosh, it looks so comfortable and so pretty!

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08KRPRY6S/ref=sr\\_1\\_39?dchild=1&keywords=pullover+sweater+women&qid=1601987774&s=apparel&sr=1-39](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08KRPRY6S/ref=sr_1_39?dchild=1&keywords=pullover+sweater+women&qid=1601987774&s=apparel&sr=1-39)

It's called a ballet neck, with raglan sleeves, and look how it's paired with pants of the same hue! Love it! This one is from the Loft outlet...so cute tucked in one corner!

<https://outlet.loft.com/kimono-sweater/534347?skuld=29941544&defaultColor=8951&catid=cat3950031&selectedColor=8951>

In case you're dressing up, a peplum sweater might be for you! I think these only look good on certain people (I'm not one of them!) but they are sooooo cute. And look at those animal print pants!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-crewneck-peplum-pullover-sweater-a-new-day/-/A-79623570?preselect=79394036#lnk=sametab>

### Three Moms – Thankful Kids

You may read that title and wonder, “Thankful kids. Do those exist?” It’s funny, it seems that some kids are more bent toward being thankful and showing it, and others have to be trained and trained hard! We decided to ask our moms to share funny stories and/or tips about their kids and thankfulness...and maybe you can relate. Maybe you’ll feel better about your own kiddos, and have a ray of hope for the ones less grateful!

#### Mom of Four, ages 10 and under:

It seems all of our kids are different. Our oldest had a friend over one time, a friend that was in need, and our daughter started giving away any and all of her clothes – even ones we hadn’t decided to get rid of. We also, as a family, put money in an envelope to set aside for giving. So, I think generosity is born out of thanksgiving. *When we realize that we have more than enough of anything*, we are thankful, and that causes us to want to share.

I also think that *our kids observe and hear their mom/dad give thanks*, so they learn to follow suit. Even before our meals, we give thanks for our food. It’s simple and perhaps a ritual, but it reminds us all to stop and recognize where good gifts originate! At night, during family prayer time, we add in thanksgiving for everyday things. One particular thing we gave thanks for was a birthday party for my daughter and all of the friends that she has.

I remember one of our four had a long season of ungratefulness, so it seemed fitting to *remove some of her most treasured toys* and put them away for a bit. It didn’t take too long (but it did take a while!) for her to realize what a blessing her toys were, and how she needed to remember to be thankful.

And finally, I often *tell my kids when they’re being ungrateful*, and share how it’s hurtful to give nice things to them, only to see them turn up their nose at the food I’ve prepared, or the gifts they’re opening. I think honesty goes a long way. They need to realize the effects of ungratefulness, as they mature into grateful adults!

#### Mom of Three, ages 9 and under:

*Prayer time* in the evening is when we work on thankfulness. Mostly, prayer time for the kids is asking for things and praying for others. But we then ask, “What are you thankful for?”

*Dinner time* is a great time for being grateful, because we ask them how their day was, and what they are thankful for. It’s fun to hear their answers.

*Party time* is when we verbally remind them to give thanks to the giver. We remind them, but as they’ve gotten older they have now begun to do this on their own.

*Living it out*, when they see us give thanks, when we remind them to notice little things, and when it’s part of our family lifestyle is important to us.

*At Thanksgiving*, our extended family is around the table, and this is a time when we give thanks for those with us, stating specific things we love about each one.

*Cleaning out toys*, our kids want to sell stuff to make money, but...we ask them to share or give away...as a way of being grateful for what they have.

*The Lord's Prayer* is something we are teaching our kids and hoping to do more of in 2021, and it begins with praise.

Mostly, parenting thanksgiving is the best. My husband reminds them to thank me for dinner. I remind them to thank Dad for what he does. So we try to be thankful in our own house, for the gifts we've been given in each other...even with their siblings. This is more of a challenge, because it's easy to take each other for granted.

### Mom of Two, ages 4 and 2

When kids are young like my two little girls, it has to start with their dad and I being an example. Even for the smallest of things, because these are "big" to them. For example, getting a new lollipop, or trying on a new pair of shoes, or getting to sit in the front seat while we go down the road to feed the cows. These are the experiences that our little ones have.

Thankfulness in our house looks like being thankful for these small things. We make sure that we constantly thank God for our food. We also thank God at night – and we ask our girls,

"What are you thankful for, today?"

One of our daughters answered, "I'm thankful for my backpack."

We also give thanks in the middle of arguments. It's a teaching moment when there's a fight over a baby doll. I recently told the girls how we need to be thankful that we have multiple baby dolls, so we don't need to fight over one! Just showing them the toys they have, or the extra clothes we have to give away, gives me a chance to teach gratitude.

Sometimes, I do wonder if they are getting this concept of thanks, like all parents do! Recently, I was taking a nap with Sadie, our four-year old. Earlier we had gotten groceries, and I bought the girls both new water bottles. Sadie looked at me as we were about to doze off, and said, "Mommy, thank you so much for my new water bottle."

Moments like those tell me yes! They're getting it. It also teaches me, when my little girl gives thanks for a simple water bottle. It reminds me to see those simple things, too!

## Tried and True – A Fall Walk – by Marcy Lytle

We love to walk and walk often, on all sorts of trails from granite to concrete, to rocky to smooth, as it's one of our favorite forms of exercise. And when the days are now dark so early, we have to find places to still walk in the evenings – so we usually choose well-lit paths or even shopping centers – either indoors or outdoors. On the weekends, we can still choose parks, if it's not too chilly! And...we've noted lots of ways to stay safe while walking that I thought we'd pass on to you!

1. **Wear good shoes.** There are all sorts of hazards, mostly turning ankles by stepping off the side of a path, and wonky shoes are not a good idea! I carry my walking shoes (Moka shoes) with me in the car, so that if we decide to walk while out, I have them handy.  
[https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0307/0738/4459/products/YB2207BS\\_1\\_1024x1024.jpg?v=1585386262](https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0307/0738/4459/products/YB2207BS_1_1024x1024.jpg?v=1585386262)
2. **Walk with someone.** Even on city trails that we've walked, we've gotten turned around. We meet stray dogs and all sorts of surprises when we walk, and we are thankful we aren't alone. So grab a friend, or take your dog (on a leash), but walk with someone.
3. **Put away your phone.** If you're going to snap a picture, then stop and snap, but then put the phone away. Talking on the phone and especially texting while walking is downright dangerous. We've seen slick spots of water, surprise holes in the ground, or drop-offs on the side that we would have missed had our noses been to the screen.
4. **Consider an insulated backpack.** If you're planning a long walk, carrying a tote on one shoulder might be uncomfortable. But an insulated backpack (we love this one we just recently got) distributes the weight evenly on your back, and you can carry a little snack or drink, stop and enjoy it, then walk back!  
[https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00J0S019S/?ref=idea\\_lv\\_dp\\_ov\\_d&tag=aiponsite-20&linkCode=ic6&ascsubtag=amzn1.ideas.JTFIXMNGYB8K](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00J0S019S/?ref=idea_lv_dp_ov_d&tag=aiponsite-20&linkCode=ic6&ascsubtag=amzn1.ideas.JTFIXMNGYB8K)
5. **Wear your mask.** I know. You're outside. But wearing the mask around your neck so that you can pull it up if you need to, is wise. We have been on a few trails where it was crowded, or we see someone coming fully masked, and we want to be considerate of them. We don't have to wear it if no one is around, but we can be prepared if there is.
6. **Consider allergies.** Cedar season is coming, and there's always something blooming that can cause us aggravation while outdoors. So if you're allergic, make sure you've taken your meds or whatever you need to do, before you get caught on the trail sneezing and wheezing!
7. **Take some tissue.** Carry Kleenex (that small pack) in your pocket. I don't know how many times we've been caught out walking and sneezed with nothing present to wipe our noses – not cool!
8. **Stay to the right.** This is HUGE! I wish bikers would alert you that they're coming beside you, but it's rare that they do! And if you step to the left, you might just get mowed down by a fast tracker. I think this is one of the most important things to be aware of, when walking. If you stay to the right, they'll pass to the left. All the more reason to be aware while walking.

9. **Observe signs.** If there's been a big rain and there are signs along the path that say "turn around, don't drown," that's probably not a good trail for that day! Seems obvious, but don't get caught down on a trail that's covered in slippery mud or running water.
10. **Smile and say hello.** Lots of walkers have on head phones and won't even know that you've spoken. Many won't make eye contact. But it's healthy, nice, and kind to say hello and smile as people pass by. Oftentimes, they look up surprised and happy that someone has spoken. And that will make your heart and their heart beat a little stronger and healthier...



HOME



## **A Night to Remember – Colorful Thanks – by Marcy Lytle**

It's always a great time of year to remind our kids to be thankful, but November is the time when thanksgiving is in the air – everywhere – so why not focus on it during family time? Kiddos have to be trained to be thankful, taught to notice, and encouraged to verbalize their thanksgiving. They also need to understand how a grateful heart makes a merry heart! And while they're learning, we adults can be reminded as well!

**Preparation:** You'll need construction paper in fall colors (orange, brown, green, red, yellow, purple), scissors, and a bowl full of Sixlets (if you can find them) or Skittles or other colored candies. Make your paper match those colors. Ask the children (or adults can do this beforehand) to cut out a leaf shape from the paper. Place these in a circle around a bowl full of the candies. Now you're ready!

Read the story of the 10 lepers that Jesus healed from the book of Luke:

*Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."*

This is a story of 10 sick people that were healed, but only one of them returned to thank Jesus. Thankfulness is SO important in healing and blessings. When we are thankful, it lifts our mood and pleases our Father, and allows us to smile.

- Why do you think it's important to give thanks? (kids answer) Every good gift we have comes from our heavenly Father, so let's give thanks for something in the color yellow...

As each person gives thanks, they choose a yellow candy and place it on the coordinating colored leaf.

- How do you feel when you do something nice for someone and they don't say thank you, but just ignore you? (kids answer) It doesn't feel very good, does it? Let's give thanks to our Father this time for something in the color green...

As each person gives thanks, they choose a green candy and place it on the coordinating leaf.

- These men in the story were all healed from a terrible disease. Why do you think nine of them didn't return to give thanks to Jesus, their healer? (kids answer) Let's give thanks this time for something purple...is this color the hardest?

As each person gives thanks, they choose a purple candy and place it on the coordinating leaf.

- Sometimes, we are disappointed when we don't get the toy we want, or get to watch a TV show, or other things we want to do. How can we give thanks when that happens? (kids answer) Let's give thanks this time for something brown!

As each person gives thanks, they choose a brown candy and place it on the coordinating leaf.

- The most precious gift of all in this life is the gift of forgiveness and salvation when we believe in Jesus and ask him to cleanse us from "leprosy" - anything that makes us unclean – like lying, stealing, hating and other bad attitudes. Have you received this gift from Jesus? (let kids answer and pray...) Let's give thanks this time for something red...just like the blood of Jesus that was shed for our sins!

As each person gives thanks, they choose a red candy and place it on the coordinating leaf.

- Often, our thanksgiving is offered up to God in song. What's your favorite song and why? (let kids answer). Let's try to sing one of these songs! Now let's give thanks for something orange!

As each person gives thanks, they choose an orange candy and place it on the coordinating leaf.

*Once all the candies are on leaves (let the kids go ahead and distribute them all by color), enjoy a few together and **give thanks** for all kinds of weather that happens in the winter months...because the Creator of the Earth give us seasons so that all things grow well in due time.*

## **An Adage a Day - Negative Nancy in November – by Carole Gilbert**

I am not writing this column to be political. I am not writing it about politics. And I am not writing it because it is the Presidential election month of 2020. I am writing it because I heard the phrase “Negative Nancy” in a church sermon preached by my son recently and thought that might be a fun phrase to research and write about. I had no idea it came about from our 36th President, Lyndon B. Johnson. He used the phrase “Nervous Nellies” while discussing his Vietnam policy and from that “Nervous Nellies” eventually evolved to “Negative Nancy.” And “I cannot tell a lie,” these are not connotations someone wants to be known as. They refer to being worrisome or disagreeable. “Nervous Nellie” actually began by referring to an over excitable horse.

I have always had a fascination with the presidents of the United States, maybe because they were and are willing to take on that position knowing it will include putting up with Negative Nancy’s and Downer Dan’s. John F. Kennedy said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” That must be what most presidents have in their minds when they run for office. It cannot be for the benefits. Rutherford B. Hayes, our nineteenth president believed, “He serves his party best who serves the country best.”

So, as we go through this historical election, we must remember this is still about the good of the country. If we could all just leave the negativism there by the door and continue forward, we would be in a brighter spot. That probably will not happen, but I challenge us to try. I like this quote by Eleanor Roosevelt to give us a positive boost, “With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts.” And this month, part of our United States will be Negative Nancy’s, Debbie Downer’s, and Pessimistic Patty’s. The other part of us will not. It will depend on if the candidate we are rooting for wins. And there is no reason to get “hot under the collar” if our candidate does not win. Remember what Abraham Lincoln said, “Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be.” So let’s be a Positive Polly or create our own effective epithet, like Rootin’ Rita, instead. (I hope to be an Encouraging Carole.)

In conclusion, I would like to add a few more quotes. The first one is from President Jimmy Carter. He was not one of the greater presidents, but he had great beliefs. One of his most memorable quotes came during an interview, “We have a tendency to condemn people who are different from us, to define their sins as paramount and our own sinfulness as being insignificant.” That does remind me of a Bible verse having to do with taking something like a log out of my eye before looking at what is in someone else’s eye (Matthew 7:3). And remember this quote? “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” from Franklin D. Roosevelt. That reminds me of more verses about not fearing, which are included in the Bible 365 times. That is enough guidance and authority for each new day. And Abraham Lincoln had a great, biblical sounding quote when he said, “I am rather inclined to silence, and whether that be wise or not, it is at least more unusual nowadays to find a man who can hold his tongue than to find one who cannot.”

Presidents, as much as we may or may not like them, come and go. But we all know who our true unchangeable leader is and who is always totally devoted to us. Dwight D. Eisenhower was not a Christian until ten days after taking over the Presidential office in 1953. Just three years later, he declared our motto to be, "In God We Trust." He is the only known president to meet God while serving. Some may think nothing great ever comes from the White House. That time the greatest did. Now that is something to be positive and grateful for.

## **Chipped China - I'm Jumping In: Are You Reaching Out? – by Jennifer Lytle**

When our family still had a membership to one of the local trampoline parks, I observed my 16-month old jump into a ball pit to save a struggling toddler. Though he had been distressed by being placed in the ball pit previously, he must have decided to endure the discomfort in order to help a fellow out who had been left to himself for several stressful minutes. The toddler was whimpering, whining, and looking quite pitiful about his situation.

He wasn't crying out. He wasn't asking for help. He wasn't desperately flailing, but there was no mistake. He needed help! He wanted out! His quiet pleas went unanswered and an observant, empathetic 16-month old acted. That little dude jumped in and went after the one who needed someone.

My 16-month old had been observing from the side. He had watched intently what was happening and tried to reach in, lying flat on his belly, with an extended hand. Quickly, he realized this was not the solution and turned around to get in feet first. He waded over to the toddler and tried to offer his hand.

Unfortunately, the toddler looked at the 16-month old with uncertainty and refused to be comforted by this heroic deed. He still wouldn't move and remained frozen in fear.

After letting the scene unfold, this Momma jumped in after my own 16-month old to encourage his efforts and ensure that he felt safe. If he needed a hand to get out, I was right there to pull him up.

Have you been offered a hand? Take it with gratitude! Ignore that the hand is younger than yours or not the person you preferred. Give thanks for the help. Take what's valuable and add your contribution, too. You just might find a double portion blessing for each of you.

## **I Don't Do Teens - The Follower** – by Marcy Lytle

It's pretty easy to tell your own child's personality at a young age, whether they are a leader or a follower. Of course, they can switch or perhaps go back and forth between the two, but often our kids are bent to one or the other. And by the teen years, if a follower is their bent (inclination), we parents start to worry. Followers often lack confidence to be who they were intended to be, or they value friends so much they want to be like them.

So how can we tell if our children are followers?

- If she changes her fashion style depending on who she hangs out with, she might be a follower.
- If he acts stupidly and dangerously when around his friends, but not at home, he might be a follower.

In other words, followers sometimes become chameleons so they blend in, so they can mix with the crowd, and not be spotted...because they're just like everyone else. In fact, the thought of being spotted because they're different is terrifying to a follower.

- If she loves to read books, but her new friend thinks books are lame and your daughter then quits reading...she might be a follower.
- If he loves to sing, but his buddies think singing is for girls, and your son stops doing what he loves...he might be a follower.

The scary thing about followers is they lose their sense of who they are, and their beautiful individuality gets swallowed up in a sea of those they follow. And the scarier thing is that teens that grow up to be adult followers end up with all sorts of woes...

So how do we train our teens to be who they are and to stay true to that person?

*Affirmation* – this is giving emotional support and encouragement to our sons and daughters for staying true to their likes/interests when others don't affirm. Teens crave affirmation from their friends, but if it's not there, we can be the foundation where they stand.

*Commendation* – this goes further than affirmation – it includes praise! Celebrate who your teens are, by speaking specifically to their strengths, and reminding them to then praise the one who made them – just like they are!

*Example* – If we are followers (they can spot us if we are!), our kids will notice and that's not helpful. However, if they see us walk away from a group that's gossiping, choose wisely in our finances instead of keeping up with our neighbors, they will note that too...and remember.

The first three letters of those words spell the word ACE, and hopefully you'll ace it as a parent if you follow those three, in producing a vibrant adult with self-confidence that isn't swayed by the masses. And even better, their bent to follow will only end up behind the ONE worthy of following at any cost.

## **Practical Parenting – While Mom is Busy – by Marcy Lytle**

Your kids have already been curbing their social contacts, their school has been anything but normal (at least for many), the world is topsy-turvy, and here we are entering the colder months, where staying indoors will be more common than not. Winter blues may be a real thing for all of us this season, because we've already been blue before the season started! Parenting wild children with energy is no fun, if there are no outlets. Thankfully, playgrounds are opening and we can get outside...but now the cold weather is coming.

Keeping kids occupied and still and happy during the holiday season is difficult, for the most creative parent out there. So I've put on my thinking cap and come up with seven ideas for parenting energetic children in the house – while trying to make dinner and shop and clean – and all that jazz.

Make a white board calendar from now til christmas, and write down the activities on the days you need the to be busy, so that they can just read it and do it, and not forget it! Here are some ideas of what to fill in...and when they perform the activity...they get a dollar! (This way they'll have a bit of cash for Christmas spending...or saving). Obviously, this is for kids that can read, so I'd say ages 5-12 would work, and the little ones can hang with Dad! Each of these activities should give you an hour...or two.

In order for the kids to earn a dollar, there can be no arguing, everything has to be cleaned up, and all items put away!

1. Give the kids your stack of magazines you've read, some scissors, glue and construction paper. They are to cut out images, glue them and cover the paper, to make placemats for each person in the family.
2. Ask the kids to have a story time, with pillows and blankets, in a corner. Each child picks a book and the older ones read aloud. Pillows and blankets and books are to be put back when done.
3. Send the kids to a table with white paper, markers and stickers, and have them make cards for friends and family for Christmas. Give them a list of names or let them make it. Olders need to help the youngers.
4. It's called the board game hour(s). Each child picks their favorite board game, and each one is played for 20 minutes each (or longer if kids can), with approved snacks as well. Lay out a big sheet for them to play and eat.
5. Gym for all can be a time when each child picks their 3 favorite exercises and writes them down. Then they all show up for "class" and each child trains the others, to selected music. Send them to the garage or backyard for this (on a warmish day). Let them take waters and fruit for snacks.
6. Zookeeper fun can be had when each child picks five of their favorite stuffed animals or figures and sets up a zoo in the den. Give them five bowls and/or boxes, and tell them to prepare the zoo for visitors. When you finish your chore, visit the zoo...
7. Set them in front of a good movie that YOU pick – give them paper to draw images from the movie as they watch – then show and tell the family later in the evening!

Hope these help give you ideas and sanity this holiday season, with a few little kid-fun while you have a little mom-done.



## **Tiny Living – It's Really Okay – by Leyanne Enterline**

The days seem long but the years fly by, is what I usually hear. However, I don't know about you but it feels like this year is super long!

It's going on month seven that my hubby lost, was furloughed, from his career. And my business has been up and down as clients seem to be going longer without getting their hair done, and are much more conservative about coming in.

Praise the Lord again for tiny living!

Otherwise, we would not be able to afford a home at the moment! We are so grateful to be where we are, even though it definitely was a bit unexpected. We didn't plan on living tiny for so long, but it is what it is, and we will continue to have *joy in the small blessings* God has given us each day!

Choosing joy has been so hard though, because we have been wallowing in the doom and gloom for a bit. We have been so mad, sad, angry, depressed, *why me*, but...we need to make lemonade out of the lemons. And we are all working on that as a family!

The kids don't seem to be as affected by our current life much, besides the fact that we are traveling a bit less. But that's really okay with the boys, because it just means more fishing and friend time!

Brian and I struggle continually with our attitudes towards life and each other. Usually when one of us is down about things, the other is doing pretty well and can help lift the other one up. But when we're both down, watch out! It's an angry household, which has been tough.

We are definitely in more prayer than ever, more worship, more seeking God. He has faithfully provided some type of income every week! We literally *live by faith weekly* on the finances! We have been blessed and know breakthrough is coming! This long year won't last forever!

We have some more trips coming up, which is our favorite of all, to travel as a family!

God has continued to bless this tiny home and we will rejoice in the little things as we drink our "lemonade" and give thanks...



YOU

## **Healthy Habits – Holiday Routines** – by Marcy Lytle

I know, the holiday season is here, and we can't believe it! So why not get a jump start on healthy habits before the holidays actually begin? It's the holiday season that often sets us all off of our routines, increases our stress, and thus we become more susceptible to illness because we're so run down! I can only say that from experience, that running around and crowding our calendars and squeezing in perfection can make for a way less-than-perfect holiday season! So what are we girls to do?

Here are seven little routines that might be worth noting, so that we actually enjoy the holidays this year, as different as they may look because of the weirdness 2020 has brought us so far:

**Shop now, and spread out the spending:** Even if you're not sure what your family wants for Christmas yet, start putting aside a little money each week, or buying gifts you do know, now...so the crunch of spending all at once is avoided. Purchase a few gifts each week.

**Start planning your foods/recipes - now** - while you're sipping cider and watching movies. Peruse the internet or your cookbooks or your favorite places and make a list of sweets, breads, breakfasts, and more...and place them in a folder. You're done, and all you have to do is then bake when the family's hungry!

**Sleep in peace** (you know, sing *Silent Night*...) by delegating holiday responsibilities. Make a list of all the things – like hanging lights, putting up the tree, cleaning linens for guests (if you have any!), going through wrapping supplies, etc. Make the list, dole out the responsibilities among family members, or among weeks if you're going it alone, then sleep...and get to each item on the list as it comes.

**Step into an exercise routine** and maintain it – don't let it go just because the holidays are here. Don't let life and worry and stress keep you from going outside, to a gym, in your room, or wherever you can escape to run, dance, get some sunshine, or whatever invigorates and lifts your mood and your body to a higher level of health.

**Speak life.** Make sure your thoughts are thinking true things about your Good Father and those around you, and then speak them out loud. Affirm the truth about yourself, your relationship with Him, and the way he cares for all that concerns you. Speak it aloud, so that you hear it, and hear it often.

**Settle into a rhythm that works for your home.** Most likely, there will be less events and gatherings to attend this holiday season, and that may sadden or gladden your heart! If you're sad about that, make a list now of some new family traditions to begin that involve staying home or close by. If you're happy about the lack of gatherings, start making your list of movies and games and fun to be had with your extra family time together. In fact, a few new games might be just the thing to buy for everyone!

**Sink into your favorite chair, close your eyes, and sing.** Singing is good for the soul, whether you make perfect notes or not. Sing your own song to him, bare your soul, praise his Name. Or sing a familiar tune that has words that send your soul soaring. But whatever you

do, sing. You could start with a Christmas carol like “Deck the Halls with boughs of holly, fa, la, la, la, la, la , la, la la.” That’s a happy tune for sure!

Holiday routines. They don’t have to kill us. They can actually send us into 2021 with a little skip in our step!

## **Life in a Nutshell – Have No Doubt – by Jill Montz**

November is the time of year my family has been working and waiting ten months for. In the pecan industry, the bulk of our business happens in the last two months of the year. For the Pecan Shed, 80% of our sales happen in 60 days. No pressure right?!

By the time most people are still digging through left over Halloween candy in hopes of finding that one good piece left in the bag, our orchard crew is putting in twelve plus hour days on harvesting equipment as they gather pecans around our 25,000 or so trees. Many mornings the crew arrives well before dawn. Calloused hands and cracked knuckles rub tired eyes and stubbly chins as the crew fill thermoses with coffee and tractors with diesel. They bundle up against the brisk north Texas breeze as the first rays of dawn begin to cast long shadows on the orchard floor. Steam rises from the crew's strong coffee as they decide daily duties and head to their respective tractor. Many won't see the barns again until almost dark. Several of the men and women will work late into the evening under the florescent lights of our cleaning barn as they process, sort, sanitize and prepare pecans to be sold locally, across the United States, and even internationally.

These 30 days in November are long, hard, cold, and to be honest...quite nuts at times. The harvesting process is a race against Mother Nature to get pecans picked up before rain slows down procedures or wild animals eat the profit. But have no doubts...to our crew...this is the most wonderful time of the year.

While the farm is buzzing with the sound of tractors rolling through the trees, our two retail stores are hustling and bustling with shoppers. From the moment we turn over the OPEN sign, customers from all over Texas and across the U.S. walk in or call to place an order for our farm fresh pecans. Many have been our customers for decades and we use this time to catch up on family and what's new with them. Some are new to the area or to our store and we offer them our knowledge of all things pecans (and a few free samples too if they are so inclined). Both stores are a bee hive of activity as customers prepare for the holidays. It can be chaotic but it can also be a lot of fun!

Well after the CLOSED sign has been put out and the retail floor lights dimmed you can find my team still working in the warehouse to box up orders for shipping or to prepare for the next day. We have been known to leave the store close to midnight and return some mornings around 6am. I have jokingly said we just need to invest in cots and stay the night, but so far I have not had any takers. My store staff runs on caffeine, Aleve, cold pizza, prayers, and a whole lot of humor! (We can get a little nutty when we start getting less than six hours of sleep.) These men and women are more than my staff...they are my family! I am so blessed to get to work with each of them. The days are long and busy and mentally and physically exhausting. But have no doubts...to my store staff...this is the most wonderful time of the year.

While the business is booming and I am doing my best to be a good leader for my team and a good support person to the orchard crew, I will admit for 60 days a year I'm not so great as a mom. My girl Dotty has grown up feeling the pains that come with pecan season. These include, but are not limited to...

- A grumpy mom living on too few hours of sleep, too many bottles of Dr. Pepper, and too many doses of Aleve
- A house that has no groceries because all meals are purchased through a speaker and come in paper bags

- Dotty knowing to be on her best behavior because if she isn't I just might snap and take all my frustrations and exhaustion out on the child I love the most
- Very few, if any, holiday traditions...I don't have the time or energy to do much more than work and survive until December 25<sup>th</sup>
- A mom who is absent from some school parties and events that fall in these two months
- Dotty pretending not to notice the forced smiles as I try to fake joy and happiness and cover the tears of exhaustion that threaten to slip over the edge and onto my cheeks

The days of November are hard for Dotty, too. She has spent all 13 years of her life learning how to adjust to them. Some years are better than others and I have tried to get better. But have no doubts...to Dotty...this is not the most wonderful time of the year.

However, she is beginning to understand that these 60 days help me to be able to be more present the other 305 of the year. She is starting to realize that being a part of a family business means the buck stops with your last name. She is learning that being the boss doesn't mean you get to get off first...it means you get to leave last. She has discovered that success doesn't come easy and sustained success comes at a cost.

Some might say the price she has to pay is too high, but I would have to disagree. I grew up very similar to Dotty. Only during my childhood my parents were putting in blood, sweat and tears and taking on mountains of debt to make ends meet. Dotty (and I) have it much better nowadays. Plus, I live closer to the fast food places so at least Dotty's meals are warm when she opens the bag (nothing against my mom...she just had a 30-minute drive home every night. I still can't stand to eat cold fries!)

While I do remember exhausted and stressed out parents from my childhood, I also remember parents who succeeded when many thought they would fail. I remember parents who showed me by example that hard work pays off. I remember parents who never gave up no matter what happened. I remember parents who hobbled off to bed achy, exhausted, and worried only to wake up the next day, well before my own alarm went off, to do it all over again.

I remember we still had Thanksgiving meals even if some years they were enchiladas from a local restaurant. We still had Christmas even if we didn't get a tree until December 23<sup>rd</sup>. My parents still asked about school, sports, friends, and other social activities. My brother even has a birthday in December and I think he got a cake most years (might need to fact check that one...if not a cake I bet he got the cash that the cake would've cost and he probably liked that more anyway).

I grew up knowing that 60 days a year things were going to be...well let's just face it...they were going to be nuts. I still know that 60 days a year my body and several well-meaning friends are going to ask me...are you nuts?! You need more sleep, more water, more dry shampoo...when was the last time you washed your hair?! My kiddo knows that for the next 60 days she will not have a candidate for Mom of the Year living in our house. But have no doubts...for Dotty...she doesn't have one the other 305 days of the year either!

Because the truth is none of us are Mom...or Dad...or Aunt, Uncle, Grandparent, Best Friend, Boss, Employee, Teacher, Coach, Husband, Wife, Doctor, Nurse, Patient, Pastor, Social Worker, Saint, or any other title of the year for any extended period of time. We all have our good days and our bad ones. Some good days string together for a week or perhaps

two...maybe even a month (maybe two). Some bad days do the same. All of us are just doing the best we can. And have no doubts...doing the best you can do...well that's doing enough my friend.

## **Life Right Now – Evidence** – by Bethany Gomez

There is this song that came on the radio recently that you may have heard, if you listen to your local Christian radio station. It's called "Evidence" by Josh Baldwin. The song is about recalling the evidence of God's goodness throughout your whole life and also His goodness, not only in the good times, but the difficult times in your life as well. It also talks about His faithfulness to always walk beside us in every season. It's such a powerful song and its message is just what I needed to hear.

I need to recall God's goodness more often. Sometimes I let the bad and negative things in my life drown out all the countless good things which can cause the enemy's lies to permeate my thoughts. God's goodness is all around, and if I simply stop for a little bit to think about His goodness in my life even when the storms are raging, then I truly believe peace and joy will be in the midst of them.

One of those particular storms right now is not directly *my* storm. It's the storm of someone so close to me that I feel the effects of it ever so much. It's kind of like being in the cone of uncertainty of a major hurricane. The wind and storm surge may not be as great as the place where the eye makes landfall, but it's still pretty damaging.

My mom was diagnosed with stage 3 melanoma back in April. Cancer. The most evil of evils. It has always been one of my biggest fears for me, or someone really close to me, getting cancer. My mom gave me permission to share a little bit of her journey and testimony. She has told everyone really close to her because she knows that prayer and support, not pity and sorrow, from those around her will get her through this storm. God has, of course, been in the midst from the very beginning.

My mom has always told us that if ever she were to get cancer that she would not go through chemo or radiation treatments, because she never wanted to live life too sick to function, and she didn't want our family to go bankrupt trying to pay for these treatments and hospital visits.

The only treatment her doctors recommended she do is something called immuno therapy. It sounds safe enough, but really it is two powerful drugs taken through a port. Essentially, the side effects could be similar to chemo, minus the hair loss. The treatment, we were told, was extremely expensive and my mom didn't have insurance. So when the cost of 6 treatments was covered, my mom was faced with one of the most difficult decisions of whether or not to do the treatment given the fact that God had made a way financially. However, the side effects could be less than ideal. I tried not to pressure her, but I didn't want her to "do nothing" because in my mind, doing nothing would result in my worst fears being realized.

She decided to go ahead and start the treatment. We were all hopeful and prayed against any severe side effects. The first treatment went okay. She broke out in a rash that lasted about a week. The second treatment nearly destroyed her. Seeing my mom become seriously sick due this treatment was heart wrenching. She couldn't eat or drink much of anything for 21 days. She lost so much weight and she became severely dehydrated and ended up in the hospital. She hardly slept and is still not getting a full night's rest. Her body is not functioning like it should, due to those drugs destroying her immune system trying to find the cancer. I wish she had never started it.

*I couldn't help but ask God,*

*"Why is this happening? I already trust You to take care of me and those I love."*



*But do I, really?*

One of the many evidences of God's goodness through all this is the fact that my sister now has a job that is very flexible and she has been able to be there for my mom physically more than I have. She has taken her to almost all her doctor's appointments, treatments and overnight ER stays. I wish I was able to help more, but I know that Mom has been in good hands.

Another evidence of God's goodness is the many good friends supporting my entire family through this. All of them have stepped in to help in some way or another. Some have been praying (which is so vital to getting through this trial), sending money for groceries, bringing over food to my parents, waking up early to go on a walk with me so that I can just talk it all out, and my sister's boss said, "Do whatever you need to do," when needing to take my mom to her appointments. Others have been making gift baskets full of comfort items for my mom, sending sweet texts checking on how my mom is doing, and so many more evidences. I know that we would not make it without true friends like these.

*And who gives us those friends? God does.*

As we are coming up on Thanksgiving, I am ever more thankful to God for giving my family and myself the most wonderful, life-giving friends.

I could continue on with so many more evidences of God's goodness, but I will leave it here with another reminder from the song "Evidence" to always look for God's goodness, because it's all around.

*Help me remember when I'm weak*

*Why should I fear, the evidence is here*

## **Strategic Women - Jochebed** – by Debbie Haynes

Have you ever heard of the name Jochebed? I'm pretty sure you have no one in your circle of friends with this name, but there is a woman in the Bible with this name whose children became great! Having great children is the desire of every mom, but is there a formula that produces them?

This lady's story is found in Exodus 2 and 3. Jochebed means "glory of Jehovah," and this woman was from the priestly line of Levi (one of the 12 tribes of Israel). Jochebed was Moses' mom, and the other siblings were Aaron and Miriam.

The scene presented to us in Exodus is one where the Children of Israel are enslaved by the Egyptians, yet still favored by God. The more harshly the Children of Israel were treated, the stronger they grew! A murderous plan was devised to kill all the Hebrew male babies, but God dealt WELL with the midwives among them, and the people continued to become mighty.

We know that Jochebed had Moses placed in a basket, due to her fierce love for God and her child, so that her son would escape being murdered. But it says in the New Testament in Hebrews 11 that God thought very well of Jochebed, too, and He honored her. It's so cool how the text in the New Testament reinforces the stories from the Old Testament. He honored Jochebed by making her Moses' mother – and we know that Moses became the leader of the Hebrew nation. She had been sort of a "nobody" until God elevated her to the Hebrews faith "Hall of Fame."

Moses was a great leader and legislator. He received the 10 Commandments, watched as God parted the Red Sea, prayed for manna to sustain millions, and these are only a few of his great accomplishments! And it all began with the love of his mother.

Aaron was Moses' brother, the first High Priest of Israel, the one who stood between the people and God to offer sacrifices and be the spokesperson for Moses. Jochebed's grandchildren were also part of the priesthood. What a rich legacy she left!

Miriam was Jochebed's daughter, and she was very brave and wise, as she responded with courage in scary moments. God used her to help place baby Moses in a safe place. Miriam grew up to be a prophetess, songwriter and poet, and an active participant in tabernacle worship!

Because Jochebed was a mom that followed God and not man, she raised three amazing children who literally changed history...children called by God and set apart under his loving eye.

The story of Jochebed reminds that even when we see NO POSSIBLE WAY out of a grave situation, God's power knows no boundaries. Even laws that are made to kill innocent children can be thwarted when a mother obeys her God.

There's a [hymn](#) about God's grace that's offered when burdens are greater, labors increase, and afflictions are added. When trials multiply, his grace has no measure and his power has no

boundary, because he gives again and again. The lyrics continue to remind us that when we have exhausted our store of endurance and our strength is gone, our Father's love has no limit and his grace no measure.

A strategic woman, Jochebed, is no different than you or I. She simply loved her God and loved her children. That love didn't keep away evil plans, but it did protect her children from the evil one, because her Source never failed.

## **Strengthening Your Core - In Case You're Wondering – by Marcy Lytle**

I don't know if you're wondering or not, you younger women that read, but I'm telling anyway. There are SO MANY things that I've come to see and realize in my sixth decade that I sort of wish someone had told me about...but they didn't. I didn't know to ask, but it would have been helpful to know that...

1. Sex is still great – although less frequent – but awesome. Who knew? So glad.
2. Shaving isn't really a thing much – except for those like 10 stray hairs on your legs – so annoying.
3. Purpose wanes, because we're not sure about the future – but we have wisdom and hope stockpiles now to draw from – because we're older.
4. Speaking of stockpiles, it's important to have an “emergency” shelter so start building it now – truths to stand on when your kids need your help and faith.
5. Losing parents is not easy, not matter how old, how they pass, or even if you've been irritated at them your entire life.
6. Friends are SO important because your kids will have their lives, which they need to have. So you need to still have yours.
7. Bitterness isn't pretty on the face, so get rid of it...don't wear it...do everything you can to toss that robe and burn it.
8. Your butt becomes flatter and your stomach becomes fatter. You can fight it, but it happens...to most everyone.
9. You'll catch a glimpse in the mirror and see your mom or dad...and it will freak you out.
10. Avoid the couch and the lazy chair, in favor of fresh air and long walks and talks. These keep you alive.
11. No, fashion doesn't have to fade. If you love it, keep creating and wearing!
12. He will have habits, but so will you, ones that annoy and distress. But fight the urge to mother...and lean in to the urge to love him more.
13. Bite your tongue, because it will be easy to let it loose to downgrade your relationship. Keep accountable to HIM and offer words of affirmation to him.
14. Date night is important at all ages. Keep it on the calendar, and often. As well as weekend getaways.
15. Friends you once had will be gone, because it happens. Look for news ones and always give...expecting nothing in return...but the joy of obeying HIM.
16. Yes, walking with HIM gets sweeter, but only if that bitter robe is discarded...
17. Your house will look old and cluttered, and you'll sigh and wish...so brighten it up regularly instead of wallowing in the dark.
18. Prayer never grows old, so guard that exercise as if your life depends on it, because it does.
19. Your hair gets thinner and a different texture – invest in scarves and hats – and smile big.
20. Life is grand because you'll see each sunrise and sunset as a gift, if you give thanks in all things.



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together - Yes, Thank You – by Marcy Lytle**

We started with a picnic by a pretty pond, and he took the blanket and spread it out for us to sit on and eat. Right away he noticed some ants on my corner of the blanket, and suggested I toss a piece of a pretzel off into the grass and it worked! The ants diverted...

In the car, we were reading for a bit and he made sure we had a spot that was shaded, that I was comfortable, and my seat was in the right position. We often stop to read or rest under a shade tree, just because we can and it relaxes us both and makes us nice people the rest of the day.

In the afternoon, we took our lawn chairs and found another spot to sit and watch ducks and people fish and chill. This was an entire Saturday outside because the repressive heat of the summer was gone and it was SO NICE with the cooler temps. He carried both chairs, opened them up, and made sure I liked where I was sitting.

By the evening, we were back home and on the sofa. He grabbed my feet and started rubbing them, which is something I LOVE so much – it's really just the best! He doesn't like his feet to be rubbed, but I do, and he knows it.

My husband's "gift" is serving, and people that know him soon realize it. He doesn't serve to be served. He doesn't wait to be told. And he doesn't demand or expect accolades. And those types of people often are overlooked, stepped on, and their services abused. I've even done it, in our marriage. I'm not inclined to serve near as much as he is, so I have to purpose to take note, give thanks, and bless him for who he is. I have to PURPOSE to do those things.

I feel as though I've written about his sweet acts multiple times, but it takes multiple times of purposing to take note of his actions. Being married to a servant-type, we non-servant types can easily slip into expectation and not even realize it. We can even let our own responsibilities go, knowing he will take up the slack. And we can even treat him with disdain at times, because he's serving others and not shining in the spotlight.

That one particular day I did take note and I smiled. He serves me so well, way too well for what I deserve, especially when I'm tired and irritable.

If I'm being honest, I'm glad he doesn't like his feet to be rubbed, because I don't want to rub them. I can carry my own chair, but he always wants me to have a lighter load, and that's okay with me! I can be quite self-centered when I'm in a mood...and he knows it. I know it, too.

He knows my strengths and weaknesses, and I know his. Being married seems to bring out the parts of each other that we don't like...and we highlight them. And if we're not careful, we will forget the strengths because the weaknesses get under our skin so badly...until...

We see those kind acts he's giving, we notice his sweet tenderness with our children, or we observe his organization skills in the garage...or whatever it is that makes him tick. And when we see his strengths, when we give thanks for those deeds, and when we pray for (not just

dismiss) his weaknesses, somehow the lens through which we look becomes a little cleaner and we see a bit farther.

Just now, as we're pulling into a parking spot for another rest, he turns and looks at me to ask, "Are you out of the sun?" And I say, "Yes, thank you."

## Date Night Fun – Five Thanks – by Marcy Lytle

It's been quite hard thinking up lots of date night ideas during this season of so many things being closed or not accessible during this crazy year! Here it is November, and now the weather is cooling down, so it seems the options are narrowing even further. One temptation might be to quit date nights altogether, and opt for sofa slouching every weekend. But...you know we won't let that happen...so below are some thankful ideas for this 11<sup>th</sup> month of year.

Jot down five things you're thankful for, and then make your date night revolve around those. Here are our five picks:

1. **Friends** – Invite another couple over for s'mores around the fire pit. If you don't have a fire pit, consider purchasing a cute s'mores kit, and setting out blankets or chairs in the backyard. It will be dark, so you'll need to be on the back porch or in your lit yard. Ask each one to bring a song to share from their play list, aloud, and to share why they love it so much. Finally, dance in the moonlight in the backyard to those songs...or others!  
[https://www.amazon.com/Nostalgia-SMM200-Stainless-Compartment-Marshmallows/dp/B00PY05VMS/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?dchild=1&keywords=smares+maker&qid=1602508661&sr=8-2](https://www.amazon.com/Nostalgia-SMM200-Stainless-Compartment-Marshmallows/dp/B00PY05VMS/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=smares+maker&qid=1602508661&sr=8-2)
2. **Food** – You'll be baking and making lots of recipes these next few weeks, so for date night – don't make it – go get it! Consider supporting your local restaurants that are open by getting takeout and heading to a favorite lookout over your city, for a romantic dinner for two in your car. If it's warm enough, open the windows or back, and lay out a blanket and eat. Begin by thinking over the year and giving thanks for at least five things, aloud, to each other. Then take time, both of you, to send a text message to five friends to thank them for something specific. Share their replies, then head home holding hands.
3. **Health** – Make this date night idea all about good food, fun exercise and settling words.... Head to Whole Foods or a store where you can opt for two items – both healthy – for a snack. Pack it in a bag you bring along (or a cooler) and head out for a nature walk (this date will need to be on a weekend!) - where you stop and enjoy your snack along the way. Search and find a new trail! Finally, take out the books you've both brought along, and read for a while, observing nature and people (if any other walkers go by.) Make this date last at least three hours...so there's time to breathe.
4. **Books** – There's a book called *Be the Gift* by Ann Voskamp that's a great choice, or you can choose your own – one with the theme of thanksgiving. I really like another choice, too, called *Say Please, Say Thank you*. Make coffee or another warm beverage, get some dark chocolate, and sip and read aloud, portions of the book. As you read, stop and give thanks and pray and give more thanks. Make this a solemn, yet joyful, date night together as you celebrate the gift of words.  
<https://annvoskamp.com/bethegift/>  
<https://www.amazon.com/Say-Please-Thank-You-Respect/dp/0399525386>
5. **Celebrations** – There will be family gatherings (hopefully) for weeks now...but you need a couple -gathering to celebrate your marriage! What is there to celebrate? How about these three things? Celebrate an answered prayer, a practical blessing, and something



in nature! Both of you write down your pick for each of those, but don't share until date night. Create a food board together, settle in by the fireplace, and share. End the evening by watching the *Greater* movie on Netflix as you celebrate the goodness of God in your lives.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2950418/>

## In This Together - Communicating Brides – by Kaelin Scott

“She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.”

Proverbs 31:26

Before my husband, Britton, and I were married, we dated long distance for two years. Most long distance relationships don't work out, and I can testify to the fact that it is very difficult to do. But despite the hardships, there are extremely valuable lessons to be learned. During those two years, we definitely faced days of uncertainty about the future. What we didn't realize was that we were strengthening our future marriage along the way. We were building skills that would help us later on, and I am so very grateful for that. At the time, I wanted nothing more than to be with Britton and not be separated anymore. But looking back, I'm thankful we had to go through it because it made us stronger.

There are many keys to having a successful long distance relationship, like trust and faith and patience. But I think the biggest one is *clear and concise communication*. When you only get to talk over the phone, you learn to weigh and measure your speech. You are forced to consider the way you are coming across to the other person and how your words make them feel. Communication can make or break a relationship, especially a long distance one. Britton and I had to learn very early on how to do it in a healthy and effective way. This has carried over into our marriage, which has been a lifesaver at times.

If you can't communicate effectively with your husband, your entire marriage can quickly fall off the tracks. Communication is an essential building block to having a strong relationship, and it helps you grow together, too. If this is something that you feel you are lacking, then *go back to the basics*. Think before you speak. I know that sounds silly, but it's a lot easier said than done. Really consider your words before you let them come spewing out. Are they helpful or hurtful? It is also vital to say what you mean. Speak clearly and be straightforward. Don't try to make your husband guess how you feel. Along with that, mean what you say! If your words do not match up with your heart, then it may not be a good idea to speak them. Our speech should be transparent and truthful, not convoluted or dishonest.

Being open and honest with your husband is absolutely necessary in order to enjoy a happy marriage. And it is critically essential to our spiritual lives as well. In fact, our relationship with God is compared to marriage many times in Scripture. Like any intimate relationship, being close to God requires good communication, which occurs in the form of prayer. Bring your heart to God openly and honestly. Trust Him with your worries and fears. Tell Him how you feel. And *don't forget to listen in return*.

One-sided conversations don't work with our husbands, and they certainly won't work with God. We can't talk and talk and talk, without stopping to listen to Him. His words might not be audibly discernable, but He is always speaking to us, and He has so many wonderful things to say!



ENCOURAGEMENT

I've always believed that, for the most part, I was a Mary, choosing the "better" things...the "one needful thing." Sitting at the feet of Jesus is the most important thing I can do. It's the one thing that enables me to live a life of purpose, meaning, and fulfillment. It's the one thing that keeps me grounded and pointed in the right direction. But lately I've been feeling more like a Martha.

Doing, doing, doing--life is filled with things I must do: outside projects, inside projects, the business and must-dos of life. You would think a single retired person would have lots of disposable time—some people think that—even I used to think that. After all, I don't have to cook if I don't want to, I don't have family laundry to do, I don't have to go to work every day and I don't have a lot of commitments. I purposely keep it that way so that I have plenty of time to spend on the better things...the one needful thing; yet, to-dos manage to weasel their way in, on a relentless mission to crowd out the *one needful thing*.

I try to read and have quiet time first thing in the morning, to fuel my spirit and lessen the chance of missing it altogether as things crowd in, but it's often a battle. I begin to think of the things that must be done, the phone calls I have to make—and then there are the "interruptions"—a text, an email, my cat. Stop, refocus, put the phone in the other room, start again, stop. This mind-battle extends the time and then I'm pressed with the thought that the cool morning is rushing by and the afternoon is hot—different tasks to do accordingly, I'd better start. This is an on-going exercise in discipline, focus, and an opportunity to allow the "one thing" to reign over the onslaught of must-dos. Some days are better than others.

How do I manage the things I must do while keeping the "one thing" at the forefront? *Must* I really do these things, or do I just *want* to do them? Do I have to be a Mary *or* a Martha? I feel both of them pulling at me, and they both feel right. The Mary in me needs to connect with God to keep my inner life in order. The Martha in me can't forget the must-dos that keep my outer life in order.

Putting these thoughts into words, it's becoming a bit more clear. I see a somewhat blurry picture of both Mary and Martha serving Jesus. Mary gave him her full attention, honoring him as King; Martha prepared food to nourish his body, which was a sacrifice, because someone had to do it. Mary chose the one eternal needful thing, but Martha carried on with the earthly tasks necessary at the time. And so, in this heaven-on-earth life, I must learn to balance the two in my personal life.

Something that helps me achieve balance is to align my inner and outer life as much as possible. Because of my "Mary time" with Jesus, I have a mission, a calling, a purpose (whatever you want to call it) that I hold to by *faith*. Most of the things I do are in some way tied to that—even though they're earthly tasks, they're meant to help me fulfill my inner purpose directly or indirectly—this is Martha at work. Sometimes I get off track (read my Nov. 2019 story "What Matters Most"), but if I listen, God brings me back. Some seasons are busier than others—spring and fall is a busy time for gardening, plus I have a few additional projects I'm working on—I guess that's why I'm feeling a lot like a Martha right now.

Sharing these thoughts with you has brought me peace. I'm reminded that my busy-ness is for a purpose and it's all good. God is good, always present, always listening, waiting for me to sit at his feet for a moment whenever and however I can.

Well, it's time to go...must-dos waiting.

## **Unearthly Thing - Gratitude Attitude** – by Angela Dolbear

Lately, the hit song “Gratitude,” from the 80’s band Oingo Boingo, is on repeat in my mind. As a worship leader, one might think the songs playing in my head would consist of all sanctified tunes, songs of praise worship (which actually happens a lot), but I was teenager in the 80’s, so that music is ingrained in me. I live in the world, though I am not of it (ponder John 17:14-16). I asked God to help me never to forget what life was like before Jesus lived in my heart. Mind and soul. But that is a topic for another day. I digress...back to gratitude! Today, I am writing about gratitude, hence the song.

November brings one of my favorite holidays, Thanksgiving. Pumpkin everything (I am not complaining, but partaking! Yum!) everywhere, along with big dinners and big shopping, and oh, uh, big football, so I’ve heard. And it’s a time to give thanks. Hopefully, big thanks to God.

### **Gratitude in action**

I live with almost constant anxiety, which seems to gain strength as it feeds on the Covid pandemic and the political unrest. Anxiety is a strange and unwelcomed sensation that is new to me, since it is a side effect from the stroke I had in March 2018.

Depression has also come to live in my brain, since then. Before fireworks exploded in my brain, I never experienced either of these mental conditions. But now I do.

I recognize them when they come around, like a hoard of angry villagers brandishing torches of fire that I can’t escape from their encroaching pursuit of my emotional equilibrium.

I was asking God to heal me on a day that was particularly dark and suffocating. He told me to be thankful.

*Sounds odd, I know. But I knew what He meant.*

God taught me to demolish the strongholds of anxiety and depression by specifically naming

things for which I am grateful.

Even the smallest things: the nice desk chair I am sitting on, the beautiful home I live in, in Nashville, my sweet black cat Maddy, who always knows when my anxiety levels are high, for my awesome husband and best friend Tim (I could name specific items of gratitude for hours about him), and for the hot coffee in the cute atomic print mug, which I am currently drinking while I write.

After naming as few as five items of gratitude, the fog began to lift. The dark weight of depression began to diminish.

I will keep naming people, places and things of which I am thankful, until gratitude has become my attitude. And I am free. And so loved by God. Which I am eternally grateful for.

“When you intentionally think about things that are godly, there’s no room for the enemy’s lies to get into your mind,” Joyce Meyer wrote in her daily devotional, from September 18, 2020.

“Concentrating on trying to not think wrong thoughts can actually increase them, but focusing on what’s pure, true and life-giving—filling your mind with good things—will shift the whole direction of your life to line up with God’s Word.” This was a life-changing revelation for me. I realized I couldn’t wait for something good to just fall into my mind; I had to choose my thoughts on purpose.”

*Yes! I choose to think on gratitude.*

Here are just a few of the many, many verses on gratitude from God’s word, to give us something good to think on (all quoted from the Amplified translation of the Bible):

- “Remember [with gratitude] His marvelous deeds which He has done, His miracles and the judgments from His mouth” -- 1 Chronicles 16:12

- “Know and fully recognize with gratitude that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, not we ourselves [and we are His]. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. -- Psalm 100:3
- “People will speak of the power of Your awesome acts, And [with gratitude and submissive wonder] I will tell of Your greatness.” -- Psalm 145:6
- “But if anyone loves God [with awe-filled reverence, obedience and gratitude], he is known by Him [as His very own and is greatly loved].” -- 1 Corinthians 8:3
- “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, and offer to God pleasing service and acceptable worship with reverence and awe” -- Hebrews 12:28

**Application:** Instead of focusing on my extreme need or suffering, and praying with a sense of fear and a sliver of blame on God, as I am prone to do when I have been run-over by anxiety and/or depression, I need to ask Him with trust, faith and patience, to fill me with gratitude. And I need to replace my anxious thoughts with deep gratitude for everything I touch, everything surrounding me. Even the comfy office chair I am sitting on.

*Application Prayer: Father, thank You for giving me the ability to think healthy thoughts. Please replace lies, deceptions and destructive thoughts with the truth of Your Word, and real life examples of gratitude. In Jesus' Name, amen.*

Great heaps of blessings to you, and thank you for reading my ramblings!

Picture note: This is Sparky, the sweet squirrel my husband and I raised from an infant. I am so very grateful for that experience, and all the lessons we learned along that journey. God is good!

ANGELA DOLBEAR is the author of four novels, and several short stories. She also writes and records original music with her husband, Tim Dolbear. Please visit her author page on Amazon for more information.



## **Moving Forward – Already Seen – by Pam Charro**

I found another wall inside of myself today...more unhealed hurt that is keeping me from fully trusting, fully giving of myself.

*I don't want it to be there, but there it is.*

I have been in therapy since the fourth grade. I became a Christian 32 years ago this month. And while I have come such a long way over the years, I sometimes wonder if I will spend the rest of my life going around and around the same hurts and insecurities. I just want to be well!

I have to constantly remind myself of God's gentle perspective when I see my weaknesses. He is the only one who knows how to heal me, and he is faithful in that task.

As Malachi 3:3 states, he stands carefully over me and uses just the right amount of heat to bring up my impurities without overwhelming me. And Philippians 1:6 assures me that he who began his good work in me will finish that good work. None of my frustrated striving will bring any good fruit. I just have to trustingly lay all of it before him and know that he is very good at what only He can do.

Equally important is that I remember that he isn't overly focused on my weaknesses. He knew what he was getting when he paid for me, and he is delighted with the person I am right now. He loves to use me every day to make himself known; and he loves simply walking with me when we are alone together. He enjoys me right now and he loves it when I simply enjoy right now with him.

*What joy to know that even as I am being refined, I am already seen as precious.*

*I can relax and enjoy being me.*

## **Rooted in Love – Spiritual Cleanout – by Kaelin Scott**

Is it just me, or is cleaning out the fridge one of the worst ways to spend thirty minutes? Seriously, I can find some really nasty stuff in there! It's not something I particularly enjoy, but it has to be done every once in a while. It's important to get rid of old, moldy stuff before it starts to stink. And it's good to wipe the shelves and drawers down once in a blue moon, too. Cleanliness is important, along with staying organized. Admittedly, I have never been very good at either of those things, but it's something I have been working on over the last several years.

If you know me at all, you already know that I like to compare ordinary things to spiritual life. Everyday life is chock full of metaphors if you really look for them. And of course, I couldn't help finding one of those metaphors as I was cleaning out my fridge. While I threw away rock hard cinnamon rolls and mushy grapes, I thought about the importance of cleaning out our hearts and minds. Every now and then, it's good to take inventory of our thoughts and feelings. There may be things we're holding onto that aren't healthy anymore. As we grow and mature, we have to throw some things away. We can't expect better things to come if we're stuck in the past. Sometimes we have to let go and make room for something new.

Just like the expiration date on a carton of milk, certain thoughts or behaviors start to turn sour if we let them linger too long. Spiritual growth means discarding fleshly behavior and replacing it with a Christ-like attitude. We must comb through our inner selves to determine which traits are of God, and which are of the world. Which thoughts and actions are pleasing to our Lord, and which ones cause us to be distant from Him?

In the Old Testament, God speaks about the pleasing aroma of His people's sacrifices. I don't know about you, but when I leave rotten food in my fridge, the aroma is far from pleasant! And you know, the same is true about our hearts. When we allow sinful nature to linger and fester, it can really start to stink. It can even make us nasty and unpleasant to be around, and God does not take joy in that. But when we clear out our fleshly ways, making room for His presence and influence in our hearts, we become beautiful and fragrant to Him. He delights in us when we become more like Him, glorifying Him through our thoughts, speech and actions.

If we want to be more like Jesus, we have to cleanse our hearts. It can be scary and painful and hard, but it's so worth it when we blossom into the women we were created to be. We can sit in our stink and let ourselves rot. Or we can choose to become something fresh and new!

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10

## **Simple Truths – One Big Bloom – by Marcy Lytle**

My husband is fascinated with gardens, especially roses. But any garden will do, really. When we vacation, he loves to roam through gardens, either natural ones or ones we pay to visit. I enjoy them as well, because plants are fascinating! All the colors, shapes, characteristics, smells, etc. are so interesting and somehow calming, as well, when we walk among a huge array of them – all arranged for visual stimulation!

Recently, he saw an agave (the century plant) blooming and decided to look it up and was amazed by what he found. The agave plant only produces one blooming stalk during its life, and that happens right before it dies! He came into the kitchen and stated, “Isn’t that so cool?” My first reaction and reply was, “No, that’s so sad!” I was thinking about our own lives and how sad that would be if we lived all our lives with no “blooms” and then right before we die, we produce something beautiful, but then it’s gone! Are you with me?

Then my husband kept reading and realized that the main stalk gets about 20-30 feet tall, and young plants spring up around its base. And that further reading gave me hope...for that plant...and for all of us!

After finishing, my husband said he thought what he had just read was great and there were so many lessons to be learned. He didn’t have time to write a story, so I told him to send me the short version...and I’d write it. At first, though, I was hesitant because I was only seeing the fact that the bloom never happened until right before death. How could that plant keep growing, and thriving, knowing there would be nothing produced for decades?

I suppose the best part of the information is the little plants that spring up around the big plant. And the fact that at the end, the plant doesn’t slowly wither up and disappear from view – it goes out with a profuse bloom that causes all to take notice! Now, that offers hope to all of us!

Here’s what my husband’s take was on the century plant:

1. Go out with a bang.
2. Pass on the mantle to the next generation.
3. Lift your head high.
4. Leave a lasting legacy.
5. Reach for the stars.

Honestly, if I had read that same story without his commentary, I would have gotten a whole different lesson from it. And that would have been how sad it is to live all of your life without blooming until the end...and I would have gotten off the page and never thought about that sorry plant again.

So, take what you want from this story. Either make sure you have a friend nearby that sees the glass half full instead of empty (my husband is that friend to me!)...or be amazed and encouraged yourself, as he was, at that awesome bloom and the shoots that arrive when the plant is gone.

I'm amazed, and I think it's a cool story. But if that plant were in a garden, I'd still probably wander on to a whole other area, while my husband stands there and marvels...



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – A and S – by Marcy Lytle**

Assumptions and Speculations. Both of these get us in trouble all the time. We assume something was meant or said or happened, and we're totally wrong because we don't see the whole picture. Or we speculate about intentions or actions and we believe so many lies, we're in a bad place for sure! I've been guilty of both of these and have to daily make a choice to steer away from each one!

Here's what I'm talking about:

- We assume he knows what we want so we say nothing, wait for him to act, and he doesn't. So we assume he doesn't love us. (Commonly happens in marriages)
- We assume when God doesn't answer a prayer right away that he either doesn't hear or doesn't care. (This is totally untrue!)
- We assume when we invited them to dinner that they would reciprocate, but they never did, so they must not like us. (We decide then to never invite them again.)

Have you found yourself thinking similar things? Most of those assumptions we make end up making us feel unloved, unappreciated and unnoticed. If we then continue to feel that way, our assumptions then affect our actions, and we actually push people away because we're hanging our heads so low!

- We speculate that because of Covid our future is bleak and without hope. (We are never without hope!)
- We speculate that because she looked sad that she must be having marital issues. (Speculation is dangerous!)
- We speculate that if our kids don't take extra classes and excel, they will not succeed in life. (This builds pressure which we don't need)

Speculation is a waste of time, it's a dangerous pastime, and is totally irrational. It's forming opinions about the future based on nothing but what we see or feel, not facts.

Reading and listening to social media can provide a feeding ground for assumptions and speculations. So many are misunderstood and judged, both the contributor to social media, and the recipient of social media. I've often seen friends "take a break" from Facebook or Instagram because of the information overload. Politics, family slander, opinions, too much information – it all floods the mind and then one of two things happens: We recognize it all and ignore the stuff and focus on the cute family photos and encouraging words...or we assume and speculate about those posting. The latter is no good!

Assuming and speculating are both a waste of time and energy, and can totally kill relationships. So how do we stop doing both? II Timothy reminds us to stay away from anything that produces a quarrel. Assumptions (where our minds come to a conclusion and a judgment against someone) destroy trust and love. Speculation (where our minds predict an outcome without knowledge) completely eliminates faith and hope.

I have found that when I start down the road of assuming and speculating, the longer I walk that path, the harder it is to turn around before I've already fallen in a ditch and sprained my mental ankles. It's best to start the day thinking on whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy – in that order. Then there's no room for the A and the S.

## **FRESH THYME - The Ditched** – by Marcy Lytle

We recently saw a movie called *The Last Shift* and I loved it, because it left me thinking about the story for days. I won't disclose the whole story here (because I hope you watch it!) but basically an older man has been the manager at a fast food drive through for 38 years and feels very proud of his job. He's taken ownership of the place and loves that he's been there so long...until a new arrival shows up.

This new arrival is a young man that will take the older man's job, because it's soon to be his last shift. He's retiring to move away and tend to his aging mom. This new arrival is a disgruntled youth and he starts making fun of the old man, chiding him for never doing anything with his life except make fries and burgers.

There are LOTS of other things that happened in the movie, with both of the characters, but this one particular observance is what I'm focusing on in this story. The older man felt good about himself, in fact he felt proud – until someone made him feel less than. Both characters end up showing their flaws, but this part made me sad.

There are all sorts of people in the world, and we only live in our little small circle of friends that are usually "like us" in economic status, looks, and beliefs. Yet there are those we are yet to meet that are totally unlike us, and the words and looks we offer might just make or break that person's day...or life.

This older man had found his niche, he was good at what he did, and the customers liked him. He had learned to manage the store well, and he was given responsibilities that showed him he was trusted. One thing the boy asked was, "How much do you get paid?" When the old man shared his hourly pay, the boy scoffed and alerted the old man to how little that was, and how the people he worked for were just using him. The old man was stunned and began to wonder about his job and even himself.

I'm pretty sure I've let something slip out of my mouth that made someone feel less than about themselves. And I know that I've received words and comments from others that have made me feel bad, as well.

I recall when we had some friends over not long after my son had been born and the lady commented on my weight "gain." I'm thinking she meant nothing by it, but it made me feel fat and I hated myself for months until I lost some weight. Another time, I had some friends over to see our new home and the first thing one said was how small my kids' rooms were, and I then was embarrassed and felt self-conscious about my home that I had loved.

Let me stop here and say that often we receive words and comments from others and they mean nothing by it, and we need to let their comments roll off our backs like water off a duck's back. However, for this story I'm talking about us – our mouths – our words – and to think before we speak.



The boy in the movie was irritated, disgruntled, and angry that he had to take a menial job because he was on probation, and he was stressed with his own life situation. He had an attitude, and he spouted off whatever he thought without any regard for the consequences of those words landing on tender ears. In this film, it was the ears of an older gentleman.

Sure, the older man maybe could have climbed the social ladder of success and perhaps gotten a more prestigious job, but he was happy. He loved what he did, and he was proud of it. Those two attitudes are something more we all need – the satisfaction with what we have and the smile that come with contentment.

But along comes social media, advertisements, new ideas and the constant barrage of words and directives to become more, do more, make more, and get more...and that sounds appealing. We look and we wonder and we want, and pretty soon we've driven right off the road into a ditch.

That boy's words sent the older gentleman into the ditch of despair, when he had been driving on the highway of happiness.

Note taken. I hope I remember that movie and its message (one of many) for a long time...and watch what I say to those around me that are like me...or unlike me...but still a friend worth valuing and affirming.

## **FRESH THYME – Great Advice – by Marcy Lytle**

Someone once told me, “You can’t do everything, and you don’t have to.” Those words, coming from a person I admired, changed my life. I no longer feel guilty when I don’t say yes to every question I’m asked, about joining in at this event or that, serving here or there, or even giving to him or her. It was real freedom to be able to say no, and know that I was perfectly okay and didn’t need to feel bad about my decision.

I think we all need to hear this same advice as the holiday season approaches. This year, of course, we may not be called up on to do as much as other years...but there is still all the activity, the baking, the giving, the doing...that we feel as though we “have” to get done.

We feel we have to make certain foods, bake pies and cookies, make everything from scratch and all that jazz.

No, we don’t have to.

We feel like we have to spend a certain amount, get that person a gift, send that person a card, have family photos made, and check off our entire to-do list for Christmas.

No, we don’t have to.

We feel like we need to make sure we give to those in need at this time, be thankful and have a good attitude all day, and keep a perfect house – for the holiday season.

No, we don’t have to.

What would happen if we let go of that pressure we put on ourselves to get it ALL done in record time, and something was left undone!

Gasp!

I follow a funny lady on Instagram and her motto is to “Charm without lifting an arm,” because she shares how to delegate everything so that it’s never a one woman show, with that said woman collapsing at the end of an event! Recently, she shared a whole story on all the pre-packaged food she purchased and how good it tasted, and how it left her time to do other things!

So here are some novel ideas, for some of us:

- If buying gifts is pressurized due to funds, don’t buy them. Be honest and let your family know that they are loved, but gifts won’t be given. Then breathe...and take the funds you do have and buy one nice thing for your immediate family.
- If family photos and all the outfits and finding the right spot and gathering everyone together is too much, then skip them this year. Snap a few candid shots of the kids, and

display them on Facebook, and be done. Sigh...and smile at the load you just let off your shoulders!

- If your to-do list is daunting and you mark off two things, only to add 15 more things, cross off at least half! Give one of those must-do jobs to another. Ask, unashamed, and without regret, for help. Then say thanks and be on your way.
- If you feel guilty because of needs you've heard of, but you just can't give this year, then say a prayer for that person and be at rest. Prayer is not something less-than, it's a great gift when backed with faith! Do it!
- If your house is a wreck and cleaning it is too overwhelming, enlist help. Pay for a house cleaner. Pay your teens! Tell your husband! (Don't pay him...) Assign duties, and then don't criticize their methods. Just give thanks that they pitched in...and you let them.

I don't know what else might be stressing you out during the holiday season. It might be sadness because someone is missing this year, it may be bitterness at loss that's occurred during Covid, or it might just be that you're tired and don't want to do it all for everyone else.

I'll say it again, what was said to me.

"You can't do everything, and you don't have to."

And guess what else? You're just fine if you don't.

Enjoy the holiday season, look out at the lights, give thanks for small things like candles burning and books to read by the fire, and sit down...and let go...and close your eyes and be still.

Happy Holidays.

## **FRESH THYME – I Can Do This – by Marcy Lytle**

Here's Texas fall weather: It's 40 degrees and chilly in the morning, and we're so excited because it finally feels seasonal...but wait! The forecast says today's high will be 88 degrees...say what? It happens repeatedly throughout the fall season where I live and it drives me nuts! We definitely know how to layer our clothing, because we have to, in order to survive! We might leave bundled in a sweater, and return home in a t-shirt. We often heat up the car at 6am only to blast the AC at 5pm. It really is enough to drive one bonkers, most days.

What I've started to realize is that when I know the heat is coming in the afternoon, I let it ruin the beauty of the cool in the morning. In other words, I have a hard time enjoying the moment, the present, the right now. And it's because I know it's going to end soon.

I do this with vacations as well. Before we ever leave, I start thinking about how sad it will be when vacation is over and we're back home. And the last day of vacation I feel sad most of the day – missing the current fun – because my mind is already back at work and busy again!

My husband is the opposite. He is very present in the moment and in the now. He doesn't think or worry about later. He lives and breathes for our morning hug, his cup of dark roast coffee, the present work list for the day, and then when the day is over – he lives for the moment with a nice walk, the sunset, and...you get the picture.

He's a man of peace 99% of the time, and I'm a woman of unrest maybe 50% of the time! However, I have learned a few ways to train myself to be more like him, more in the moment, so that I actually enjoy my days instead of fret that they're soon going to end! It's hard for me, and I have to discipline myself and make an effort, but when I do – I'm all the better for it. And so are those around me!

- I make myself pause and observe
- I relax my mind with the Word
- I give thanks for the cool AND the hot
- I make myself smile (it's amazing how often I realize I'm not!)
- I stay in contact with others who are unlike me
- I journal my thanks
- I pray and ask for His help

I have an active mind, and I'm sure that's part of why I'm always thinking ahead about the heat instead of pausing to enjoy the cool. I've been known to miss the joy of a show, because I'm texting or planning or working. Sometimes, I have to actually plan "down time" so that I can breathe and look up and look out, and see the trees blowing and the sun setting...because it all happens sometimes without my seeing it at all!

If you're like my husband, God bless you. What a gift you've been given. And if you're like me, let's link arms (well, as best we can) and purpose to end the year of 2020 by being present,

taking note, giving thanks, and stepping out in the cool breezes and smiling big...and then doing that all over again when the heat rises. We can do this!



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

December 2020



TIPS

## **The Dressing - A New Bag for You** – by Marcy Lytle

It's the end of the year 2020, and I'm guessing you've not gotten yourself a new bag. Or maybe you have! But nothing picks up the mood like a new purse that you then fill and organize and carry, with all your outfits! This time, we're choosing basics – in black or brown or gray or beige – bags that look chic and sophisticated – yet practical and useful. They are timeless bags that will go with your loungewear, your dresswear, or your in between clothes that you scoot about town in. Enjoy shopping!

**The Dome Satchel** – It's black (two other color options), it has two carrying handles, looks sleek and classic, and it's so pretty.

<https://www.target.com/p/small-dome-zip-closure-satchel-handbag-a-new-day/-/A-78655316?preselect=77460255#Ink=sameta>

**The Gray Zip Closure Tote** – Gray goes with everything! And this bag has cute details on the handle, and a little half-moon pouch included! Look at the side zippers! These Target bags are super affordable, too!

<https://www.target.com/p/vr-nyc-zip-closure-tote-handbag-with-half-moon-pouch-gray/-/A-80371680#Ink=sameta>

**Hobo Handbag** – I love this bag – it's pricey – but it's leather. It's so pretty to carry on your elbow or over your shoulder. The flap that keeps it shut just makes the bag!

<https://www.target.com/p/bolo-elaina-flap-hobo-handbag-leather/-/A-53809014#Ink=sameta>

**The Reversible Tote** – Can't choose between brown or black? Get both, in this reversible bag that has a tie closure, and looks plain yet sophisticated, no matter what outfit you're wearing!

<https://www.target.com/p/reversible-tie-closure-tote-handbag-a-new-day/-/A-79363696?preselect=78782161#Ink=sameta>

**Satchel Handbag** - in this beautiful Cognac! This bag is a neutral color, has lots of detail, and is pretty inside and out! It's got a little more pizzazz to it, if you like that sort of thing!

<https://www.target.com/p/vr-nyc-zip-closure-satchel-handbag/-/A-80886299?preselect=80604639#Ink=sameta>

**Zip Top Tote** – Maybe beige is your color. Check out this cute tote with the pocket on front! Have you had this color purse before? I have not!

<https://www.target.com/p/zip-top-tote-handbag-a-new-day-8482-beige/-/A-78648041#Ink=sameta>



**The Backpack** – These are great for travel, but now they have choices that also look great for any outfit wherever you go! This dome zip closure backpack has straight lines and doesn't look frumpy like some backpacks do. Love it!

<https://www.target.com/p/dome-zip-top-commuter-backpack-a-new-day/-/A-78655319?preselect=79773469#ink=sameta>

The bag I'm carrying I got at Marshalls, and their inventory changes frequently. But check discount stores for name brand bags at half the price!

## **Seven for You – How We Thrived – by Marcy Lytle**

2020's been quite the ride, and everyone seemingly has found some sort of "new normal" as we all continue to navigate life that is anything but normal. We thought we'd ask our panel of women what newness they've embraced that has helped them thrive during this time. Maybe you will want to try one of these suggestions as well.

### Journal/Write

The one most important thing that kept me going this year has been my faith. I do a devotional every morning that my son started online last January and I started leading a women's Sunday school class during the pandemic. These keep me pretty focused in God's word. Also, I write. I work on a novel I started. I work on my blog and my column in this magazine. And I write poetry. I encourage every lady to try this. Even just writing your thoughts in a notebook or journal occasionally can be very soothing and uplift you. And you don't have to be the best at writing. It'll be fun to go back in a few months or a year and read what you were thinking.

<https://mailchi.mp/f3aec7eecb56/day-1-90-days-of-prayer-12515366?e=c70207314c>

### Visit/Connect

I enjoyed spending time with my Mom. She lives alone outside of Manor, Texas in the country. At 84, she's in the high-risk group. Taking the drive to see her once a week, to bring her groceries, her favorite Starbucks latte, or a meal from Whataburger, made me feel so much better. We go on car rides now. We talk and laugh and just drive to nowhere in particular. For all that we may have lost during the pandemic, the most precious has been our time with those we love. Finding ways to still connect lifts our spirits and gives us hope.

This is probably a common answer, but with my family unable to visit, Zoom has been a welcomed addition to my computer and phone apps!

### Read/Listen

I found a new app called Dwell. It is a scripture reading app. The app gives me the ability to listen to scripture with multiple voices, intimate background music, and customize. There are many different reading plans. Love it!

### Makeover!

I renovated a bedroom! The wallpaper shown here is the original 1940's wall paper I was able to restore.

We completely cleaned our garage and made  $\frac{3}{4}$  of it a playroom for the kiddos, with a coca cola theme, with comfy chairs, a TV, gumball machine, neon signs, slush machine and popcorn maker. Super pleased with how it's turned out...

### Learn

Joining an online home decorating group has been such a breath of fresh air for me. The Cozy Minimalist Community and the leaders teaching videos are available three times a year to new members. Every week for six weeks there is a video posted with homework to do that helps you progress through updating a room of your choice. One of the foundations is determining your own style and working from there. They also support using pieces that you already have,

repurposing furniture, and shopping for previously owned items. And the best part...To join the community, watch the videos, and get input from thousands of people when you post a question.... Is \$10 a month only for as long as you want to be a part of the group. It has been a fun and engaging activity for someone (like me) who struggles with all things decorating.

## Subscribe

I now subscribe to two deliveries that come monthly, and I've so enjoyed them arriving. Ipsy brings me a makeup bag with five new products to try, and they've been great. I love trying new makeup items but get overwhelmed, so this offers me choices and new things to try. I've found some new products I really like! I also subscribe to The Grove cleaning items and have enjoyed them as well. So far, I've loved the scents and the product availability (and they arrive so quickly!).

## Focus

Having lost my husband of 45 years last October 31, just two months before Christmas, that season was really just a blur. But thanks to the healing power of God and his CONSTANTLY ABIDING spirit, this season looks much brighter, despite the lockdowns California is still experiencing. One of the things that has enabled me to press forward this year is being pastor of a church! When my husband passed away, the church elected me (100%) to assume the senior pastoral duties. While I was / am in a STEEP learning curve, even though I've worked alongside my husband in ministry for many years, it gave me something to be constantly focused upon that was very far outside of myself. I feel like I'm in a good place now, just passed one year without him, but I have hope for the future and I'm asking God for BIG things in our church! He's a BIG God, so it's no problem for Him.

## Puzzles

My family has stayed so very close to me during this year and I so appreciate that! One thing that has helped me immensely, which I've never done before, is working on jigsaw puzzles. My brother-in-law makes beautiful things from wood and he made me a large puzzle board; it has two parts, the main board to assemble the puzzle on and the smaller board to arrange the pieces on. I can leave it out on my dining table to work on, but if I need that space I can lay the smaller board on top of the larger board and store it away! I've found a particular type of puzzle is really like, called Dowdle. You can get them on Amazon and sometimes, at Costco. They are beautiful scenes and locations, which are all based on artwork done by the maker, Eric Dowdle. I've passed many evening hours alone working on them, but my grandchildren LOVE to help me and I've discovered how differently each of them approaches a puzzle! The youngest has such an unbelievable eye for finding the right SHAPE (he is COLOR BLIND!!) and fitting it into the right spot, in seconds, even I've been looking for ages! It's really amazing. Another loves the solitude it provides and asks me if I would mind if he works on it (which I don't), and yet another loves all the colors and handling all the little pieces. It's been wonderful having these puzzles to work on, either alone or with all my little helpers, which range from ages 9-11.

## Getaways

Thriving during this year and its changes has been hard for me, personally. I like to be on the go, and having to stay in wasn't great fun. It helped me to have plans for each weekend to explore different parts of my town or small towns nearby. We often chose an area, and picked out a few things to do in each place like: a park, shopping, an eatery (often ate in the car) and just the architecture or scenery in that area for a drive. Getting away often to observe and enjoy helped lift my spirits greatly!

#### Food Experiences

This year we all ate home a lot more, or brought takeout. Instead of just eating at the table or on our laps watching TV, we tried to vary up our experiences. Sometimes, we made picnics on the floor (with tablecloth and candles and a basket), we arranged food on boards for a different setup, we set two chairs out in the family room and made a pretend theater with all the snacks and a blanket, etc. Other times, we set up the card table, added a tablecloth and vase of flowers, made a fancy dinner for two and called it a date!

## **In the Kitchen – Make and Share – by Marcy Lytle**

It's December, and all of us are spinning, trying to wrap our heads around the fact that Christmas is so near! Baking and cooking are always part of the holiday hoopla, so why not incorporate it into gift giving as well? It's fun to give something homemade. So while you're making a batch of something, creating a board, or setting out a dinner for your family, why not make two – one to give away!?

Here are some ideas:

### **Granola**

This recipe is one of our favorites, but we have lots of recipes we love. We make it about once every other week, and store it in these glass jars that sit on a tray, on the counter. It's easy to find these jars, fill them with the granola, and give one away to your kids or a neighbor!

#### Ingredients:

- 4 c old fashioned oats
- ½ c chopped pecans
- ½ c chopped walnuts
- ½ c ground flax seed
- 2 t ground cinnamon
- 1/3 c canola oil
- 2/3 c pure maple syrup
- 1 t maple flavoring (I didn't have this, just omitted it)
- ¼ t salt

Preheat oven to 300 degrees, line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Mix oats, nuts, seed and cinnamon in a large bowl. In a small bowl, stir oil, syrup, flavoring and salt, then pour over the oat mixture and stir to coat.

Spread the mixture evenly onto the baking sheet, and bake about 40 minutes til lightly browned. Let it cool before breaking into chunks. Store in an air-tight container.

### **Chicken Gnocchi Pesto Soup (serves 4)**

We just made this recently and it was so easy, and so good. I made the pesto ahead of time (see below) and then the soup was put together in no time at all. Just package up the ingredients, add a couple of soup bowls or a big soup spoon and a tea towel, the recipe – and another gift is done! (Obviously, just wrap up the non-refrigerated items – they can buy the rest!)

#### Ingredients:

- 1 jar (15 oz) roasted garlic Alfredo sauce
- 2 c water
- 2 c rotisserie chicken, roughly chopped

- 1 t Italian seasoning
- ¼ t salt
- ¼ t pepper
- 1 pkg (16 oz) potato gnocchi
- 3 c coarsely chopped fresh spinach
- 4 t prepared pesto

In a large saucepan, combine the first 6 ingredients and bring to a gentle boil, stir occasionally. Stir in gnocchi and spinach, and cook until gnocchi float, about 5 minutes. Top each serving with a dollop of pesto.

### **Roasted Walnut Pesto**

This is the pesto I made for the above soup. It makes enough to fill a small jar. Just fill it, seal it, wrap with a bow – and keep in fridge until you're ready to give it away. It's green. And with a red bow, it just speaks Merry Christmas!

- ½ c walnuts
- 2 c fresh basil, packed leaves
- 1/3 c Pecorino Romano Cheese
- ¼ c Parmesan cheese, grated
- 2 garlic cloves
- ½ c extra virgin olive oil
- 1 T fresh lemon juice
- ¼ c fresh Italian parsley leaves, packed

Toast walnuts til just fragrant. Place all ingredients in food processor and blend til smooth. Season with salt and pepper.

### **Marble Cake**

They used to sell this at Starbucks, and a family member really loved it. So, I found a similar recipe on line, and it worked – and was quite easy to make! It's a great loaf to set on a cutting board, wrap up and give away. It needs to be eaten right away, so that it doesn't dry out. So tasty!

#### Ingredients:

- 2/3 c unsalted butter at room temp
- 1 c sugar
- 3 eggs
- 2 c flour
- 1 ½ t baking powder
- ½ t baking soda
- ¼ t kosher salt
- ¼ c milk

- 2 t vanilla extract
- 3 T unsweetened cocoa powder + 1 T milk

Preheat oven to 390 degrees. Grease a 9X5 loaf pan with butter, then dust with flour.

Cream butter and sugar til light and fluffy. Add in eggs and mix.

In another bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Combine with the wet ingredients and mix. Add in the milk, and mix til just incorporated.

Divide batter into two bowls. In the first bowl stir in the vanilla. In the second bowl, stir in the cocoa powder and 1 T milk.

Using a large spoon, dollop about 1/3 of the vanilla batter into pan and spread evenly. Using another spoon, dollop the chocolate batter in the middle, pushing down slightly and leaving some vanilla visible on the edges. Repeat with vanilla and chocolate as before (always leaving some vanilla visible on edges). Run a sharp knife through batter in swirling motion.

Bake for 10 minutes, then lower heat to 350, and bake 40 minutes or until cake tester comes out clean. Transfer to a cooling rack for 15 min at least, then remove from pan and slice.

### **A Board of Goodies**

This is a fun gift, or a fun presentation for the family get together. Use a large seasonal plate as the base, make a cheese ball for the center, add grapes, nuts, crackers and dark chocolate. So good and fun! This would be a great gift to give someone as well – include the plate, crackers, nuts and chocolate – and let them provide the grapes!

## **Three Moms – Sheer Joy**

### **Mom to Three, ages 9, 7 and 5:**

One of the first things we do to celebrate the joy of the season is getting our tree. We typically go to a Christmas tree farm here locally, usually after thanksgiving. We get to go on a hayride and cut down a tree. It's outdoors, and the kids love picking out a tree – whether it's warm or cold, dry or rainy. It's a tradition! The trees aren't perfectly shaped. We've picked short ones, wide ones, and all shapes. This reminds me that the joy of the season is enjoying our time together and finding a tree that's fun – not cookie cutter.

We also have advent calendars, the chocolates, or sock boxes, and this encourages the kids' excitement for the season! We have a wooden activity that has a book with it, it has a wooden start that is hidden at night, then the kids find it. On Christmas Eve, the star lands on top of the manger, and we talk about the Christmas story. Another fun tradition!

This particular year, I really want to create a new tradition for our new house . Maybe a night of s'mores by our chiminea for a tradition and sing carols! I want to do a craft too, maybe the construction paper loops to hang up!

This crazy year has helped us slow down and have perspective. We do not want to miss free time to go our city's Christmas tree lighting – in our masks – because it's so fun to be with our community – even with social distancing!

Lastly, our kids pick out a new ornament each year to add to our tree!

My encouragement to all of us is that “less is more.” The tree and the gifts and the decorations are not going to be perfect. My kids hang ornaments in clumps and on the back, some don't match, and some are broken. Instagram or picture perfect is not what matters. I learned it the hard way when our dog pulled out tree over and broke all our ornaments! But finally, I realized that we could get new ones, and the kids loved that process. We don't need to compare our Christmas to the Christmas of other moms.

Nothing can take away our spirit of the holidays and the spirit of Christmas. Kids will follow what we do. We can be present, and not sweat the small stuff!

### **Mom of Four, ages 10 on down:**

For Christmas traditions and joy, we always get a Christmas tree after Thanksgiving – a real tree. In West Texas most people don't get real trees, but we found a tree farm not too far from us! They grow different, non-typical trees, as well as some of the normal types. There's a scavenger hunt, hot chocolate, etc. so we make it a fun day. Taco soup at home and decorate, so we make it a whole day excursion.

We also do an advent devotional. We found one last year that we love that's builds...it wall works together. There's a sweet opportunity to really do something for others! This brings the



message of Christmas into our home creatively. Each lesson makes a link, so when all 25 are completed, we have a link of devotionals that make a paper chain for the Christmas tree!

Mom to two little girls:

We love the idea of purposefully scheduling and thinking of joy, because it's easy to get stressed with getting the "perfect" tree, getting gifts wrapped and being busy.

My kids are young, and we are just now starting new traditions with our little girls. One thing we decided that at the end of the year we will close our office for two weeks. We own a dental office and we've committed to having time with our family, unwind and close! This brings us joy most – being with our family. We have to *intentionally* schedule that time – to close – and we are!

Another joyful thing we do is planning a fun activity, nothing that costs too much, but just fun! While living in Alaska, we visited an ice sculpture museum. This year we have scheduled with our girls and some friends to ride the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad – the Polar Express! It runs through the mountains of North Carolina. WE will dress up in Christmas pajamas, having cookies, read the Christmas story, all dressed up and joyful!

The last thing I love is baking – the girls and me! We love making homemade chocolate chip cookies for Santa, casseroles and comfort food. We love making Monkey bread and banana nut bread, again!

One more thing – the Advent Calendar – chocolate ones! My aunt started this tradition for me, and I've continued it through early year of marriage, and now with my kids. When we open up a chocolate, we say something that brings us joy – the number one joy being Jesus!

## **Tried and True – Wrapping and Stacking – by Marcy Lytle**

How do you wrap your gifts? I feel like I've done it so many ways! We've wrapped where each person has his/her own paper, or their own color of ribbon, or even their photo on their name tag! That was a lot of work! Some use all gift bags, so that no wrapping is involved. That sounds lovely, except I've found that gift bags don't stack very well under the tree. And one year we had color coordinated solids and prints so that they looked pretty.

This year we're wrapping with newspaper! Yes, we STILL take the printed newspaper and we started saving it all a month or so ago, so that we'd have enough to wrap. I did it to save money on wrapping paper, to be useful by recycling, and I thought the black and white would be pretty – with colorful ribbon wrapped around!

Michaels has bunches of stray ribbons in a bundle for sale, and I found some pretty colored ribbons (to match my home décor) earlier in the year, so I have a stash. I also have some neutral bows in whites, silvers and grays. I used a few bows, but I've found that bows prohibit stacking, as well!

For name tags, I plan to just write their names on the newspaper with a thick tip marker.

For placing the gifts under the tree, we put the larger boxes near the back to use as bases and stackers, and go from there. But it could also be fun to place little piles of gifts around the entire room, so they're not all under the tree. It's even fun to hide some tiny gifts among the branches of the tree!

I absolutely love wrapping gifts. I love snacking, watching a Christmas movie, hearing the crackling of a fire or listening to holiday music...while taping and cutting and tying the ribbon round and round.

Wrapping gifts can be so stressful, or it can be one of the most relaxing things we do this season. So why not MAKE it relaxing.

We can:

Wrap a few gifts each night

Have a gift-wrapping date or family night

Designate one room as the wrapping room so it's not all over the house

Wrap little gifts in fabric or bandannas (hey, I think I'll add that to my wrap!) with twine

Leave some gifts unwrapped and just covered with a blanket

Breathe and enjoy and pray for each person as you wrap

Dance after every few gifts that are completed

Smile often and give thanks for what you can give and what will have to wait

However you wrap or don't wrap, figure out a way to make it pleasant this year. Don't stress to make it perfect. But do enjoy the giving, not of just the gift, but of the process that it takes to give that gift to the ones you love.



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Grace to Run – by Marcy Lytle**

Here's the story of my husband's experience with coming to faith in Jesus. He was 7 years old and sitting on the back seat of a church, next to an elderly man. My husband's parents were busy serving and singing, so there Jon sat with this old man, as he listened. It was near the end of the service when an old hymn was playing, I think it was "Just as I Am." Something in the lyrics or maybe something the pastor had said before the song, or perhaps something in the atmosphere struck, and struck this little boy hard.

He realized that he needed Jesus. It was like he knew that he needed a Savior, and when the pastor asked for anyone to come, Jon went. In fact, he ran. He said he ran down to the front and fell on his knees and wept, as Jesus welcomed him and received him...and has now kept him for decades since.

I'm telling you this story to encourage you parents to give your kids space and time to run. The best way to do this is by:

- Living as an example of one that loves Jesus. Not perfectly, but humbly and simply loving Him and loving others.
- Attending church (virtually or at home or in person) faithfully, not out of a have-to, but because you want to be there with others – no matter how flawed you all may be – to worship Him.
- Playing music to fill the air of your home with lyrics that speak to the soul and lift up His name.
- Allowing quiet time to reflect, as a family, away from the madness...in the still of nature or the quiet of reading.
- Showing them unconditional love with boundaries too, leading them and pointing them to His love.
- Giving them plenty of hugs, affirmation, instruction, and time...demonstrating the love of their Father.
- Asking forgiveness and offering it freely, when wrongs have been done and tears have been shed.

Some say coming to faith in Jesus as a child doesn't stick. But it stuck with my husband. He remembers that Sunday morning clearly and distinctly, and if you ask him about it, he might tear up – because it was that amazing and tender and holy – when Jesus became real.

My husband has the most amazing faith and peace of anyone I know. And I believe it all started with the grace and the space to run.

Give that gift to your kids this season, and ask Jesus to sing and woo them to his feet, where he will kindly lift them to his lap and hold them forever.

## **A Night to Remember – Dormant December – by Marcy Lytle**

Do your kids know what dormant means? It's a good time of year to teach them this word! It's when things slow down for a bit, they don't grow, but they will reappear soon. It's a good time of year to show them the things that are dormant in the yard, and then talk about this funny word as you come in for hot cocoa and the story of Jesus' birth.

*Preparation: The family will just need paper and colored markers and/or pens!*

### **Take the kids on a yard tour:**

Show them how grass doesn't really grow high in the winter, because it's dormant.

Talk about, and ask them, about the animals they know that hibernate in the winter and why.

Point to the trees that have lost their leaves and talk about the root system that keeps them alive so that they bloom again come spring.

### **Take the kids inside by the fire:**

Tell them the story of Jesus birth as they listen (you can use a manger scene, or let the kids draw as you share)

Long before Jesus was ever born, his birth was foretold. This means that God spoke to people about the coming Savior of the World and inspired them to hope and believe. The world was a mess, and people needed hope! You could say their faith was dormant. Many heard about Jesus and hoped he would come, but over time they grew weary in believing.

Is there something you hope for, but it seems to never come? Like maybe Christmas morning? It takes a whole 365 days to wait for it!

### **Have the kids write 365 on their paper:**

A year of 365 days is a long time to wait for Christmas morning!

Finally, it was time for Jesus to be born. An angel spoke to a young lady named Mary and she became pregnant with God's son – not because she was married to a man yet – but because God give her this special gift to be Jesus' mother. And Jesus was born, just like it was foretold for years and years before. The Savior had come. The One who would bring hope to the world!

### **Ask the kids to draw the baby in a manger:**

How do you feel when Christmas finally comes? We all can barely sleep because we are so excited!

That's the way those who had believed and hoped felt, when they heard the news that baby Jesus was born! Their dormant faith (remember it's when something sleeps for a bit but then is awakened and alive again.) The wise men walked a far distance, as their faith was inspired by the news that Jesus the Savior was born.

**Have the kids add the big star in the sky that the wise men followed:**

Jesus' birth brought to life all the years of waiting and waiting, and now the Savior of the World lives forever and ever. We never have to wait, like they did. He lives among us, in us, and for us. Isn't that awesome?

We've been waiting a long time for Christmas, and every year, it finally comes. Our hope that sometimes goes dormant (to sleep for a bit) is suddenly awakened on Christmas Eve, when we go to sleep awaiting all the gifts under the tree!

**Ask the kids to draw a Christmas tree:**

The best part of Christmas is awakening the faith in all of us that Jesus came, the Savior of the World, God's only son, to save us all if we just believe, love Him most, and love others well.

Let each child share their pictures and ask them again what dormant means, and remind them that there's always good in waiting...even in the dead of winter...for life to appear. And it always will, because Jesus lives in our hearts forever and ever. Amen.

## **I Don't Do Teens – Holiday Happiness – by Marcy Lytle**

Attitude is in your face, isn't it, when you're raising teenagers? And one attitude that seems to surface during the holidays is that of not wanting to hang with the family. Or maybe your teen feels too old to participate with the younger kiddos present, or uninterested in the older folks, or unwilling to help out without a gripe and a long sigh... I suppose attitude comes with the teenage years, but having it surface during the holidays is not fun for anyone, especially Mom!

Maybe, just maybe, a few tips can help out with making the season merry and bright, whether you have a mix of ages in kiddos, are visiting an aging grandparent, or need help with the baking, or are hoping that Christmas morning is all smiles from everyone!

- Sit down and have a family talk. Communicate what is expected from each family member, and the attitude you'd like to see go with that action. Let them speak and tell how they feel, then you share how you feel, and come to a family agreement. Communication helps.
- Give teens a task. Don't just assume he/she will hop up and help you set the table, or clean their room, or show up for the Hallmark movie watching. Let them be in charge of a few things, give them ownership. Maybe they can put together a food board, or create a centerpiece, or plan a family night. If they help plan, maybe they'll smile when the plan comes together!
- Make schedules. It might help to have a calendar with dates and even daily times, where teens are allowed to retreat to their rooms for down time, and other times where they are required to be present with family. Hang a family calendar, so teens know what's coming and what to expect.
- Listen to them. If he really stomps about and she throws a fit when you tell them you need help, or an event is about to take place, listen to their feelings. Maybe there's a real problem you can all address, together. Listening is half the battle.
- Pray together. They might snarl at this one, but bring the family together and pray about the upcoming weeks. Ask each family member to give thanks, as you pray together for others and thank Him for the opportunity to give, expecting nothing in return.
- Plan to Give. Don't exclude your teens when you give. Include them. Let them wrap the bread you're delivering, find the directions to that elderly person's home, make cards, or do something – so that they feel a part of the gift as well.
- Thank Them. Thank your teens when you see them get a job done, hold their head high, bite their tongue, or smile through a less than exciting event. Tell them how much you appreciate them and love them. I promise, those seeds are being planted, and they are taking root, even if you can't see the fruit just yet.

Holidays are a blast, but they can be ruined with a foul attitude from our teens, our spouse, or ourselves! And for sure, someone is bound to slip up, so offer grace, pull together as a family, and look around at the lights, the hope, and the glory of Christmas.



## **Chipped China - Engaging the Senses this Season – by Jennifer Lytle**

We have been given God's Word to experience, understand, and come to know His personhood. We have also been given a physical body with the ability to engage in knowing Him as well. May this season bring you what you need most to find restoration in those areas of your life that have been out of balance.

We can engage our senses to find joy in our present moment. Grounding, mindfulness, and being present are some of activities that we can partake in to enjoy the life we have been given, the one we are living. Should you find your mind roaming to the far corners of . . . whatever normally pre-occupies your thoughts, I encourage you to take stock using your senses.

### **Sight**

Thank you, God, for the beautiful lights of this season. Soft lights are everywhere – from candles to tree lights. They twinkle, blink, and make a silent movie. Thank you, God, for the [gift of sight](#). Open my eyes so I can see your wonder and glory around me today. Amen.

### **Sound**

Thank you, Jesus, for the sounds of laughter and children. It is such a gift to be able to hear giggling, chatting, and joviality. Thank you, Jesus, for the sounds of wind through the branches of the trees, against bells and chimes. Thank you, Jesus, for [giving me ears to hear](#). May you remove any blockage that has kept me hearing your wonder, promises, or instruction. Amen.

### **Smell**

Thank you, Lord, for the aromas of food! Thank you, Lord, for even the smell of fire. Thank you for the refreshing smell of Cedar trees and the memories they bring. May my praises be a sweet [aroma](#) to you.

### **Touch**

Thank you, Lord, for the ability to touch Pine needles and Cedar leaves. I feel the prickly needles, the softness and sharpness of the Cedar. Thank you for the warm embrace of family and friends. Thank you for the extended hand that I can touch and hold. Thank you, Lord, for your physical touch in my heart and body.

### **Taste**

Thank you, Father, for the taste of chocolate, spices, and coffee. Thank you for supplying food for my family today. Thank you for the ability to discern sweet from sour and sharp from mild. Help me, Father, to [taste your goodness](#).

After engaging the senses in a simple practice of experience, the body relaxes, and the brain has begun to use the prefrontal cortex. If this exercise helped you, I would be delighted to hear about your experience!



James 1:17

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

Happy Holidays!

## **Tiny Living – The Best Choice** – by Leyanne Enterline

Rejoice!

Rejoice!

And again I say, "Rejoice!"

That has actually not been my word for this season we have been in, but something I so need to continually practice.

I ended my last story with saying we will rejoice in the small things. So I started really thinking about that. I get so frustrated living so tiny and not having enough space for "things."

But in the long run, are we closer as a family? Yes.

Do we have lots of good talks and movie nights and just hang out times? Yes.

We have nowhere to go! So when this is all over and we can spread out again one day, I'm sure I'll look back and see what a blessing this actually was.

I am beyond thankful that my parents let us wash our clothes at their place, but does that get exhausting? Yes. Driving back and forth consistently throughout the week is a bit of a pain. But I am rejoicing in my little bit of quiet time. I try to take advantage of that drive and listen to church messages or sing praise and worship or just have some peace and quiet. It's only a five minute drive, but with all the stinky baseball clothes that drive multiplies into maybe five, five minute drives, back and forth. So I will rejoice with my peaceful drive.

I also started to look more at my surroundings. I usually just drive to my parents' house without paying attention, besides making sure a deer doesn't try to commit suicide! I really feel like they play a game with me! Galloping out in front of me and the last second trying to give me a heart attack! On my drive, I started to notice the beautiful pieces of land. Most homes out here are on a couple of acres and it's been fun to really look at what people have turned their property into. Most have beautiful homes on their land, with workshops, but some have ratty, old lake homes that have not been updated but have lots of character. Close by us there are cows, donkeys, mules, goats...so fun to see!

So when I get frustrated at our situation, I will do my best to choose to do what?

Rejoice!



YOU

## Healthy Habits – Daily Three – by Marcy Lytle

I've realized over the past year how healthy it's been to offer thanks. I started on January 1 journaling three things a day that I'm thankful for and I continued all year to 1000. This activity was prompted when I read *A Thousand Gifts* by Ann Voskamp. I learned so much about myself and God, and felt like my heart grew two sizes as I went on this journey of training my heart to be thankful, observe what it was I was thankful for, and then write it down. It became a habit, a healthy one, and here's why I think it's healthy to continue:

- I realized that mostly I thanked God for the obvious (food, clothes, shelter) but overlooked the hidden (a wave, a text, a piece of chocolate).
- It took time each day to reflect upon, think about, and then write about what it was that I was thankful for.
- Giving thanks for three things turned my heart upward when perhaps it had been downward all day long.
- Three things, on some days, were hard to find after I'd journaled hundreds, but I kept looking, because I wanted them to all be different.
- Often, my thanksgivings were just for temporal trivial things, but nonetheless, they made me smile at His attention to detail in my life with blessings in the leaves swaying in the wind, or the fact that a package arrived so soon...
- It was a great year to do this exercise, as it was a year that I could have easily focused on all the negative; but giving thanks shifted my focus to the good.
- Journaling thanksgivings in a pretty book has given me reference, a place to look back on, and place to grow from, as I start 2021.

I'm hoping to journal again 1000 thanks, but next year I'm going to be more purposeful to really look at life, creation, my heart, others, and so many more beautiful gifts in the world and notice every intricate detail of my Father's hand at work in all of it. I'm hoping that I will look forward to this daily exercise as much as I look forward to a big bucket of popcorn, knowing the satisfaction and thrill it will bring when I'm through.

Healthy habits aren't just running and bending and eating and minimalizing, although that's mostly what we're told that brings us good health. Healthy habits include daily noticing, thanking, praising and growing as we realize how full our hearts really are when we stop to acknowledge the One at work making them pump steadier and stronger.

## **Strengthening Your Core - Peer Pressure – for Adults - by Marcy Lytle**

Peer pressure is usually something we see in teens, we teach our teens to not succumb to it, and we are greatly grieved when they do! However, I think peer pressure as an adult, on into our aging years, is still present and still just as detrimental to our mental, spiritual and physical health! Hopefully, we've outgrown the pull to do bad things with a bad crowd of friends, but what about the pull to perform or produce?

The Christmas season is a time when the pressure is on, and here are a few reminders to steer clear and stay true to who you are and what's best for your family:

Maybe they're not giving gifts this year, or they've "outgrown" gift giving and only give to the littles. That's fine. But if you still enjoying giving and getting and all that jazz, do it. Don't let what they do sway you.

Maybe she's decorating her house with five Christmas trees, baking cookies and freezing them, and doing all the things and you start to feel anxious that you won't even get your one tree up before Christmas. Lay that anxiety aside in favor of savoring the season.

Maybe she's just handed you a homemade gift she's put together for you, and you have nothing to give her in return. Don't run out and grab something, just say thank you and enjoy that something.

Maybe this pandemic has you staying cautious and you're not gathering and socializing, like they are with their friends and family. They can't believe you're "living in fear." Shed those judgments like water off a duck's back and rest in what you know to be best for you and yours...

Maybe she's started a diet plan and talks about it constantly and how much weight she's shed, and you're in your kitchen baking homemade bread because you want to. Enjoy that homemade bread, and let her enjoy her new self...and continue to be friends.

Maybe she's spent thousands on a home renovation and she's showing pictures on social media of her closet that's bigger than your family room, and you start looking at your home with downer eyes. Lift up your eyes and give thanks for the beauty that's yours, in your home, and your space.

Maybe she's lonely, this other friend lost her job, a neighbor has Covid and your own parent is declining, and you feel an ungodly amount of pressure to give all and be all and do all to help all. You can't. But He can. And he will help you choose wisely, and leave the rest up to HIM.

I don't know what makes you feel peer pressure. If you never feel any, I'm applauding your maturity. But many of us still do, from time to time, when we listen, watch and hear what others are doing – and then we gripe, feel less than, and pity our own situation.

Tis the season to rejoice and give thanks in all things, and it's amazing what those two things will do to bring peer pressure down to a low simmer and eventually calm waters...

Merry Christmas.



## **Life Right Now – Quite at Peace – by Bethany Gomez**

I am sad to announce that this will be my last article for a little while...

This decision of course caused me to look back over my writing journey. My very first article came out June of 2018. I was shocked to discover that it has been almost two in a half years of writing my “Life Right Now” articles each month which amounts to almost 30 articles! I couldn’t have done this for as long as I did without the most amazing editor, Marcy Lytle. I’m so thankful she gave me the opportunity to encourage others with my writing. I hope that I have. It has been an honor to be a part of this uplifting magazine. I am sincerely so sad that this will not be a part of my life anymore, but maybe down the road I will get another chance to write again.

However, writing does not come easy to me and I wouldn’t say it is one of my favorite past times or hobbies. However, my confidence level has slowly increased over these years, thanks in large part to Marcy. I’m a perfectionist, so I began this writing journey thinking my writing was not good enough at all. But she kept affirming me that it was indeed good and that I had a great writing voice that is honest and relatable, and that my writing was not just a rambling mess! (Like this sentence!) I’m still not 100% sure my writing is that great. I even think saying it’s “good” is being generous, but for the most part I have been able to overcome these nagging perfectionist thoughts, with the help of God. Otherwise, I have a feeling that I would’ve quit writing, a while back.

Also, I remember mentioning in a past article about how being vulnerable is really kind of scary. It is like handing over your journal for others to read. It has been quite the challenge sometimes to muster up enough courage to write my thoughts, my life updates, my fears, my successes, my failures, or my feelings for other people to read. I sometimes worried what people might think of me. But like I have said before, if my writing helps one person to feel like they are not alone or encourages anyone to get to know Jesus better, then that is what helps my fears dissipate. I have to work hard to remember that the only one whose thoughts of me I should care about, is Jesus’. He even knows all the things I don’t share, and yet He still loves me.

With all that said, I honestly cannot believe that this is the last month in the year that no one saw coming; that is, except for God. He knew what would happen this year and every year before and every year after, which is very comforting to me. It has been a trying year for me, for people close to me, for so many. And I’m sure, in one way or another, 2020 has been hard for everyone. I believe that God doesn’t cause pain and suffering; I will believe that to my dying day. Pain and suffering is the result of living in a fallen world. God so desires us to draw closer to Him during times of great loss or suffering, so that He can comfort us. I am under no impression that when this year ends that life will be rainbows and sunshine. No, this next year will have troubles of its very own, but I know that God will walk with me through it all.

Hebrews 13:6 says,

“The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

Since this is my last article of the year, I would like to share my one and only New Year’s resolution:

I want to draw closer to God. I want to walk in His will for my life and deepen my relationship with Him more than ever before.

This is it. You know the saying, “All good things must come to an end.” Instead, I would have to say, “All good things come from God and with Him there are no ends, just seasons! This

season of writing for me has finished, but maybe another one will spring up down the road. Only God knows and I'm quite at peace with that.

## **Life in a Nutshell – Off the Candy Cane Hook – by Jill Montz**

Fall is by far my favorite time of the year. September 1<sup>st</sup> you will find me dripping in sweat from the Texas second summer heat as I dig through the dozens of orange and green storage tubs stacked floor to ceiling in my backyard storage shed. After hours of lifting off tops and peering inside, I drag out dozens of metal decorative pumpkins in an array of sizes, shapes, and shades of orange. After that are the several pairs of scarecrows with their straw sticking out from underneath patched hats and protruding from shirt sleeves and pants legs. They look a little worn but that just gives them more character! We greet each other with a smile as I adjust their pieces of straw and carry them to the front yard. Next I'm off to the garden center. Although my flower beds are still bursting with pinks, reds, and violets from my Gerber daisies, lantanas, begonias, and petunias, I happily shop for yellow, maroon, and purple mums to add to my summer blend. With just a glance at my front yard, it is easy to see fall is most certainly my favorite.

By the time I flip the calendar to October, I am once again rummaging through tubs in my storage shed and find my tubs filled with happy Halloween friends and fiends. My smile rivals that of the happiest jack-o-lantern! I love to fill my home and yard with silly ghosts, friendly goblins, green-faced witches with big moles on their noses, and crooked smiling pumpkins. All these favorites find their way to crowded book shelves and fireplace mantles or get tucked in amongst piles of pumpkins and mums. Then, all I have to do is shop for the trick-or-treat candy and demand restraint from my daughter, Dotty, and myself so we don't eat it all before Halloween night.

November brings cooler temperatures and a busier work schedule for me, so when it's time to change out for Thanksgiving décor I usually gather up my Halloween treasures hurriedly one dark evening after work. I pile them up on my back porch and throw a sheet over them to protect them from the elements and to protect me from seeing them when I pass the window. My pumpkins and scarecrows from September welcome the addition of a few fat turkeys to the mix. "Tom the Turkey" is our six-foot blowup pal who sits prominently in the front yard for the thirty days of fame he gets each year. He welcomes me home after each long workday with a wobble of his oversized head and a wave of his nylon tail. Fall is still my favorite, but, like the leaves on the trees, I am just barely hanging on some days.

Christmas is a whole other story. Come December I am running on Dr. Pepper, Aleve, and very little sleep. My Christmas cheer is reserved for the hours of 9am to 5pm and for the customers who come in to shop at the Pecan Shed (our family's retail store). When the closed sign is put up, so is my holly jolly spirit for the evening. I am not quite the Grinch, but I'm definitely a not too distant cousin.

Over the years, Dotty and I have put up a Christmas tree adorned with family ornaments and the cherished creations Dotty made in elementary school classrooms. These parental keepsakes are decorated with love by little hands and lots of glue and glitter that still flakes off on the floor almost five years later. Some years I've even unboxed my grandmother's Christmas village and told Dotty stories of Grandma Montz and her house this time of year. I love sharing my memories of my grandma with Dotty, laughing at the funny ones and wiping away a tear at the tender ones. Sharing these memories helps me to build new memories with Dotty and for that I am always grateful.

There have been years when the tinsel of the tree, the tangle of lights, and the pile of gifts have filled my home by early December. And then there have been those years where Dotty has

asked me on December 20<sup>th</sup> if we are even going to have a Christmas at all. One year when I had moved that summer into a new home next to a Catholic church, the elderly nuns there came over with rosaries in hand to basically ask me if I knew Jesus. I was confused at first. With furrowed brows and concerned eyes they stated how I seemed to really celebrate Halloween but not Christmas. As they patted my dry cracked knuckles with their soft age spotted hands, I stifled a laugh and quickly hurried into my house to grab my nativity scene (luckily it was close at hand but sadly it was still in the box). With a tired smile I assured them I did in fact know Jesus and was just very busy with work in December. I promised them that even though my house was dark and undecorated, my heart and soul were filled with the light and love of Jesus Christ. I'm sure I was still on their prayer list but in December I will take all the prayers I can get!

Last Christmas was our first with our adorable new kitten, Rae. We soon discovered a Christmas tree is to a cat what Mount Everest is to a thrill seeking outdoor enthusiast. No matter what I tried, Rae climbed in, knocked over, and chewed through every Christmas item we owned. So after several "bad kitty" scoldings, a dozen replaced strands of Christmas lights, and two fake trees later, we decided to just hang our stockings inside the house. Even Rae got one although she was definitely on the Naughty List. Then we decorated the front yard with a trio of merry blowup friends and called it good enough to make the Nice List that year.

When the middle of January rolled around this year, I finally had the strength, courage, and resolve to lift the sheet on the back porch. Dotty and I spent a long, blustery cold Sunday afternoon packing away four months' worth of decorations. The holiday favorites found their way back into tubs and back into the storage shed in the backyard. After much exhaustion, frustration, and a few Grinch approved curse word, I declared through chattering teeth, "No decorating in 2020! None. Zip. Zero. Zilch. Nada. And for our German friends down the block, Nein!"

Dotty knows not to speak too much when I get in this mood. She has learned over the years to go blank-faced and robotic. It's her survival mode and it breaks my heart to see it and know I have helped her hone it over the years. Without any emotion and in just the smallest whisper she asked, "Can we at least hang our stockings?" That question stopped me in mid tantrum. I sighed and softened and hugged her close to say I was sorry for giving her yet another reason to spend hard earned money on a counselor's couch and said, "Of course we can. I wonder which tub they are in?" Dotty softly replied, "I think they are in the green long tub." I took a deep breath and then I turned her to face me. With both of my chilled hands placed firmly on the padded shoulders of her winter coat I asked, "What do you say we get new Christmas stockings this year?" And with that she broke out into a big grin. Perhaps this particular adventure in parenting will only take up a few minutes of the counseling session someday and not the full hour. Fingers crossed.

So this year when September rolled around, I stayed nice and cool as I napped to the sound of Hallmark movies and Rae purring on my lap. When the calendar flipped to October I enjoyed the sights as my neighbors' yards turned orange, green, black and purple with Halloween décor, but mine stayed tucked away in the backyard shed. I did get some pumpkins from my brother who has a pumpkin patch every year between the rows of our pecan trees. November was the same. Tom and his friends never left their plastic beds in the shed and I wasn't too sad about it. However, now is the real test. While Christmas comes with a mixed bag of emotions for me and is laced with exhaustion, lack of sleep, and too many empty calories, I have never gone a year with absolutely no effort to decorate and celebrate. We will have stockings. But that's it. No

tinsel, no tree, no reindeer, no wreaths, no glitter, no glue, no big to-do. This year my *house* will not celebrate Christmas, but my goal is that Dotty and I will.

My hopes are that by letting myself off the candy cane hook of Christmas decorating guilt I can enjoy more of what makes the holiday extra special. Instead of spending the free nights we have digging through tubs, untangling lights and yelling at the cat, I pray we find time to snuggle up close and talk about what's on our hearts and minds. Instead of dragging out extension cords, I hope we can't drag ourselves away from spending time with family and friends. Instead of filling our house with memories of Christmas past, I hope we make lots of new memories beyond the walls of our home. Like the Grinch realized, so will we...

“What if Christmas doesn't come from a store.  
What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more.”

Of course this grand idea of not decking the halls, walls, or walkways might backfire on me. I might realize that Dotty and I miss the tinsel and the tangle even if it comes with a little tantrum and some childhood trauma. If that's the case, then I can always fling open the backyard shed. Or we can head to the holy land of all things that glitter...Hobby Lobby. Because the truth about Christmas is a child was born who came to save us all from our sins. Jesus came, offering love and forgiveness. And this year I plan to offer that as well...especially to myself.

## **Strategic Women – From Harlot to Heroine – by Debbie Haynes**

There are a couple of peculiar facts about a woman named Rahab, one being her dubious career. Her home was built into a wall and many scholars agree that she ran an inn of questionable repute from her home, with nighttime traffic constantly taking place. She was written about as being one of the four most beautiful women of her time. The second odd fact about her is her bloodline. She is named in the direct ancestral bloodline of Jesus!

Rahab's story is found in the book of Joshua, chapters 2-6. There's a man named Joshua who is told three times by God to be strong and of good courage, as he was about to move the Children of Israel into Jericho – a very old city, and the lowest point in the world – next to the Dead Sea. They would have to cross the Jordan River in treacherous waters. He was to prepare food, move forward by night, arm strong warrior men, and...send two spies to the house of the harlot, Rahab, to scout out the enemy and the land. Perhaps, since there was so much traffic in and out of her house, the spies wouldn't attract attention. However, these guys were spotted, and the King demanded of Rahab to know who the men were and where they were!

Let's first look at Rahab's qualities, before we finish that story. She was an astute business woman, she knew how to negotiate a contract, she was brave and strong, an excellent judge of character, smart and forward-thinking, loyal and loving and ALREADY had a strong faith in the God of Israel. Read Chapter 2:8-11 and realize that Rahab knew who the spies were; why they were at her house, that she could trust them and that she was chosen to help them!

*Back to the story...*

Rahab hides these spies on her roof underneath the drying wheat and barley stalks that were there, because it was harvest time. In verses 9-11 she makes a profession of her faith in God to the men. She then boldly and bravely negotiates for her life and all that is hers, so that she and her household will be spared. She tells the men how to escape by being lowered down on a scarlet cord from her window!

When the King's men came to capture the visitors, she confessed that she had seen them but that they had left a short time ago, and if the men hurried they could catch up to them. However, the gates of the city were locked down til morning (as was the custom) and she had given the visitors instructions to escape to the mountain and wait three days. The plan worked!

That scarlet cord of escape is often said to be symbolic in many ways – it showed that Rahab's home was an inn of nighttime activity – BUT it also represented the thread or the blood of the Lamb – that saves us all from death! That cord meant safety and salvation for Rahab and her family, and it was physically an escape for the men, so they could accomplish God's plan.

Joshua and the people were then able to cross over the river, march around the walls of the city of Jericho until they fell, and all inhabitants were killed – EXCEPT for Rahab and her family!

Even though this woman was of ill repute, she had a faith that saved her out of destruction – and was escorted into the promised land and lived there. She married, gave birth to a son

named Boaz who married Ruth, who gave birth to Obed that had a son named Jesse – who had a son named David. This fulfilled the scripture that said Christ would be from the lineage of David!

This woman Rahab would be an unlikely candidate perhaps by our own standards, for being chosen and then succeeding; yet she played a pivotal role in the success of the nation of Israel and in continuing the bloodline of Jesus!

Our past doesn't matter. It's why Jesus came. God uses those he trusts, regardless of who we are or what we have done. God REDEFINES our past and makes us his chosen sons and daughters. From bad girl to beautiful bride, from harlot to heroine, that's Rahab! She could have remained in shame, sin and hopelessness, but Jesus in her bloodline came to conquer all that.

- Roman 8:1 says we have no condemnation in Christ.
- I John 1:19 says if we confess sin, he forgives.
- I Peter 1:3 states we have hope in the resurrected Christ.
- John 8:34 says those in Christ are free!

Finally, in the New Testament in Hebrews 11:31 we read again about Rahab, the harlot, that ended up in the Hall of Faith – a strategic woman honored by God. She was not out of His reach, and neither are we. God's grace extends to us ALL.



MARRIAGE



## **In This Together - Sacrificial Love – by Kaelin Scott**

“The prince married the princess, and they lived happily ever after...”

As an author of Christian romance, I know how tempting it can be to buy into the idea of happily ever after. We don't like loose ends or unresolved conflict, and we like to think that life's a breeze once we say, "I do." But life isn't a fairytale, and marriage is hard. It's not a fix-all for life's problems, but rather a partnership in getting through them. So many people today give up on marriage as soon as it gets tough or when honeymoon feeling fades away, but love isn't supposed to be a feeling. True love is a choice you make every single day.

It's choosing to stand by your spouse no matter what. There's a reason wedding vows include, "for better or for worse." Hard times will happen; it's a fact of life. But true love means sticking together through it all. Sometimes it means compromise, and sometimes it means sacrifice. And yes, those are two very uncomfortable things. I'm betting that Jesus wasn't comfortable when He died for us, but that was the ultimate sacrifice of love. John 15:13 says, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." That's what Jesus did for us, and it's what He expects us to do for our spouses.

I think what people get so wrong about marriage is thinking it's all about themselves. It's not. It's about a covenant with God, and it's about putting someone else before yourself. It's not about being happy or going on romantic getaways all the time. Those are great things, but they don't define marriage. Marriage is going through all of life's ups and downs and still choosing each other at the end of each day. Maybe you don't really like each other sometimes. But you can still choose to love. Maybe you don't agree with the other about something. But you can still choose to support their decisions. Maybe you feel unappreciated or misunderstood. But you can still pray for your spouse.

In a culture that elevates self-importance and getting what you want, we have to turn to the source of truth – God's Word. That's the only place with solid marriage advice. Not TV or music or Facebook. God designed marriage to enhance and enrich our lives, but we have to treat it the right way. Thankfully, He gave us an instruction manual to show us the way!

Sometimes we have to stand beside our spouse and go to battle together. Is it hard and scary? Yes. But victory doesn't come through division, and you'll never get there if you give up. Put on your armor and choose to fight for your partner. And while you do, God will surely fight for you.

“Walk in the way of love,  
just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us  
as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Ephesians 5:2

## **Date Night Fun – December Romance – by Marcy Lytle**

I'm not usually happy with date night at home. But I've had to learn to be more so, this past year. Dinner and a movie on the sofa all evening is not appealing to me, sometimes. I like to be busy, have purpose, do something fun, and sometimes staying at home seems lackluster and boring. I know you can relate, because we've all been home so much! So we've put together five date nights at home this December that we hope you'll enjoy and try! After all, home is where the heart is...right? We've even included ideas for what to wear!

Lights around Town – Pick a few neighborhoods, pack up a car picnic, and set out to look at lights. This is a yearly tradition for many with children, but why not just the two of you, as well? In your picnic basket include cranberry chicken salad sandwiches and a fruit salad, as well as some Jr Mints (Christmas ones!). Make this date last as long as you like, and why not wear all black and white, with a touch of red, just for fun!

<https://flavormosaic.com/cranberry-chicken-salad-sandwich/>

Wrapping and Snacking – Make Oreo candy cane bark together and place in the fridge. Set out the gifts and have a wrapping party. For snacks, put together a food board (see recipe on the TIPS page!) Set up your card table, get out your wrapping supplies and enjoy the gifting. Talk about each person you're wrapping for, and what you love about them. Consider wearing your ugly Christmas sweater or Santa Hat, or jingle bells, for this date night in.

<https://www.heb.com/recipe/recipe-item/oreo-candy-cane-bark/1398764176767>

Fireplace Chat – Even if you don't have a fireplace, you can light candles in a group, so that you have a flicker nearby. A fireplace chat is usually a "ask me anything" type venue, so ask away! If you need help, print out some great couples questions for ideas. Have soft Christmas music playing in the background. For your meal, why not make a pizza together with yours and his toppings, and lay out a blanket for your tablecloth? For this date night in, consider wearing your favorite pajamas and Christmas tee, and socks! Don't have the socks? Hit the Dollar Tree before date night! (We've included questions below!)

Carols and Chips – If you're not going caroling with others, carol with the two of you! Each pick five Christmas carols and have them ready on your playlist/Bluetooth speaker. Before each is played, say why you like that carol. Prepare chips/dips ahead of time. Mad Dash Mixes has so many cool and easy dip mixes, and stop by World Market for some interesting chips! While there, pick up a seasonal tin of Christmas cookies! When you're finished listening, put on a Christmas movie and snuggle in. For this date night in, pull out your favorite sweater/jeans/sneakers for a comfy night at home.

<https://www.maddashmixes.com/>

Cozy Sips and Bites – Dress up for this date! And head out in the car, dressed to the nines! Play your route for your cozy sips and bites. Peruse takeout menus and make three orders to be picked up curbside – a great appetizer, an entrée, and coffee/pastries to go. Between each

stop, pull over for snapshots (take your tripod) at pretty sites, so you can enjoy the pictures or print them out/post later.

Life with him can still be fun even if places are closed, and not as much is available to do. So make it happen, and share what you did! Merry Christmas!

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

Some of us are now working at home and being together with our spouses for hours and hours a day, at night, on the weekends, and we quite enjoy it – BUT then there are those days when we want to scream and run away. Am I right? I think we've had a few of those, even though the joy of being together has far outweighed the annoyances. But here are a few examples, in case you can relate:

I'm about to make lunch and he decides to come to the counter to clean his coffee pot, and gets in my way. I just want him to sit down and wait until I'm finished.

We've prepared said lunch and we're sitting down to watch a show while we eat, and somehow I see every little thing he does, from licking his fingers to smacking his lips. I'm sure he's not doing anything different than before, but my ears and eyes are way too sensitive!

I'm looking at my phone, taking a break, and he is too, but we don't want the other one to know that we're not being "productive" and we don't want the evil eye for how we're spending our down time...

I retreat to the bedroom when he's in the front room, so that I can talk to my sister without him hearing and chiming in responses from the background.

He remarks on something in the house that's been there for years, as if it's new and different, and I sigh and roll my eyes.

Have I listed enough examples of this togetherness and all that it brings?

It's now been months of this, and we've found a few tricks to still being in love at night after all day together, all week together, and all that jazz!

- Communication is key. Talking about our expectations and irritations has helped both of us to see and be aware of time and space...and words and looks.
- Separating into different rooms isn't a bad thing. It can be good to pick corners and go there, for a few hours...then return together later in a better mood.
- Listening to each other work brings insight on the pressures of each person's work, and appreciation for each other grows.
- Realizing the need to get out of the house is so important, as he and I both walk, go through a drive-thru, sit near an open field or in a parking lot to eat and people watch.
- Sunshine and a breeze change the entire atmosphere of the home when we return after a brisk walk.
- Weekends with planned activities bring order, anticipation and fun to the week's end of work, work, and work...at home together.
- Hugs cannot be forgotten, and neither can the kisses, as they send our hearts soaring.

Hope your togetherness hasn't brought you pain, but rather much gain. I wonder what 2021 holds and what else we will learn?





ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Rooted in Love - The Greatest Gift – by Kaelin Scott**

With the holidays quickly approaching, I find it hard not to get in the spirit. There's so much to be excited about! Stockings and presents and Santa, oh my!

I love listening to Christmas music while I work around the house, and I have to admit that I have an affinity for Hallmark movies too. I also love the gentle glow of the Christmas tree during the dark and quiet evenings....well, at least after the kids go to bed it gets quiet. It's so easy to get wrapped up in all the glitz and glam of the commercial side of Christmas. Especially when we have little kids whose eyes light up brighter than a thousand Christmas lights at just the mention of presents. And I don't think there's anything wrong with making it festive and fun! But we have to remember the real reason for the season, and we must make sure our children know the reason as well.

In case you don't know the true meaning of Christmas, here it is in a nutshell. God wanted to rescue His people from their sinful ways, and the only way to do that was through a perfect atoning sacrifice. That sacrifice was His Son, Jesus, who was born in a stable as a humble baby. When He grew up, He gave His life for us on the Cross, taking the punishment for our sins. And after three days, He rose again and ascended to His Father. This means that we can spend eternity with Him in heaven, as long as we give our hearts to Him. Christmas is the celebration of Jesus' birth. If you want to learn more about it, check out the book of Luke in your Bible.

It's okay to get excited about presents and Santa and parties. Those are fun things at any age! But the most important gift we can give our children is the *gift of faith*. It's vitally important that we teach them about Jesus and how He gave us the gift of life. That's what Christmas is all about, and without that we would have no reason to celebrate. He is the reason for the season, and He should be the reason for our joy.

*No Christmas tree or perfectly wrapped present  
can compare to the beauty of His ultimate gift.*

Let's go out and enjoy those holiday festivities, but make sure they aren't our focus. Let's make Jesus a conversation point in our homes. Let's make traditions that involve the Christmas story. It could be getting the family together to make a nativity scene, or it could be as simple as reading about Jesus' birth in the Bible. Whatever it is, let's don't forget why we celebrate.

And finally, let's be joyful!  
We've been given the greatest gift of all.

## **Simple Truths – Opposite Prayers – by Marcy Lytle**

I recall when my son was small and playing soccer that he wanted to win every game. Of course, he did! We wanted his team to win, as well. And often, I caught him whispering prayers to win. But of course, there were many times the other team won. This was probably one of my son's first experiences with asking God and then not receiving what he prayed for.

Fast forward to just this year, when many Christians were praying for the election and for their candidate of choice to win the presidency. I'd say many were confident that their choice was the best choice, and so they prayed and prayed hard. I saw many say just that on social media. They were anxious all week as we awaited the election results, stating they were praying for our nation, for the "right" one to win.

But just like I told my son...the other team probably had boys on it that were praying the same prayer my son was praying. They wanted their team to win. But only one team was going to get the answer they wanted, and the other was going to lose.

It's hard to explain prayer to kids. The exercise of prayer starts with asking for Christmas gifts, for a friend to spend the night, and yes...for the winning score at a game. But I remember that my son looked like he understood that while he was praying one thing, another boy could be praying the opposite – and the sure fact was that one team would win!

It seems that opposite prayers, especially among Christians, tend to bring out the worst in us! We are sure that we've "heard from God" and what we are praying for is the best for all. But across the street is a friend that believes in the power of prayer as well, and she's praying the opposite prayer!

How can it be so often that Christians that love God and want the best are praying opposite prayers?

Could it be that we're praying the wrong words? Instead of praying for particular individual to be placed into office, perhaps we should be praying about the things that matter the most...loving others and loving God...and asking God for those things to take place no matter who gets voted into office.

Maybe our kids should be taught to pray for God's presence to be on the field among players, as they compete but honor, on the field and off.

Instead of praying for a win, or for our own choice, or for what we "know" to be best, we could just lift up His name and pray that His kingdom would come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Maybe, just maybe, if we learn to pray that way and teach our kids the same, there won't be signs in our yards with a candidate's name, but rather one that says something else. I have a friend that had a sign made in America's colors that said "Love God and Love Others." I think all that pray would agree on those two choices. But who is going to run our country on those



values? We had no idea, but only hopes in men with flaws; because we all had issues we deemed the most important ones to consider.

Who is going to win a soccer game? It might be the best team, or the one that makes the least mistakes, or there might be a tie. But if the prayers of the kids are made, asking their Father for all to have a good time while playing, there will be congratulatory wishes at the end of the game...no matter who wins.

I know that's not a popular sentiment. Parents yell on the fields and stir up anger at coaches, and get called off the field due to misconduct. I think some of us should be called off the field for a while too, to relearn what prayer really is. Because opposite prayers are taking place across the street in the homes of people we love.

We don't have all the answers. And we're not supposed to know what's best. I'm pretty sure that's why the Lord demonstrated the best kind of prayer to start with *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name*...you know the rest.

We have a president, it seems. And it's time to pray for our leaders, all of us. One prayer for the hope of our nation.

## Firmly Planted – Friend on 14<sup>th</sup> – by Dina Cavazos

*“No friendship is an accident.” O’Henry, Heart of the West*

I’ve been single for a long time and am quite happy with it, but sometimes it can get a bit lonely, even for an introvert like me. It’s not that I don’t have friends—I do, and I love them, but one thing I haven’t had for years is a “neighborhood friend.”

I usually have a lot of projects going on and am invariably working on something, looking for something, planting, imagining, writing, or reading something! Moving furniture, getting a picture hung straight, unloading a heavy object—there are techniques that make these things easier, but sometimes I just need a hand. A like-minded friend within walking distance to talk things over with, get an opinion, or call for an impromptu adventure—this is something I was missing.

I’m not sure when I started praying seriously for a “neighbor friend”—maybe four years ago. It was a “heart’s desire” kind of prayer. I live on the edge of the older part of town and love the big trees and unique homes. Sometimes while walking I would wonder who might live in a certain house. If a house was for sale, I’d imagine “that person” might be the new owner. There is one particular street that has always been a favorite because it’s kind of a hidden gem—a little alcove with two great houses—a tiny quaint one made of cedar (pretty unique!), and, next to it, a two-story stone house that was a mystery to me. *Was it new, was it old? Did anyone even live there?* (I’ve since found out it was a custom-built “storybook” house.) The tiny one next to it was also a mystery. It had an interesting looking garden area on the side. *What was in back?* I so wanted to peek!

One day, I drove by and the quaint cedar house had a “For Sale” sign in front. The wondering began: *Who will get that house...it’s pretty small for a family...maybe a couple, but maybe a single person.* I kept my eye on it to see what would happen, and, finally, the “For Sale” sign was gone. I’d drive by to see if there was any sign of who might live there. (I know...I sound like a stalker!) There was one car, and sometimes a pickup was also there. I concluded it must be a couple. *Disappointing.* On my irregular walks I’d often walk down the “hidden gem” street. I never saw anyone outside and I continued to wonder.

About two years went by...

Just a few months ago, I decided to venture out. I went down 14<sup>th</sup> (aka the “hidden gem”) and a woman was in the front yard of the tiny cedar house. She was working at planting or watering—I don’t remember which—I stopped and we talked. She had bought the house about two years ago—a *single person!* We hit it off right away and the rest is history, as they say—we both love gardening, thrift store shopping, and books. We both have a cat, and we both remember shopping at the original Whole Foods store on Lamar in Austin years and years ago. It’s not often I run into someone like that!! We’ve become good friends and have already gone on a few adventures.

Because of our mutual love for plants and our ongoing work on our own gardens, we’re always looking for ideas and have self-toured several local yards—one was even featured on Central

Texas Gardener. Our shared enthusiasm and these amazing and creative gardens have been inspirational.

It's easy to get in a rut and be so fixed on a plan that one fails to see other possibilities. I thought there was little room for anything else in my garden, but now I see new ways to add to the design and have more peace about the things I can't control (like leaves!) There is a lot more I can do. God not only answered my prayer for a neighborhood friend, he re-ignited the fire in my soul for what I'm meant to do...and *that* is above and beyond what I asked for.

Ephesians 3:20

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,  
according to his power that is at work within us...*

## **Unearthly Thing - Through the Least of These – by Angela Dolbear**

“What *is* that?” I asked, my heart pounding in fear as I gawked at a creature I could not identify, which appeared to be alive. And moving.

My husband, Tim, and I stood huddled over this mysterious organism in our backyard for a good ten minutes, mystified, on a sweltering Austin, Texas Sunday afternoon in late August.

Barely bigger than my thumb, hairless and pink, with no eyes, this tiny unidentifiable animal lay injured under a massive old oak tree in our backyard. Dark purple bruises lined one side of its body. Slowly, it pulled its tiny forearms (or legs?) up closer to its face.

In this new position, I could see that this little unknown beastie strongly resembled a squirrel. Eureka! It was a newborn squirrel with its umbilical cord still attached.

He (we could clearly biologically identify it as a “he”) must have fallen out of the nest about twenty-five feet above us, which swayed precariously in the top branches of the oak tree. My heart began to break for this little one.

Being an extreme lover of all God’s creatures, well, except snakes (it may be an “Eve” thing, but I’m not a fan), I knew there was only one thing to do. We had to try to rescue the poor little guy, and do everything in our power to try to nurse him back to health.

I couldn’t bring myself to touch the weird hairless pink skin, so I did what any woman would do, I asked my husband to pick him up off the ground. Tim placed him in his make-shift shelter made out of an empty 12-pack Diet Coke box, furnished with soft cloths and leaves from the oak tree.

We brought him inside our home, and immediately jumped on the internet to research baby squirrels and how to best care for them. We spent the afternoon bookmarking websites and making lists of things we would need to get from the store for him.

We refrained from naming our tiny guest, both of us silently resolved to not get too attached to him, just in case he didn’t survive his terrible fall.

Following the instructions we had studied online, we fed him a few drops of water from an eye-dropper every few hours. The instructions also said to keep the baby warm, so we wrapped activated hand-warming packets in a wash cloth, and placed them in his box. And we prayed.

The next morning, hoping and praying he was still alive, I carefully peeked into the box I had kept next to my bed all night. Tiny arms wriggled and wrapped around my pinky finger. My heart melted instantly.

By now, I was completely comfortable with his soft smooth skin, so I picked him up and carried him close to my heart to the kitchen. I prepared his special meal of scalded whole milk with a little Vitamin D oil mixed in it, something I would do every day for the next two months. Just a couple drops of milk, and he was full. Every four hours. He appeared to grow stronger and a little more active by that evening.

The next day, he opened his little toothless mouth and hungrily suckled the eyedropper filled with his milk meal. We were slowly growing enamored with this tiny trooper. And we kept praying for him.

By the third day of eating like a champ, it seemed he was going to live, so we decided it was time to give this sweet baby squirrel a proper name. We held him up, gazing at his tiny face, dark orbs where eyes were forming under a layer of skin. A faint shadow of fine brown hair had begun to cover his body.

Our son Kyle proposed the name "Spartacus." A fine name we thought. Little did we know at the time, this warrior name foreshadowed the feisty survivor he would become as an adult squirrel. "Spartacus" seemed a little grand for such a tiny being, so we nicknamed him Sparky.

Sparky grew, and our love for him grew along with him. He was part of the family now. He accompanied us on various family functions and holiday celebrations. He journeyed in the back seat of our car tucked into one of his homes all the way to Dripping Springs, Texas, and even as far as Houston. He was one well-traveled squirrel.

We created a "public figure" Facebook page for [Sparky](#), so our family and friends could enjoy watching him grow through pictures and videos we posted regularly -- sometimes daily. He has fans all over the world admiring his poses and antics. He was always a topic of conversation at our church. Friends asked us every Sunday how Sparky was doing, and we would joyfully reply, "Great! He's so nutty!"

Sparky's eyes finally opened when he was about a month old. Looking into his large inky brown, almond-shaped eyes was like meeting him for the first time. To say we loved him was an understatement.

Sparky would regularly spend his afternoons napping as he laid on the back of my neck under my hair, or curled up in the tiny front pocket of my T-shirt. We purchased several new homes for him to accommodate his growth and activity level. We started with a hamster "bubble," and gradually progressed to a five-foot-tall cage in which any ferret would feel at home.

One morning, as I opened his ferret cage to let him have breakfast on my desk while I wrote, I notice a dark line that ran down his abdomen. By the end of the day, his "man-berries" had dropped. He had nutted-up and hit puberty. And he was so feisty, way more than usual.

The next day, when I took him for his daily venture to the outside world, he climbed up the oak tree and ascended out of sight. But this time, he didn't return.

I was completely heartbroken. And worried sick. Could he survive in the outside world?

Tim and I had to trust God that He would take care of little Sparky. We prayed fervently for our little buddy. Two agonizing days later, he popped up in the lowest "Y" of the oak tree. He ran down my arm and burrowed himself into the front pocket of my hoodie sweatshirt where he would always find the raw shelled pecans I kept for him. It was as though he had never left. My heart soared! We praised God all day long.

Now we got to watch Sparky acclimate to the great outdoors. We watched him do things we know only his instincts inspired him to do. It was amazing. We marveled at how God created and encoded these little creatures for life in their environments.

Sparky figured out how to build the tightly-woven nests that tree squirrels constructed out of carefully chosen fresh branches. The squirrels bite off the branches, bring them to their nests, and then weave the branches together with their tiny hands. When the branches and leaves dry, they've created a sort of sealed upside-down basket, in the tallest of the tree tops.

Day after day, we watched Sparky eat some of the nuts we gave him, and then decide at some point to bury the others. It was such fun to watch him dig a hole, plant the nut, cover it over with dirt, and then pat it down several times. He was very thorough. Of course we never taught him to do this. How did he know how to bury nuts? It was amazing to watch his God-given instincts in action.

When I would sit out on our back porch reading my Bible, I would look up in the oak tree, and spot Sparky sprawled out on a tree branch closest to the porch roof. His limbs dangled down and his eyes were half-closed as he rested in the gentle swaying of the breeze. It reminded me that I should have that kind of trust in God. There is a time to build and a time to gather food, but there is also a time to rest--to rest in the shadow of the Almighty, as Psalm 91 says.

God taught us so many lessons through raising Sparky. We learned about trust, provision, and most of all, His immense encompassing and ever-present love.

One day, I was washing my hands at the kitchen sink, watching Sparky out in the yard burying the almonds I had just given him. I somewhat felt like I was watching my child at play. I was thinking about how much I deeply cared for and loved this little critter, how every morning I looked forward to him running down the tree toward me to get his breakfast. I just loved his very presence so much. I loved him as if he was my adopted bushy-tailed son.

Then I heard the unmistakable self-authenticating voice of God say in my spirit, "How much you love that little being is only a fraction of how much I love you." I froze. Those words permeated my heart and reverberated through my entire being like the echoes of a gong. They still do, even now as I write about them.

I needed to hear that. I needed to be reminded of God's great love for me. I was still grieving the loss of my beloved Golden Retriever Caleb, who had passed away four months previously at the young age of five. And we had been experiencing some financial hard times. Times were just rough and tough all over causing a great deal of wear and tear on my faith.

But God used Sparky to reach down through my despair to paint a clear picture of His unfailing and all-encompassing love for me. *For me, personally.* God's grace fell upon me full-force through my love for Sparky, my adorable tree-dwelling pal.

We saw Sparky just about every day for over a year, and every day I reflected on some aspect of how God loves me, and how He cared and provided for me. I saw how I need to just rest in Him daily, trusting Him fully like Sparky--with my limbs dangling down and my eyes half closed, just swaying in the breezes of life.

And most of all, I realized how God saw this newborn squirrel that needed to be saved. With all that is going on in the world and in the universe, God arranged for his rescue. He provided Sparky with a safe home and abundant love, just like how God saw that I needed saving and saved me through His Son's redemptive work on the Cross.

And He saw that I needed a timely reminder of His great love for me, which He provided through the very least of these-- a tiny Texas Fox Squirrel, named Sparky.

---

*Angela Dolbear* is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, all 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 inspiring readers to laugh, cry, and crave certain genres of food. She loves reading, writing and leading worship music with her husband Tim at their church in Nashville, Tennessee. Please drop by and sing-up for news and free goodies at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!

## **Moving Forward - I Surrender (Again) – by Pam Charro**

32 years ago, I made one of the most challenging decisions of my life. After 5 months of studying the bible with a small group of friends, I gave my life over to Jesus. It was a complete 180 from the life I had been living, and, despite bumps and bruises along the way, was definitely one of the smartest things i've ever done.

I'm still *re-surrendering* today.

The pastor at my church asked a couple of weeks ago, "Are you ready for God to clear your schedule?" He didn't get much of a response, so he moved on with the sermon for a few minutes and then asked again, "So are you ready for God to clear your schedule?" Again, we didn't respond much, so he said, "I'm going to keep at this until you get it." I had to dig through layers of apathy, unbelief and disappointment before I realized that I had been withholding control of my life from the Lord. And the only way he is going to give me the life of my dreams is if I return that control back to him.

Like many of you, my current life doesn't look anything like I thought it would. I have fought hard through so much difficulty and so much of my reward doesn't seem to be in sight yet. Why is it still so hard, and when can I start to be a little bit comfortable?

Without answering that question, I felt God asking for my surrender. Because, despite my disillusionment, he is still God and he still has better for me than I can ask or imagine. Maybe comfort and predictability shouldn't be the goal; maybe what God has for those of us who have been made uncomfortable blows all of that out of the water. And God is a gentleman, so he won't force this amazing life on anyone. He only asks that I trust and believe. When I consider this, what alternative do I have? I can't control all that much, anyway, so I might as well decide to give it to him.

So I recommitted myself to spending the first 30 minutes of every day in silence with him, not even asking for anything, just being in still surrender to him. And I'm now more certain than ever that my very best life still lies in front of me, because I remembered who he is and have decided to believe him.

Father, whatever it is, have your way. My heart is yours. Take it all. My life is in your hands.

This is *gonna* be good.





FRESH THYME

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

I love to entertain, except I'm usually so tired afterwards. Entertaining, by one definition, means to give attention or consideration. So I suppose that's what we do when we have guests or family over. We give them attention by serving them food, keeping them happy and busy, and considering their needs and wants.

However, I'm not writing about entertaining friends. Did you know there's a verse in the bible about entertaining? It's Matthew 9:4. These guys brought Jesus a man that was paralyzed, and Jesus told the man to take heart, that his sins were forgiven. Some of the teachers that were listening nearby were thinking that Jesus was blaspheming God by saying that, and Jesus knew their thoughts. He then asked this question:

“Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?”

What funny choice of a word to use, right? He then stated that he indeed had the power to forgive sins, and to heal. He next spoke to the paralyzed man and told him that he was healed, and to get up and take his mat and go home.

Have you ever thought about how we all entertain thoughts in our hearts? It means we give consideration and attention to thoughts, thus causing them to take up residence inside of us, even when we know they're detrimental to our well-being – spiritually and physically. In this case, the teachers that were watching Jesus probably were expecting him to heal the man first. After all, that's why he was brought to Jesus in the first place. But Jesus spoke to the man's deepest need – that of needing forgiveness. Because of the teachers' preconceived notions about what was best, these thoughts that Jesus was blaspheming came to mind. To blaspheme means to speak irreverently about God.

Once they judged Jesus for not acting as they thought he should, these thoughts took up residence in their hearts, much like our guests take a seat when they're invited to the table. We then serve our guests and they go home full. But when we entertain judgmental thoughts and feed them with our invitation to sit there and fester, we're drumming up a whole lot of trouble.

If these teachers had quieted their minds, dismissed these thoughts that came to their hearts' door, and not allowed them in at the table inside, they would have then seen that Jesus cared for the man deeply as he healed him completely. When Jesus did heal the man, it says the people were filled with awe and praised God that Jesus had such authority as he did!

I think we all do this. Jesus is near, we have a need or present to him a need, and he waits and doesn't heal when we expect it to happen. We then judge him as being non-caring, unaware, and certainly not our provider...when we ask and don't receive. But we don't know that Jesus is at work performing another miracle of greater or equal value – that of speaking to the heart of the individual we are praying for – or to our own hearts! If we would just quiet our minds, send the unwanted thoughts away, we might be still and see that a lot of good will take place in His right order.

As stated above, we're exhausted and tired from all the effort it takes to entertain guests we have in our home, but it's so worth it because of the joy it brings to have them and to serve. But entertaining evil thoughts can not only be exhausting but deadly to our spirits. Had those teachers sent those evil thoughts away and entertained good thoughts that enabled them to watch and wait and see, they would have realized that Jesus was healing the whole man...not just the paralyzed limb.

Something worth thinking about today, isn't it? I know I am...

## **FRESH THYME - One Last Look – by Marcy Lytle**

We all do it. We get dressed, we comb our hair, we make that cup of coffee, we look at our list of to-do's and then the last thing we do is go back to the mirror and check. We look to see that we didn't miss something, to see if our hair is still in place, if our zippers are up and our make-up is smooth. And then...we leave the house in confidence that we look okay and the day will go well.

I was thinking about that activity and realized that as 2020 ends and a new year begins, we need to do the same thing! We need to take one last look at this year and all the craziness that it ushered in, and decide what to do with it...before 2021 begins. We need to see if we missed any lessons, if our faith is still intact, if anything exposed is now forgiven and covered, and if our faces are set like flint for the future.

2020 brought in a disease, and our country reacted. People died, families were separated, friends fought over mask-wearing, and sanitizer became the new home commodity, even more important than bread!

2020 was an election year, and either our candidate won or lost. Emotions ran high among neighbors with signs in their yards for this one or that one, and drivers sneered as they observed the opposing team and possibly said something hateful.

2020 brought to light injustice, racism, and hatred – that is always there when people judge and are judged by skin color or status or wealth – and protests and violence erupted and brought new levels of fear in our neighborhoods.

2020 demonstrated record breaking storms, disasters, and craziness that we would not have believed had someone told us last December that it would be such a year.

So that's what we see in the mirror when we look at 2020. All of these broken things that need attention reflect in our vision, and we have to make a decision before we walk away from the 2020 mirror and step into 2021.

Just like we adjust what we see to be out of place on our physical bodies as we gaze one last time before heading out the door, we have to adjust things before we head into the door of this coming year.

The fight against the diseases is not over, and most likely new diseases will arise. We have to choose to place our lives in the hands of our Creator and ask Him for provision and health, and the ability to lie down and rest.

Our country is now being led by the newly elected President and whether we like it or not, we now need to pray for those leaders. More praying and less griping, that's the adjustment that needs to take place. Prayer is powerful, not just an "Oh well, I'll pray" with a sigh...

Hatred is always living in our streets and we have to overcome it with the kind of love that is patient, kind, keeps record of no wrongs, and the kind that is not boastful but lays down its life for a friend.

I'm pretty sure more storms will arise in the forecast, and in our lives, but we can look to see who it is that's with us in those storms, the One who rises above them all and invites us to the secret place beneath the shadow of His wings – wow – what a picture!

I'm always taking one last look in the mirror, often to see if my hair is sticking up somewhere! And many times, something needs to be adjusted. I know that my life, my heart, and my spirit need adjustments after the rocking of the boat in 2020.

So let's all take one last look and say with a big smile (not a pitiful sigh) "Welcome 2021." After all, it's a new year, another gift of time to get it right with Him, our neighbors, and those that see things differently than we do.

## **FRESH THYME - The Pause** – by Marcy Lytle

Have you ever started to buy someone a gift, whether it's a child or a friend, and stopped and paused and had a thought like:

They don't deserve this gift

They won't even appreciate what I'm doing

They never give me anything

They have enough, so why am I spending my money?

I bet we all have had similar thoughts that have causes to pause before we buy. Pausing before we buy is always good, when we're trying to be frugal and careful and wise. But pausing before we buy because we're trying to judge whether or not the recipient is worthy of the gift is not good! Worthiness isn't part of the equation in gift giving!

Most of the time, our kids won't thank us like we'd like them to, by gushing on and on about how perfect their gifts are. We have to let this go and give to them because they're our kids. Period.

None of us deserves gifts at one time or another. We've all been ungrateful, thrown tantrums, or been downright rude. So we can offer grace to those that don't seem to appreciate their blessings, and give anyway.

It's hard to give and then not expect. So hard. We give and we want something given back. It's the way we feel in marriage, and with our friends. But Christmas is a great time to pray about who to give to, to pray about what to give, and then to give without expectation of anything except the satisfaction that you obeyed and gave.

Maybe that friend has everything she needs and more, so why would you buy her another candle? I have a few friends that feel like because they have a lot, they are always expected to pay, give and dole out compassion...yet people don't give it to them because of their abundance. That makes for a sad heart. So give to that friend who has everything, because she will LOVE IT. Even if it's just a card or candle or a bar of scented soap!

Giving can be so complicated if we let it. And it can be a very sad experience if we only give to those we think deserve it, those that we think will give back, and those that will thank us over and over again.

It's hard. But my desire is to give this holiday season with joy, knowing that my heart is full and I want to give to bless. Because the truth is that He will bless me because I give, and that's the best blessing and gift to receive – more than anything else in the world.

The blessing of listening, obeying and then giving results in the satisfaction of relationship, happiness and joy this Christmas.

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

It was late on a Monday afternoon and I sat at my desk facing the front window of my house, where the sun was starting to set. I felt drawn to be still and close my eyes for a few minutes and just listen. These are the things I heard:

- A dog bark
- Cars drive by
- The whirr of a motorcycle
- Ice dropping in the fridge
- A voice on the sidewalk

I kept my eyes closed and faced forward and could feel and sense the light, shining on my eyelids.

I thought about the other kind of “traffic” I’d heard earlier today:

- The health report for Texas
- New social media platforms that are growing
- Unrest with the election results
- Influencers and the latest must-haves
- My own voice of condemnation for eating too much lunch

Sometimes, we pull up in shady spot in a park and nap, but we are unable to do so if there’s too much traffic nearby, like:

- Slamming doors
- Playing children
- People talking
- Trains or trucks
- Wind in the trees

What’s my point in sharing all of this?

The only way the traffic doesn’t disturb in all three of those examples is if something louder drowns it out. Uplifting music can be my choice to listen to, instead of listening to people and their opinions and statements. We turn on the AC so the noise of the blower drowns out the outside noises, when we’re trying to rest. And when I was sitting at my desk, I wasn’t really hearing anything except the traffic...until...

I heard his voice say:

*COME – come to me when you’re weary and I will give you rest. Lay your burdens at my feet, my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Learn from me. Follow me. I am the Good Shepherd. You shall not want. Lie down in the green pastures, and drink from the cool water where I lead you to drink. Let my rod and staff comfort you as I steer you away from the cliff. Sit down. Eat.*

*In the presence of darkness, because I am the Light. Surely my goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life.*

The traffic will settle down later tonight, less cars will be on the road, and I will lie down to sleep. And because I sat still and listened and heard a louder voice above the din, I'll sleep in sweet peace. Not the peace that's here today and gone tomorrow, but the peace that passes all understanding, because He keeps my mind quiet when I lay still and choose to listen...to His heart over me.

What's your traffic like? Close your eyes and listen...