



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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TIPS

## **The Dressing – The Bag – by Marcy Lytle**

Just focusing on purses this month. Why not? We all carry them. Some of us enjoy tiny ones, and others love them huge, and yet others somewhere in between. Purses can be expensive, and we don't know if we should splurge or save. And what about color, shape, functionality and cuteness? It's all daunting, sometimes. And yet, a purse can be such a great accessory to have this spring/summer.

Here are a few things to consider when shopping for purses...

Decide if you are a purse person that enjoys switching out bags, or you'd rather buy one and carry only one. Think about what you carry in your purse, so you'll know the size you need. And finally, do you want a basic color or one that gives a pop? All of these will help you in choosing that next new bag...

Crossbody bags are great for shopping, traveling and being a mom. They leave your hands free. So maybe, you want one that's got a wide strap so it doesn't hurt your shoulders, and you want the bag to be roomy, but not heavy. Marshalls is my store of choice for this kind. So many choices, and you can even get a good leather bag at a fraction of the cost of a leather store.

Fabric Totes – I can never seem to have enough of these. And you can find so many in so many stores like Marshalls, and even in the Dollar Spot at Target. They fold up nicely in a drawer and they're great for taking snacks to the movies!

Box with Handles – I have a couple of these. They're always on the Target site as a laundry tote, I guess because of the handles. But they make great lunch totes for those picnics this season. Load them up with a rolled up blanket, a few snacks, and games for all.

Whimsical – If you like something unique, colorful and different, you might want a bag you'd find at a market, one that's handmade. These are the most fun. Grab one and enjoy it all season long. I grabbed a Mexican leather bag at a great price and love it so much – I've had it for years.

Elegant and Handy – Quince is a great store with beautiful bags, ones you can order online and they arrive so nicely wrapped and look quite amazing. I have a woven bag in a neutral color that elevates any outfit, yet it's purely and perfectly functional as well.

Black and Big – I found the prettiest large black classic bag at Marshalls recently with a great strap for carrying or one for across the shoulder. It's super roomy, will go with everything, and I'm hoping to carry it the rest of the year. It's just so special!

Something different – I found a tote at a festival, made by Madeline Parks Designs, and it was on sale, and I grabbed it. It's still available on line. It's in the prettiest blue, and it's a tote/purse. I can carry it to the theater with a couple water bottles inside, or carry it on a date, to look chic and put together.

What about Red? Red is a pop of color that you'll be sure to see a lot of this season. And a bag is the perfect thing to have in your wardrobe to add red. It can be your new neutral, instead of black and brown. This one is also from Marshalls. Check out TJ Maxx and Ross, as well!

A Backpack – I carried this backpack on a recent vacation and it was so roomy, so pretty, and had a pocket and a slot for everything. I liked it even more than I thought it would. It's from Amazon, and they have a couple of colors available!

If you haven't gotten a new purse in a while, step into the stores and browse. Hit the farmers markets where artisans sell their creation. Or even stop by a vintage store, if that's your vibe. Purses are a necessity for all us, so why not enjoy having a drawer of several to enjoy this season?

## **Seven for You – Good Sleep – by the Panel**

Is good sleep a hard thing to accomplish? It is for so many! There are all sorts of remedies and things to try, but it seems each individual has to work out their own issues because we are all so different! We asked our panel of women to discuss sleep, what helps them, what hinders them, and then share all the things...

Sleep! I have been using the Calm app for several years and it definitely helps me go to sleep. The app has “sleep stories“ for adults and for children. They also have music or, my favorite, “brown noise.” They also have meditations if you happen to wake up in the middle of the night and want to go back to sleep. Someone, and I prefer men’s voices, will talk you gently back to sleep.

It is a subscription service, about \$70 a month, but I cannot live without it! - Anita

My husband and I are creatures of habit. Each night we eat supper between 6:00-6:30. Then we watch television until the news at 10:00. After that, we watch House Hunters. Then it’s bedtime at 11:00, right on the dot. Some nights I almost can’t wait for the people to decide on their house so I can go to bed, but I do wait and watch. Then when I get in bed I turn on Chopped or Project Runway with the volume really low. I have tinnitus and this helps to muffle it, so I can fall fast asleep.

We both get up at least once a night for something but usually we go right back to bed. On the occasion when my mind is thinking about a hundred different things, and I can’t go back to sleep right away, I turn the television back on.

And I have one other solution to sleepless nights when I don’t want to be up or I’ve tried everything else. I turn the television and lights off, roll into my favorite position and sing softly in my mind. I have one song that always works quickly.

”Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. There’s just something about that name...” Works every time. - Carole

Sleep has become a problem for me. I am scheduled to see a sleep doctor in April, and I've been waiting on that appointment for a few months now. I wear a mouth guard, but that doesn't keep me from trying to grind my teeth and exhausting myself while I should be resting. Then I've added snoring to the mix in the last couple of years. I have no idea why because I can breathe just fine when I'm awake. I take plenty of vitamins, including magnesium, go to bed at relatively the same time every night (usually 10 pm), limit my caffeine to one cup of coffee in the morning. I so want to rest well, and I'm looking forward to getting some help. – Laura

I’m at that stage in life where sleeping from bedtime all the way through till morning (and by morning, I’m talking about sunshine peaking above the horizon, not the wee dark hours of morning) has become an accomplishment worth celebrating! Unfortunately, we don’t get too many opportunities to celebrate this feat. Because more often than not, I awake from sound slumber to find the red light on the clock mocking my tired eyes while silently shouting “3:00!” Ugh. Not again. At first, I’d attempt to roll over and force REM. I’d mentally bargain with myself that if I didn’t fall asleep, I had to get up and clean the house (Didn’t work – I didn’t fall back asleep, nor did I clean anything.) I’ve tried fighting it. Even considered seeking medical assistance. But for now, I accept sleeplessness as my current reality (Thanks a lot, hormones.).

Awake at three a.m.? Okay, let's use that time to catch up on missed TV shows or read a few chapters without that pesky self-imposed guilt telling me I should be doing something productive {Since the only thing I SHOULD be doing at the moment is SLEEPING!}. Yep, I've decided to embrace the sleepless nights. And if you'll excuse me, I'm off to grab an afternoon nap... - Jennifer

Sleep...so far lost in my life...where did you go? Insomnia had come to stay, but help was only a blood test away. My Mom and I both have chronic insomnia and have tried many meds, routines to fall asleep/stay asleep. The one thing that has helped me is the reduction in my thyroid medication. Two years of reductions, and I am finally sleeping better. From 125 mg to 88 mg. Your thyroid controls more than you think:

Key Body Functions Controlled by the Thyroid:

- Metabolism & Weight: Regulates the speed at which you burn calories.
- Heart Rate & Blood Pressure: Affects how fast or strong your heart beats.
- Body Temperature: Controls sensitivity to heat or cold.
- Brain & Mental Health: Affects concentration, mood, and mental activity.
- Energy Levels: Influences feelings of energy or fatigue.
- Growth & Development: Crucial for development and skin/bone maintenance
- Bowel and Stomach Issues: Can cause diarrhea or constipation, gas, bloating, pain, SIBO, or IBS.

My advice is to have your thyroid tested if you have any of these symptoms. I wish I had known this years ago; it would have saved me from a colon resection surgery and years of insomnia, diarrhea, pain, and more. I would have slept like I did before I turned 40 and my thyroid went rogue. – Cathy

I've never been a good sleeper, usually because my mind is working overtime. Since I've been in the throes of menopause, I use supplements to help me sleep better, such as [Centrum Restful Sleep Menopause Support Tablets](#). Also, my husband and I have a nightly routine of praying and reading a section of Scripture together. That tells my mind it's time to shut down and go to sleep. Some nights when that hasn't happened yet, I open my Kindle and read some fiction until I'm ready to sleep. - Angela

During the course of a week, I may have some nights where I sleep great, and then a few nights where I'm wide awake at 4am and that's it. I'm up. Of course, it's maddening. I really don't know what makes me wake up so early, but I do know that I don't require a lot of sleep to have a good day. If I get seven hours, wow, that's the best. Here are a few things I consider at night...

I eat dinner early, if possible.

I listen to worship music, right before I get ready for bed.

I scroll the TV (yes, this helps me!) get sleepy.

I love a fan for noise, tucked in covers all around me, but my comforter has to be loose at the bottom or it bothers my toes!

I unburden my thoughts to Him.

I smile. Yes, it makes my face and mind settle down as I drift off...

I make sure I use lotion on my dry hands! Yes, dry hands can keep me awake! – Marcy

I used to have no trouble sleeping whatsoever. My normal was around 6 hours or so and I liked to stay up late and get up early and usually didn't need a nap; but in the last 9 months or so, my sleep has been somewhat erratic. Sometimes I fall asleep too early, then wake up at 2ish and can't get back to sleep for a couple of hours. If I go to sleep normally at 10-12 I wake up at 5 or 6 which is good. But this past winter, I sometimes slept until 7 or 7:30 which feels very late to me. Sometimes I wake up around 4 and find it's better to just get up rather than struggle to go back to sleep. Then I can take a nap if needed (a luxury of being retired!) I'm hoping the long days of summer help me normalize again, but with getting older (unbelievably 70), I think naps are here to stay because I tend to take one when I'm tired, when it's too hot, when it's too cold. - Dina

## **Cousin Moms – One Perfect Day - by Kamrin and Charissa**

Do moms ever get a chance to create a perfect day? Probably not very often. But what if they could dream up a perfect day off, doing what they'd like to do, apart from chores and obligations. What would that look like? We asked, and the cousin moms answered. They almost said the same thing, this month. So...maybe moms everywhere need coffee and movies and to be unplugged. See what they say, and comment below with your own perfect day idea!

Charissa

If I could dream up a perfect Saturday, it would be a spring day, like we have this season.

I'd want to start the morning with the kids sleeping until at least 8a.m. I'd love my husband to make a pot of coffee, and we would enjoy a freshly made breakfast. I'd then love to pack up lunches to go, load our truck with our bikes, and snacks. We'd then head to our favorite campsite Standing Indian Campground (where there's no cell service!) We would enjoy the day riding bikes, playing in the creek, playing card games, and maybe even enjoying a camp fire.

On the way home, we would stop and get frozen yogurt. Once at the house, my husband would grill meat on the grill and the gorgeous sun would be setting behind the house. We would then snuggle up on the sofa with popcorn, candy and a movie.

That would be a cheap outing, we'd enjoy God's nature disconnected from the rest of the world and phones, and all of our commitments. Being together and present would be my ideal Saturday.

Kamrin

A free Saturday? That's rare for us. I do love being at the baseball fields and watching my kids. But sometimes, we are pulled in all directions, so...

Sometimes on a free Saturday, we end up staying around the house because we are always gone, always doing and going. But if I had my perfect pick, it might look like this:

One would be to get up and do nothing, after sleeping in late. We'd enjoy coffee and just kind of be. I like to plan a fun lunch like a sub bar or charcuterie, pick a movie, and all be together. Then we'd play games. Just being home and enjoying each other is my favorite, with the least amount of screen time. We might even go out and do an ice cream run in the evening. That would be our perfect "chill" day.

The other choice, if money were no problem, I'd love to get up and get dressed and get coffee out, first. We might go to a smaller shop here we sit and play a board game, or go get breakfast and enjoy a slow start. Then we'd go on a day trip. We might pick a small town or festival where we could shop and explore, or even hike! We love to be outdoors when we can, but my daughter loves to shop. Then we'd eat somewhere we'd never eaten. We might find a park to explore, or a zoo. Even though the kids are getting older, we love the zoo. There are so many months here in Texas where it's hot, so spring time we love zoos. Most of all, we love making memories.

In the summer, we might visit an amusement or water park. We all work and do school from computers, so it would be great to disconnect. And we might see a movie out, if there's something

good to see. The kids also like setting up their rooms, so going to Ikea to shop would be fun! We sing and jam out in the car, and just have fun doing and experiencing the new!

A family adventure book is also something I'd love to do. Adventure Books create fun books for families, and there are so many options. You scratch off, and you read what you need. One time it was to buy marshmallows and go to a park and have a marshmallow fight. One was to play dodgeball with flour in socks! Our kids love these! And some of these are road trips to enjoy. You do the adventure and take a Polaroid picture and you write about your day. We've done five or six of these, and we love it.

## **Bookstore – Like a Fish – by Angela Dolbear**

FISH OUT OF WATER will always be a special book to me. I completed this novel in close to six months, which is record timing. But the thing I remember the most was that each night I went into my office to write, it was like a date with God. I always pray before I start writing—or at least, I try to remember to pray—and God would meet me there. I felt His presence, and the words flowed freely. Perhaps because I used a personal experience as a plot point. There were many tears and laughs, too.

FISH OUT OF WATER is the third novel in “The Garden Key Tales series. Each book can be read as a stand-alone novel, but reading them in order is a lot more fun.

It’s hard to describe the story without giving away spoilers. But, here goes.

Can life be this beautiful for a quirky-cool, former Goth chick? Writer Maddy McManus certainly counts her blessings--daily.

She lives with her gorgeous, loving, and loyal rock star husband, Peter, in a beautifully restored historic mini-mansion in Pasadena, California. And her fiction writing career is taking off. After years of battling fear and insecurity, Maddy’s life finally seems to fit her, and she feels established.

Then a major-league curveball crashes in and unhinges Maddy’s perfect life plan. But this new adventure leads Maddy into a deeper level of love — and heartbreak — than she has ever known.

While joining her husband on his band’s tour in Berlin, Germany, an elderly Italian woman in an ancient church speaks a phrase to Maddy that haunts her in her broken world.

Can she make sense of this woman’s words and receive the healing she needs from her suffocating grief?

In a divinely-timed moment, Peter’s wild past rears its head by way of a mysterious letter.

Can Maddy make peace with the repercussions of her husband’s history?

FISH OUT OF WATER is the tale of purpose, prayer, and palette-pleasing pizza in Germany.

## **In the Kitchen – Five and More – by Marcy Lytle**

*Trader Joe's 5-Ingredient or Less Cookbook.* Have you heard of it? It was a gift to me, and I've SO enjoyed the recipes I've tried so far. Simple. All the ingredients are at Trader Joe's. And oh, so tasty. I'm including several of the recipes this month, along with a sweet treat...

### Sesame Noodles with Chicken

- 8 oz linguine
- 1lb boneless chicken breasts
- 2 c shredded carrots
- 2 c edamame
- Toasted sesame dressing

Bring large pot of water to a boil, add the pasta and cook for 8 minutes, stirring occasionally. Drain.

Cut chicken into 1-inch cubes and season with paprika, garlic powder, salt and pepper.

Heat 1 T olive oil in skillet and add chicken to the pan and cook for about 4 minutes, undisturbed. Turn and cook another 3 minutes til fully cooked. Set aside to cool.

Assemble the bowls by dividing chicken, carrots, edamame and noodles into 4 bowls and drizzle with the dressing. Serve cold or hot. (You can toss edamame and carrots in oil in a pan and cook 2-3 min if you want them hot.)

### Steak and Potatoes

- 1 lb sirloin steak tips, cut into bite size pieces
- 24oz. roasted potatoes with peppers and onions
- 1 T parsley, chopped
- 6 T butter
- 4 frozen garlic cubes

Preheat oven to 425. On a greased sheet, empty roasted potatoes bag and bake 25 minutes.

Heat 1 T olive oil in skillet, add the steak pieces in even layer and season with salt and pepper. Cook for 2-3 minutes per side til fully cooked, and set aside.

Discard any excess oil from pan and then add the butter, parsley and garlic cubes, heat til the butter melts.

Add the steak bites back to the pan and toss to coat. Add the potatoes and toss as well. Serve and top with more parsley if desired.

### Grilled Cheese

- 2 slices of sourdough bread
- 1 T Garlic spread dip
- 1 T Italian Hot Pepper Bomba Sauce
- 1 c unexpected cheddar cheese, grated

- Tomato & roasted red pepper soup (or soup of your choice)

Spread 1 T butter on one slice of sourdough, repeat with the other. Flip the slice over and spread 1 T garlic spread dip. On the other slice of bread, spread 1 T of the sauce. Place grated cheese on top of the sauce, place other slice of bread on top to close.

In a skillet, place the sandwich butter side down and cover with lid. Heat 2 min per side til cheese melts.

Heat your soup and serve alongside the grilled cheese.

### Sweet Potato Tacos

- 2 small sweet potatoes, cubed
- 15.5 oz black beans
- 14 oz Mexican style roasted corn with cotija cheese
- Corn tortillas
- 1-2 avocados, sliced

In a bowl, combine sweet potatoes, 1 T olive oil, sea salt, paprika, garlic powder and mix well.

In air fryer, air fry them at 400 for 10-15 minutes, tossing halfway. (Or just roast them at 375 in the oven for 25 minutes if you don't have an air fryer).

Rinse and drain beans and set aside.

In a non-stick skillet, add 2T olive oil and add corn and sauce pellets and cook for 5-7 minutes.

Heat tortillas, then assemble the tacos. Scoop some sweet potatoes, corn and black beans into the warm tortilla, then top with avocado and cheese.

### A Sweet Treat

We love this treat and have it often...

- Apple
- Caramel sauce
- Chocolate syrup
- Fresh blackberries and strawberries
- Dark chocolate chips

Just slice the apples and arrange in a flower like shape on the plate. Place your fruit in the middle, and drizzle the sauce and syrup. Top with chocolate chips!

### A Box to Go

Have you seen the divided boxes, found in the hardware section of the dollar store? Get the ones with rigid dividers, not the removable kind. Or you can find these at Michaels stores, too. These boxes work great for snacks to go, for those day trips or games or just a picnic out for fun!

You can place whatever you want inside the squared sections, but here are the tastes we enjoy:

- Cucumbers
- Sliced carrots

- Pita chips
- Hummus
- Market treat
- Dips or sauces
- Tabbouleh
- Dark chocolate
- Cashews

Fill it with what you have. It can be a totally snack treat, a savory one, lots of crunch, or only sweets!

## **Tried and True – Last Month’s Learning – by Marcy Lytle**

March is over, can you believe it? A third of the year has passed. What have you learned? I’ve been learning so much, and I share it monthly with you, to inspire, make you smile, encourage you to try, or just to read for fun:

Did you know that Target often has the cutest totes in the dollar spot? They’re great for spring fun.

Have you seen the cute spring night lights on Amazon that come on when you turn off your light switch? They’re so cute in a guest bathroom!

Want to decorate your counters or tables or spaces in the kitchen? Just set out lemons or limes! They’re a great addition!

I ordered this cute little trio of fragrances from Life in Lilac – they smell awesome – and they’re great for travel because they’re tiny.

All those throws and blankets from winter, and where to put them. How about rolling them and stacking them in a basket for décor? You might want one, once the AC turns on...just saying...

Serve up your root beer floats this spring in an clear glass mug, to make it look like a latte and oh, so fancy! Fun...

The King’s Warden – if you like foreign films – it’s a good one.

It’s the time of year for all things totes. For packing up for day trips, weekends away, or a full picnic array. Target has these laundry basket type totes that I use for everything!

I found the coolest backpack with all the pockets, great for travel, and just the perfect price and size. Check it out!

A restaurant where we ate recently served onion dip with nachos. It was good! Don’t knock it until you try it...

Did you know that before skilletts we use on the stove, there was a pan called a spider? I did not...

President Woodrow Wilson’s wife Edith was one of the first minimalists...read about her interesting life!

You know the table runners we all use? Long ago, it was just a ribbon that was placed down the table!

Ever heard of a melodeon? Neither had I. But this is it...a small organ of sorts.

We were dining recently and saw this on the wall, repeated throughout the dining room. Framed art, but then just a fabric covered shape tucked in among...interesting.

Black bean hummus. It’s a real thing. It’s in restaurants. And it’s tasty.

There’s a tavern in Abingdon VA built in 1779 that still has mail delivered in the original slot in the wall of the building!

Ever seen John Wayne's first feature film called The Big Trail? He was only 23 years old. It's a good movie.

Ever heard of the "Carter scratch?" Look it up...

Fake flowers aren't so bad...when drought and heat are where you live...Amazon has plenty!



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Outside Fun – by Marcy Lytle**

It's that time of year, maybe a small or large window, where we all are thankful for sunshine and warmth, and the invitation to go outside with the kiddos, to the park...or just in our backyards. There's a lot of fun to be enjoyed just in the backyard, with the family, without leaving your space.

### Things to buy:

Maybe your little kids would love one of these items for play this spring:

A tree swing – There are a couple of cool ones that also look so colorful in the yard. One is a flat disc, great for swinging, sitting, just a quiet and cool retreat for those spring days. The other is rope type swing with little discs for climbing and enjoying.

Push mowers with bubbles – You've seen these, I bet. There are so many options, with the simplest ones for barely walking babies, to more sophisticated mowers for the older toddlers. They make noise, they blow bubbles, and they're fun. The perfect outdoor toy.

A water table – One particular water table from Target is a favorite, because it has so many cool features. And a plug for draining easily. This is sure to entertain the little kids for hours, and you too, while you sit nearby and watch.

A sensory table – Oh my goodness, the hours and the creativity that can emerge from this toy. Just visit the dollar store often for replenishing the bins with pompoms, wiggles, sand, felt, anything that feels good to the touch and fun to play with.

A big blanket – for sitting, listening to the birds, enjoying a snack, and feeling the warmth...

### Things to learn:

Consider planting an herb garden with the kids. You don't need a fancy herb box, even just about three pots will do. You'll need: pots, soil, your herbs of choice and some little hands that are eager to plant. You can provide them with garden gloves and tiny shovels if you wish!

Think about perhaps three herbs you use a lot, and take the kids shopping to purchase them. Let them smell the herbs, too! A good choice where we live is rosemary, basil, mint, parsley, and cilantro (before it gets too hot).

Figure out a good spot for the plants to thrive and start filling the pots with your soil. Let the little hands help with a scoop!

Show them how to wiggle the herbs from their tiny pots and place them into the big ones. The basil will grow a big plant, so give it the biggest pot. Mint will spread and take over, so be sure it has its own pot, too.

Once it's all planted, use your watering can or the hose, to give each plant a drink.

Clean up, and plan a schedule to check the herbs, water them, snip them and enjoy them!

### Things to create:

Sometimes, you just need a big tub of all sorts of things that the kids can dig into and use to create, as the perfect weather allows.

Sponge paintbrushes and water buckets – they can then paint the sidewalk or the brick with water!

Balls of all sizes – to throw and kick – and create games with!

Pool noodles – not for swimming, but for placing and creating obstacle courses.

Dollar store fun items – bug catchers, ball tosses with gloves, picnic items to play and set the table, anything you shop and see that can create games or interactive play time.

Sketch books and crayons – for drawing what they see on a spring day!

Cups and spoons – for digging and filling and making gardens and creating mud pies.

It's the best time of the year for getting outside with the kiddos, young to old. Maybe the teens will play and create with the littles. Or maybe your littles will play for hours, while you relax and smile as they do. The daylight is now longer, and the warmer breezes are coming...isn't outside fun the best?

## **I Don't Do Teens – Let's Do It – by Marcy Lytle**

A friend and I were chatting recently about the tweens and teens in our family and she asked, "Do you text your grandkids?" I do, because a couple of the older kids have phones. So we talked about the kids and how we communicate with them. Maybe you have teens in your home, or you're an aunt to teens, or a grandparent, or just know some teenagers in your circle of friends. These teens need encouragement, and you can bet they're not going to get much throughout the days and weeks of being at school and on the fields or dance floors, etc. They're going to get a lot of instruction and criticism and correction, but encouragement? Maybe, if they get good grades...

What if we, the adults in their lives, could find ways to encourage all the teens we know, or at least a few in our circle of family and friends? That conversation with my friend started me thinking of a list for all of us, one to print and keep, as a reminder to encourage these big kids that will be adults before we know it. They need affirmation in a big way, and it can be our joy to offer it:

1. Text the teens that have phones with a word of encouragement weekly. It can be a verse or a poem or just a thought to make them smile.
2. Hand a bit of cash into their hands when you see them, if you have extra. That will certainly get a big smile.
3. Pray for these teens, and then tell them you prayed for them. Remember that they said a big test was coming up, and ask how it went, and tell them you prayed.
4. Attend a game or event where they are participating, and hug and pat them on the back for a job well done.
5. If you see teens at church, compliment their outfit or something you see them doing. They will love that!
6. Give your teens chances to succeed, even at the little things. If they set the table well, say so. If they take out the trash, thank them. Teach them a skill, then watch them shine.
7. Take a teen in your life out for ice cream. One is never too old to enjoy a cold treat.
8. Grab a gift card from a sporting goods store, from Amazon, or a clothing store and mail it to a teen. Imagine their surprise!
9. Did a teen experience a great loss or disappointment? An old-fashioned card in the mail would be so nice.
10. Invite a family with teens over to your yard for backyard fun and food. Why not?

That's just 10 ways to affirm and encourage teens, the ones who need it so much. They're growing, some faster than others, and it's hard. They're experiencing hormone imbalances and feelings they've never had, and they get confused. They are a child one day and want to be an adult the next. And if we think back, we can remember the teen angst that was ours, as well.

We can at the least be kind and thoughtful. And when a kind thought pops into our heads, we can act it out to the teens we love.

## **Homesteading – A Few Seeds - by Leyanne Enterline**

It's time to start planting!

I wanted to try some new foods in my garden, but I felt like I wasn't really prepared this season. Therefore, I just planted what I knew had worked great in the past! I got in tomatoes, okra, peppers, cilantro, potatoes, basil and oregano. I had brought all my aloe in so it wouldn't freeze and I finally got all that back outside. After the big rain, they are looking so happy! My green onion lasted through the freeze and is looking massive and healthy. Everything has been started by seed, so it takes a really long time to start seeing results. I am excited!

I would love to grow garlic, ginger, turmeric and sun berries, but haven't tried too hard yet. I would also like to try melons, but I don't really have the space for them in the garden. Some work would need to be done, to be able to host those. I'll try cucumber and zucchini soon as well, but I don't think it's quite time to plant those...

By accident last year, some loofa seeds I had received from a friend blew off my gardening table and just planted themselves! I will have loofas for years! That was a nice surprise! I'm not sure what to do with them all. I've shared with friends and family and still have an insane amount. The one thing I didn't even take time planting gave me the most production! Same with my zinnias. I sprinkled a few seeds out and had a fantastic harvest of beautiful color. My son even took some zinnias to his girlfriend and she thought they were from a store! I was so happy they turned out so well! Those flowers also helped bring in the bees and ladybugs, which have been so fun to observe.

Whether you have a garden or just a pot with some soil, plant! It's so exciting to grow and eat your own food Thank you Lord for providing!

“To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:”  
Ecclesiastes 3:1 NKJV

It's the planting season! Get to it!

## **In Each Room – The Back Porch – by Marcy Lytle**

Every season, I rearrange and add things, toss and rearrange more things, all to welcome in the new. Do you? It can be expensive to re-do an entire back porch, but there are some things you can do to brighten your space, now that spring is officially underway and we're on our way toward summer. A little at a time...

Our back porch isn't big, but we do have a table and two chairs. That's where I began. I freshened up with new cushions on the chairs and opted for a huge flat basket instead of a table cloth for the table. I found all of the table décor at the store, At Home. I wanted a centerpiece for the table, so I thought the little cactus setting was perfect.

Now that the table was done, I looked around the perimeter of the porch.

We were shopping in a mall and stopped into Earthbound Trading Company, where I spotted this cool beaded curtain on sale. Would it work? It did! It's just hanging on a couple of nails and provides a small curtain that pairs well beside the table, where we sometimes eat breakfast or visit outside. It also looks pretty from inside the house, as we look out the window!

I forgot the rug under the table! That's an important piece of the patio! It provides such coverage and an overall color scheme for the setting. I went with neutral this year, and added color other places. The rug too is from At Home. Be sure to measure your patio before you shop!

Just off the patio, I've had a baker's rack sitting for years. I've placed candles there, garden tools, little knick knacks and more. But this year, I decided to just shop my home for lots of little plants I've had sitting around in different areas and just take them outside and group them. They filled the shelves, and provide a pretty side area off the porch for enjoying. Yes, a few garden items are still there as well.

It's fun to have a cooler nearby, so we've had the same one for years. We fill it with ice and drinks when friends come to visit. That way, we don't have to go in and out of the house while we're visiting. We can satisfy our thirst right from the cooler. It's from Amazon.

A patio table and chairs can always be your focal point for a re-do, and then build from there, as you can. Purchase a few new things, find items on sale, visit Goodwill, make things, and shop your own house and garage. You'll be amazed at the newness you can create and enjoy. It will make you smile and invite you to the patio more often...this season.

## **A Night to Remember – Resurrection – by Marcy Lytle**

Do your kiddos know that resurrection means giving life to something that was dead? Hopefully, they will know more after this lesson, so fitting for the Easter season. There are so many cool ideas out there, like resurrection eggs, making resurrection rolls in the oven, and all sorts of hands on activities to teach our children about the power of life after death. So why not focus on it even more? How can we ever get enough of the power of the resurrection?

Preparation: Call the family together to move around the house together as you learn. Have some hot buttery rolls in the oven ready to enjoy at the end of the study.

*Plants* – Take the kids outside and look around the yard. Ask them to find some plants that look a bit like they're dying, or plants that look like they're thriving. Ask the kids what makes the difference between the two. (Water, sunlight, food).

Can a droopy almost dead plant come back to life with bit of attention? Yes!

Can a completely dead plant come back to life? Not without a miracle.

*Food* - Head inside and open the refrigerator door and find something that looks like it might need to be thrown away because it's no longer edible. (It might be brown, or mushy, or out of date.) Toss the items that are not fit to eat.

Can moldy mushy out of date food become good to eat? Probably not. Best to go to the store to get something new.

*Toys* – Now, move the family into the bedrooms and look through the toys. Are there “dead” toys that have laid in a drawer or on the shelves of closets for a while, because they're broken or need batteries? Find a few.

Can broken toys be brought back to life? Sometimes they can! Ask the kids to name ways they can be used again.

*People* – Move to the sofa and sit close together and talk about people the family knows that might need a bit of watering, because they look droopy. (Maybe an elderly neighbor that walks slowly?) (Maybe a homeless guy on the corner?) What about friends that aren't so nice to be around because they have stinky attitudes like that molded cheese? (Are there people that we sometimes ignore and toss aside because we don't like them?) And finally, do we have folks we know that are broken? They've had a hard time in life and seem sad? (Maybe a sick friend, or one whose parent is gone, or all sorts of reasons.)

Jesus came to give life to all of these folks, including us! God saw that the world needed a Savior, one that could rescue them and bring new life where death was once present.

Jesus' death on the cross and then his resurrection (coming back to life) bring us all hope that when we believe, we too will live forever and never die. Sure, our earthly bodies will someday pass away, but there's the inside of us that gains new life because of Jesus, and we'll get a new body, too!

Bring out the rolls and the butter.

What did these rolls look like before they were made? (They were nothing, just ingredients)

When the ingredients were stirred together, were the rolls edible? (No! Just gooey dough.)

How did these rolls become edible and so good to eat? (They were transformed by the baking in the oven – what a cool miracle!)

Jesus' death and resurrection were the ultimate act of love for all of us. When we read John 3:16 – God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes will have eternal life – we are then resurrected with Him, when we too believe. No lumpy dough, only fragrant and full of life – to share with all the world around us.

Enjoy the rolls and give thanks for resurrection life!

## Rooted in Love - Heart Check – Kaelin Scott

I admit it. Sometimes I complain about stuff. Specifically my house.

Cabinets that are falling apart. Spaces I wish looked more decorative. Furniture that's old and uncomfortable. Clutter in every nook and cranny.

You get the picture.

I could go on and on sometimes. It seems like no matter how much time I spend cleaning or organizing or rearranging, there's still something to moan and groan about.

But not too long ago, I got a heart check. I was looking for a document in the ancient files on my computer, and I came across this photo.

I know, it's not a high quality photo. That's because it was taken on my flip phone in 2011.

It's a picture of the bedroom in my very first apartment, where my husband and I spent our first year of marriage. I was 20 when we got married; he was 21 and in his final year of college. We had basically nothing, as you can see. Just a mattress on the floor, some lawn chairs in the living room, and a bunch of Tupperware in lieu of actual dishes. My hubby worked a few hours a week as a tutor after class, and I worked two part-time jobs at the mall. We barely had enough money to pay our measly rent, much less to buy anything else.

It was tough, but by the grace of God we scraped by. It's a time I look back on with fondness now, even though I would never want to go back to living like that.

Here's the funny thing. While we lived in that apartment, my husband and I had so. much. fun.

Sure, we wanted to make more money and get out of that creepy apartment complex. (No joke, our neighbors were not the kind of people you want to hang around with.) We wanted to be able to go out to eat or buy each other nice gifts or even just some new clothes. We bought whatever groceries were cheap, usually frozen junk because neither of us knew how to cook.

We had it tough back then. But some of our silliest memories together are from that time in our lives.

When our psycho neighbors were screaming at each other all night, keeping us awake, we played mini golf in our bedroom. We watched every single Texas Rangers game and every episode of *The Nanny*. (And maybe some *Jersey Shore* too.) We sat on the floor eating Otter Pops watching the rain fall outside. We played outrageous pranks on each other like a couple of little kids. We went to the park and played baseball with sticks and pinecones.

It was a hard time, but it was a simple time. We were happy because we were together, and that was all we truly needed.

Looking at that old photo reminded me that the house isn't what makes a place feel like home. It's the people inside of it. The memories made together. Finding joy in the little things because they're the things that really matter.

You don't have to have a lot to be thankful. All it takes is the willingness to enjoy life in every season, knowing that none of them last very long.



YOU

## **Inner Strength - Fresh Air – by Michelle Wyatt**

You know the phrase we all say, “I need some air!” Fresh air can be good for the soul. You know what else it’s good for? Quality time with people you care about. My recent experience was going with my newfound friend and my two boys to walk my friend’s dog.

It was refreshing to see my oldest son, Brendan, quickly get off his computer game to join us on the walk. My youngest jumped at the chance to go for a walk with a dog. Since my boys and I only had a couple hours to visit, it was a perfect way to spend time together. As soon as we got settled outside, Brendan took the lead and told us about the last dream he had. It sparked an interesting conversation. Brendan has a hard time conversing in closed places where engaging things usually occur, such as playing games on the computer, so a walk in the fresh air made for a sweet reminder of what to do more often.

I appreciate Brendan’s creative mind. He paints a picture with his words. Brendan is a thinker but there’s no way to know what’s on his mind unless he is in an environment where he feels safe and free to share. He is free to share when his mind isn’t competing with other stimuli, as I previously mentioned. He is safe knowing that he is surrounded by people who care about him, and having a furry friend around also helps.

I wish I could tell you what it was about, but it’s not about what Brendan said. It’s about the experience. My friend and I piggy-backed off of what Brendan talked about. Matthew is a great listener and shares when he finds it fitting to, as well. He’s very passionate about animals, especially cute dogs. He took the lead at watching out for our furry friend. We all have our passions that feed out souls.

That day reminded me of one that, sadly, I had forgotten. You know a cool thing about the walk? It wasn’t at a park. It wasn’t on a trail. It was around the hotel where I was staying. There were multiple hotels by each other, with plenty of grassy space and sidewalks. So getting fresh air and taking a walk doesn’t have to look a certain way to be peaceful. I used to think it did. I have put off for way too long taking walks, because I wanted to be in a “pretty” spot. I am so thankful for my friend and her dog for reminding me that feeding the soul with fresh air doesn’t have to look “pretty” in the traditional sense. By making a connection, whether it’s with someone you care about, talking to God, reaching out to a lost loved one, or just being in the present by noticing what’s around you, getting out of your head for a while can give your soul the beautiful quality time it deserves.

Even though it was a short walk, it was a significant, memorable, peaceful moment. I will keep this in the back of my mind every time I feel like I need some fresh air.

So after reading this, I encourage you to reflect on these questions:

What does getting fresh air look like for you?

What feeds your soul?

## Life Right Now - Cultivating Generosity By Jennifer Stephens

When my phone buzzed, I glanced at the screen and saw the text message with three words staring back at me - door dash delivery. What? Knowing it wasn't an actual door dash delivery (How does *that* even work?!), I continued to stare at the puzzling words on the screen. Curious and confused (my birthday was weeks ago and there wasn't a holiday in sight), I cautiously opened the front door wondering what mysterious item my friend left on the porch. Yesterday's false spring had quickly given way to second winter, so with a chill in the air, I swiftly grabbed the large canine covered sack and brought it into the warm comforts of home. Reaching inside, I pulled out the most beautiful handbag!

The art of generous giving. Some people just have it. This friend is one of those people! Most people (me) try their best when it comes to giving. We give what we can when we can. We bake casseroles for acquaintances recovering from surgery. We throw dollars in the plate at church. We'll round up to the nearest dollar when purchasing things at the thrift store when asked. And during the holiday season we'll toss money into Salvation Army's red buckets. We see a need and immediately ask "How much?" We are givers. But are we...generous?

Giving and generosity might seem like interchangeable words, but they're not. Giving is often perfunctory. A task to check off a list. But generosity? That comes from the heart. And it's the kind of giving God loves (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). The handbag dropped at my door? Pure goodness. She didn't expect anything in return (emphatically refusing my offer to repay her). Likely she would've preferred to just drop it off anonymously, but chose to send a text to ensure I'd be there so it wouldn't fall victim to the porch pirate thieves that like to prowl the neighborhood. Her generosity shined because this bag wasn't just a random purse. This handbag was covered in sparkly beads (She knows my love for all things that shimmer!), it featured a Route 66 logo (She listened when I shared about the road trip my husband and I had previously taken on the mother road.), and everything about it screamed ME (Those were her exact words when she shared with me later!). She even considered my love of dogs when she placed it inside the dog covered sack.

This friend's thoughtful act of generosity has inspired me to move beyond giving to strangers and cultivate creative generosity towards the people in my life! Does that mean spending loads of money on elaborate gifts? Not at all. Then, how? We can use our skills and talents to connect with our inner circle. We could host a cookie decorating party or a craft night or send a thoughtful note in the mail. We could invite a small group over for a casual game day. If we're out shopping and spot something that immediately brings a friend to mind, buy it for them – and don't wait for a special day, do an on-the-spot door dash delivery!

Opening presents always makes us feel good, but receiving an unexpected gift of generosity for no reason at all makes us feel...something more. Special. Important. Connected.

This month let's begin to create a community that feels special, important, and connected. Let's give from the heart. Let's shift the focus of our giving from "How much do I need to give?" to "How

can I give generously?" Let's cultivate a culture of generosity by sharing our time, talents, and gifts with our friends.

*"The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed."  
Proverbs 11:25*

## **A Hopeful Heart - A Rock Called Hope – by Christina Oberon**

Last night, while walking along a quiet path in our town, my son found a pile of rocks. I noticed something small resting amongst them right at my feet. At first, I almost walked right past it. But something about the color caught my eye, and I stopped. There it was, a painted rock. Purple with little dots scattered across it, and in the center was a green heart with one simple word written inside.

HOPE.

I picked it up and held it in my hand for a moment. It was smooth and cool, but the message it carried felt warm.

Someone had taken the time to paint that rock and leave it there for someone else to find. They didn't know who would come along. They didn't know whose day might need a small reminder. Yet they left it anyway, trusting that hope would reach the right person. And somehow, it did. This rock had no idea how much I needed it in this moment.

This particular walk, I had shed a few tears as the sun was going down. April has become a month that stirs many emotions for me, as it is the month of my late dad's birthday. Holding that little rock in my hand last night made me think about how hope still lives on, even if my dad no longer does.

Hope is still alive in simple reminders placed along our path. It could be a kind word, a shared smile, or a memory that suddenly warms our heart instead of breaking it. Hope is like that painted rock. Someone, somewhere, chooses to believe that goodness matters enough to leave a piece of it behind for others. I think that is something my dad would want me to remember this April. That even when life feels uncertain, hope is still out there. Sometimes we just have to slow down enough to notice it.

Maybe hope is also something we're meant to pass along. To leave behind in the form of kindness, encouragement or compassion. A small act that might brighten someone else's day. Just like the person who painted that rock.

I don't know who created it or who placed it on that path, but their act reminded me of something important. Hope is never wasted. It travels from one heart to another.

And sometimes, when we least expect it, we find it waiting right at our feet.

## Healthy Habits – Purse Particulars – by Marcy Lytle

Does the title amuse you? How can buying a purse be involved in staying healthy and safe? Well, when you have as many totes, bags, and purses as I do...there are seriously lots of things to consider over time...in purchasing, wearing and enjoying that one accessory all women carry.

### Buying:

Make sure it closes – Once in a theater, I slung my purse across my shoulder and my wallet flew out! Open totes are one thing, but a purse with important valuables is another! Magnets and zippers keep your items inside and safe.

Designer isn't dope – Don't spend money you don't have on a designer bag. There are so many pretty bags that look just like the one you're eyeing. And so many Instagram influencers share designer lookalikes. It's not healthy to drain our bank accounts if we don't have the funds to drain...on a bag.

Functional AND pretty – Sure, some purses are so cute and pretty, but if they can't hold at least your essentials, they're not very practical. Or...if the straps are so thin that when you carry the full bag, your shoulders hurt, that's not good! I have a skinny strapped purse I love but I just quit carrying it because it cut into my shoulders.

### Carrying:

Clean out – Make it a habit of dumping and wiping out your bags at least once a week. One full of used tissues, old candy wrappers, and any other personal items is just a bag of germs.

Heavy is not good – I mentioned skinny straps above. But if the bag is just overall a heavy one, it won't be comfortable or good for your back or arm. I love a large tote bag to hold all the stuff, but it won't be one I carry over my arm for long walks. Summer bags are out now, so consider lightweight ones that are airy, ones that breathe.

Safety first – Be careful with all the dangly things on bags. Purse charms are popular right now, and fringe is back. But sometimes, too many strings and baubles can be an unsafe thing to have on your bag. They can easily catch in a door or swing by an object and knock it off, when you're shopping.

### Enjoying:

Why Not? A pop of color – Sometimes, adding a pop of color to your outfit can just brighten your look and your day. And that's healthy! Maybe a pretty red bag this summer would be fun, or what about blue? Look in your closet and see what color you might wear the most. Then check out Marshalls, where the bags hang by color, and choose one!

A dressy bag – I found a peacock sequin fancy purse last fall in an antique store for \$19 and grabbed it. I carried it several times for special events, and it made me so happy. It went with so many things...I was surprised. If you spot a cute bag with sparkles or one you'd carry to those fun outings this summer, and it's not too pricey, it might be fun to have...to sit on a chair in your room as décor...or to hang by the door! That way you won't forget to use it!

Those totes – I can hardly ever pass up a good tote, and they're a healthy choice when traveling or going to farmer's markets. How so? A roomy farmers market tote (Marshalls has the cutest and

ones with pockets!) is yours personally, and you can fill it with fresh veggies and jarred goodies as you shop. It's so fun, and fresh is awesome! Travel totes can be filled with books to read, a hat for the sun, snacks and so much more. And having that cute tote on your car seat to grab from, it relaxes and soothes the soul. I carry a tote to the movies with a sweater and personal snacks!

Who knew all the particulars about purses could be so important to our well-being? Now, we do!



MARRIAGE

## **In Unison – Locked-In – by Terri Barnes**

My husband regularly plays guitar at the church we attend.  
His dedication to the worship team has been both inspiring and meaningful.  
On one occasion, Chris told me, “We locked-in.” - referring to the worship team’s connection.  
This phrase “Locked in” resonated with me, prompting me to reflect on its relevance to marriage.

Wives, think about how you are "locked-in" with your husband.  
How do you connect with him before his attention shifts to daily duty?  
Here are the points to hit:

Create space with intentional.  
Foster unity and highlight each as significant.  
Represent a deliberate alignment.

Chris heads out earlier than I do on weekdays.  
To keep our bond strong, we make it a point to stay in touch through an ongoing text conversation on our iPhones—an easy but meaningful way to feel connected – created space with intentional.

Often, we exchange a single emoji, the face blowing a kiss, which serves as our unique expression of affection.  
While it may seem silly, this routine forms a start to an ongoing thread communication that keeps us engaged until we meet face to face – it’s deliberate alignment.

In the evenings, we engage in deeper conversations, giving us a chance to talk about both the high points and difficulties we’ve experienced throughout the day.  
These discussions are essential for maintaining our connection.  
By listening closely to one another, we help create balance and understanding after our busy routines.

Afterward, we share parenting duties and have dinner as a family.  
If nothing is scheduled for the evening, we usually settle into a relaxed "lock-in" routine to end the day, often winding down by watching action movies or Netflix series.

Maintaining a "locked-in" mindset can help you build a deep bond with your spouse.  
This focus is key to enhancing day-to-day life and keeping your relationship close over time. Such closeness grows from being genuine, truthful, and making a steady effort.

I'm curious about how couples experience a sense of being "locked-in" with each other.

How do you keep your marriage engaging and connected?

## **Date Night Fun – April Antics – by Marcy Lytle**

Did you know that by definition antics are amusing or outrageous behavior? It's the behavior in kids that makes us laugh when they tell funny jokes as they're making faces, or act up in cute ways we cannot resist. So why not enjoy some April Antics in our date nights this month...and make a bit of a fool of ourselves...all in fun...

Dance videos – No, you don't have to publish them or even share them if you don't want to. But what if you took your phones and captured the moves while you're out and about? Maybe you're shopping and you hear a song. Ask him to do the twist! (My husband is great at this.) Or you could pick three songs at home and dance and record, and watch together with snacks, when you're done. If there's outdoor music, show up and dance and video each other as you make silly faces. Share them with your kids, and watch them croak...or laugh...or whatever.

Call a Friend and Show up – Let a friend know you're coming to cheer up someone in their family, so they're not completely unaware. But show up at a friend's house, or invite them over and surprise them with crazy straws, kid snacks like goldfish and Twizzlers, watch old shows together, eat on unusual plates you found at the dollar store. The crazier the better. Make another couple smile, and cheer up their day, on your date night with them.

Indoor Forts – You know, the kind that the kids make. Get a couple of sheets, lots of pillows, and rearrange a couple of pieces of furniture. Make forts. Read in one, snack in another, listen to tunes in another...move around as if you're in the jungle. Have fun!

April showers – Pick a rainy day or evening (no lightning, please) and take your umbrellas, wear shoes you can splash in, and walk and enjoy. Sing in the rain. You could let the umbrella down and get completely soaking wet together, then build a fire after. Open your mouth wide and taste the drops, if you dare. Make coffee and get donuts. Enjoy the season.

Have Your Own Hunt – Yes, it's Easter, and the kids will hunt and all the things. Make your own hunt with him. Hide notes, treats, etc. around the house and find them. Or make a scavenger hunt of sorts around town, as you look on line for places and sites you've not been to before. Go out and find the spots, snap pictures and make faces.

Have you ever had an antic date? I bet not. So why not this April?

## **After 40 Years – A Kinder Way – by Marcy Lytle**

Early years of marriage, I don't recall trying to stifle my comments or what I had to say, probably ever. Neither of us did. We said what we liked and didn't like and apologized later, when we realized we probably could have conveyed our feelings in a nicer way. We were young in age, young at heart, and young in wanting what we wanted...

Fast forward to now (and I do mean, wow, the years have flown) and we both find ourselves trying to communicate in a more kinder fashion, because hurting each other just isn't an option we want to choose any more. We don't want to stay up until early morning discussing some topic that we vehemently disagree about. Instead, we want to enjoy the gift of each other daily...because life is fast!

Choosing a kinder way for me...

I find that taming my tongue might be the hardest part of marriage, for me. I have always felt like if I don't say it, I can't get over it, no matter how little or small the irritation might be. And really, that's just been my excuse to correct and belittle. And neither of those choices makes my husband feel good. However, as I've gotten older, taming my tongue is now a choice I really want to make, unless I'm saying something encouraging!

I find that *grabbing his hand and squeezing it tight* works to stave off a fight. Sometimes, I'm just irritable and don't want to be touched, when he places his hand on my leg. Why? I don't know, it's just silly. So if I press through that and grab his hand and look into his eyes, he smiles, I smile back, and that irritation is gone.

I find that *saying thank you a lot more* than *why didn't you*, goes a long way for a pleasant evening at home or a night out. Finding things to thank him for is not hard, when I purpose to do it. And something changes in my heart when I see the gift he is, instead of looking for what's missing or what he didn't do.

I find that *praying for my husband works wonders*, and I don't even have to say a word to him. Funny, how that truth works, even when I think I have to say something to help God out. Often, I just pray about whatever it is, and it either goes away (because it was silly) or God gives me patience or speaks to him.

I find that *cozying up instead of scrolling my phone* or staying busy in the house settles both of our hearts and creates a bond and a love that then makes us feel like dancing for a minute or two before we go about our day, or head off to bed.

I find that *giving to him without expecting him to reciprocate* in like manner is pure gold. Often I don't see his giving because I place the list of gifts on a list, of which I want him to use. But when I choose to see the way he's bent, the way he gives, my heart sings instead of pines.

Do I choose a kinder way every single day? No way. I fail miserably some days. But I will say that I'm much sadder and more quickly to repent these days than I did way back then. There are so many changes that occur over time in a marriage, ones we don't even see happening, until we feel ourselves slipping away.

But choosing a kinder way, with His help, really revives a marriage to the status of new love, even better than that love we had in the beginning. So I'm headed toward that path in my marriage of choosing kindness. It's always better. And His kindness to me enables me to do it. And on the

days I am so unkind and mean? There's always mercy and grace for me, and for that I'm so thankful that I have another day to choose a kinder way.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **A Day in the Life - This Is 40-ish – by Bekah Holland**

As I'm sure I've mentioned at least 27 times over the years, I am in no way a spring-cleaning kind of gal. I really, really want to be. Need someone whose to-do lists are epic? I'm kind of awesome at it. However I also excel at procrastination, so the follow-through aspect of those epic lists is severely lacking. Instead of washing my curtains and cleaning out closets, I find myself watching videos of people who are better grown-ups than me while mumbling self-deprecating comments, irritated that now I'm thinking about my ceiling fans that needed to be dusted months ago. And in true ADHD fashion, thinking about cleaning while avoiding doing any, my brain starts down a typical pinball machine style bunny trail and before I realize it, I'm doing some self-reflection and personal inventory.

I'm smack dab in the middle of my 40's, which has propelled me into a strange kind of limbo. For example, I could not possibly care less if Becky with the good hair disapproves of my 20-year-old Bon Jovi t-shirt and pajama shorts attire while I'm doing the glamorous marching band pickup at 10pm on Tuesday. But I'll also apologize profusely to my friend about my messy house even though I know her laundry room is almost as disastrous as mine (not really, she's a magician) because apparently you can both care and not care about what people think of you at the same time. Make it make sense, y'all, because I can't.

As women, most of us started wearing multiple hats around the same time we learned to tie our shoes. We grew up learning to be different things for different people, usually carrying a majority of the invisible, emotional labor in our homes, while navigating the minefield of being both too much and not enough. So after decades of being pulled in a thousand different directions, being criticized by sometimes well-meaning family, leaders and random internet strangers for being too sensitive, or too driven, getting married too young or not young enough, having children or not for a million different reasons, staying home or having a career, while pouring from an empty cup, many of us feel like throwing in the towel.

We. Are. Tired.

Or at least I am. My knees hurt for no reason, no amount of exercise makes my belly look like it didn't grow and carry 2 actual human beings inside it, and the recent, unwelcome addition of night sweats and hot flashes have pushed me fully into the "please kindly stick your opinions about me where the sun don't shine" phase of adulthood.

Do I actually care what other people think about me? Unfortunately, the people pleasing part of my brain is not giving up without a fight, so yes, yes I do. However, the part of my brain responsible for actually doing anything about it has turned on its neon "closed for business" sign, and maybe that's not all bad. Because through all of the things that life continues to throw my direction, I'm learning. And lucky (or unfortunately) for you, that usually means I'm sharing, too.

Here are a few highlights from my work in progress list of things I've learned about life, myself and other random unsolicited opinions, in no particular order of importance...my "this is 40-ish" manifesto.

1. We are enough, even at our worst. We are enough when we're so exhausted down to our bones, when we don't check off our endless to-do lists, or when we lost it on our kids/spouse/co-worker or dreamt of running away from home. Still more than enough.
2. If you need someone who makes you feel like you have your life together, I've got you. I'm the friend who has already 100% forgotten about whatever it was I signed up to do tomorrow no matter how many calendars I put it in, my refrigerator is the place where

salad and vegetables go to die and my house is best described as “there appears to have been a struggle” so you can feel better about your any of your own messes. You’re welcome.

3. Cupcakes are a breakfast food. They’re made with eggs and if you like chocolate you get bonus points for antioxidants. I don’t make the rules.
4. Keep snacks in your purse at all times. Period. No exceptions.
5. Your body is a jerk in your 40’s. You may wake up in a pool of your own sweat in the dead of winter. Having friends who will pluck random hairs from your chin that escaped your inspection is paramount. Everything hurts for no reason. You now need upstairs Tylenol, downstairs Tylenol and purse Tylenol. Just trust me.
6. Also, our moms did NOT prepare us for peri and/or full-blown menopause. They say they don’t remember it being bad. They’re either liars or have repressed the memories completely, which is something I understand more every day. Sorry, Momma. I love you but I’m also kind of mad.
7. Kindness is never the wrong choice. Remember the rule applies to you, too.
8. Self-care does not actually look like snail facials or massages, no matter what the newest bright and shiny social media influencers tell you. Caring for yourself can look like hiding in the closet with a tub of ice cream and a spoon, taking a walk with your bestie and spending half of it venting on a swing and not correcting your watch when it counts it as steps, or even choosing to say no.
9. We are not alone. We are chosen. We are loved. Exactly as we are. Every minute of every day. For God so loved the world...it’s a promise, and it’s ours.
10. Life is a beautiful, funny, chaotic, heartbreaking cycle. There’s no escaping it. But we have survived every single day. We find beauty in the breaking we endure and continue to rise from the ashes - stronger, brighter, and more than we were.

No matter where you are in your story right now, you are part of a sisterhood that stretches far beyond this moment. Women carrying forward what matters, breaking what needs breaking, and building a better world than the one we inherited. So love out loud. Stay curious. Look for beauty even when the world feels heavy. Because when women show up for each other and ourselves, the light gets a whole lot brighter.

*“Maybe the journey isn’t so much about becoming anything.  
Maybe it’s about un-becoming everything that isn’t really you,  
so you can be who you were made to be in the first place.”*

*Paulo Coelho*

## **Unprepared - The Mirror – by Marcy Lytle**

This is the third in the series of “Unprepared” - a new column this year on all the things I wasn't ready for, no one really warned me about, and I wish I'd had a handbook to help me through! This month I tackle those body changes.

Let me start by saying how appalled I am at the girls on social media that talk about signs of aging and how they're getting so “old” when they're in their 30's. They're using all the creams and potions to stave off the signs of aging but let me tell us all...aging is going to happen anyway.

I remember looking at a back view of myself in the mirror one day, possibly in my late 40's, and caught a glimpse of the back of my arms. They looked like my mom's arms, and I gasped! That alone later made me sad, because what's so bad about having my mom's arms? I thought it was the worst! They looked old, and old was bad, wasn't it?

My sister had told me she had started wearing this body shaper she loved in her 40's and I was drawn to try it, because let's face it – gravity pulls - once aging sets in. And anything that lifts and tucks, well I'm here for it.

As for wrinkles, I tried this very expensive eye cream because I was sucked into this relentless sales pitch by the most annoying of sales people, while we were on vacation. Can you believe it? He convinced me that this cream would change my life, and I used it faithfully for a year. Was there a change? I have no idea! I didn't take a before and after picture, and I didn't have time to check the crow's feet daily to see! In fact, most before and after pictures I'd seen on line didn't really look that different! I was so mad that I spent the money.

Just today, a young mom in her 30's talked about her aging hands, and how she learned that she needed to use her face creams on her hands, and she showed her hands after four days of use. Not that different!

Why do we buy into this stuff? Why do we fear the aging process, the gravity, the loose skin, the age spots, the wrinkles, and all the things that appear every single year as we approach our older years? I don't know, but we do! And when we think we start to look like our moms, we panic. But wait! Didn't we think our moms were beautiful? I did. I loved my mom's pretty hands, when she painted her nails and I didn't notice the ugliness of aging. I saw the beauty of the hands that gave.

And yet I stood in the mirror and gasped when I saw my mom's arms on me!

Here's the deal:

Age spots are going to become visible

Skin will sag and age, over time

Cellulite will creep all over you like a plague

Wrinkles may appear fast or slow...but they will show up like an unwanted relative

We will all one day look in the mirror and realize that our bodies are changing rapidly, and we have this choice. Oh, there's nothing wrong with taking care of ourselves. Of course, we do that! And moisturizers are our friends, wearing a hat in the sun gives us a chance to buy some cute ones. And we most likely won't be headed out in a bikini, or even sleeveless dresses any more (unless you're bold, which I so admire the bold).

One of life's challenges is looking in the mirror as another decade rolls by and giving thanks for that skin that has covered you your entire life, and will do so until the end. You'll figure out ways to cope, but you'll also realize that your focus will be better spent on giving thanks and admiring the miles you've walked and breathed and enjoyed the wind and the rain, that yes...show up on your skin.

There was a time in history where folks didn't have mirrors, and there was a time when mirrors were small and only used for the head view. Then when full length mirrors appeared, we looked and gazed at all the imperfections and lingered to try and fix them all.

I certainly haven't arrived in this area, but I'm not any longer swindled by expensive potions. I don't love my arms or thighs, or even the wrinkles, but I've found fashion to still be enjoyable as I grab for what makes me feel good in the skin I have. And I wish I could tell those of you in your 30's that you're not old. And I bet the women I know in their 90's would say to me, you're not old, either, my friend...

Make the mirror your friend as you smile at the pudge, shake your head and dress in what you love, and step into those comfortable shoes and hit the road with confidence in the skin you see looking back at you. And maybe don't look at the back view, or the bottom view, but instead give a quick glance and a smile and be on your way...

## **An Adage a Day - Thumbs Up! But is it Green? – by Carole Gilbert**

I have a baby in my house. It's not your normal type of baby and it came from an odd place. One day, I was cutting a grapefruit in half when I saw one of the seeds inside had sprouted! It had a strong root about an inch long all inside the grapefruit. I thought, how can that be? Seeds need water and sunlight to grow, but my baby started without either of these! I carefully got it out and planted it for curiosity's sake. For years it grew into a nice full plant although it never got very tall and never had fruit. But now, my baby has started to look very poor. My "green thumb" doesn't seem to be working anymore.

After high school, I worked managing a privately owned greenhouse. I had no idea what to do but the sweet lady that was retiring took me under her thumb and taught me. What she couldn't teach me was having a natural green thumb. I always had thriving beautiful plants at home but some of the plants at this greenhouse were very picky, like orchids. And I did fine with most of them. But for some reason, as I did my job, my plants at home started to die.

A friend explained, "As a rule of thumb, what you take care of at work is not what you want to take care of at home."

But the estate owner gave me a thumbs up and brought a close friend in to help. He was head of the Biology Department at our local University. He taught me more about plants and even talked me into taking his biology classes for college credits. I hadn't planned on going to college, but this professor really had an influential way.

God completes the cycle for our growth by planting just the right people in our path at just the right time. And it's amazing how He waters and gives His light to the seeds He plants in our lives. But as for my little baby, my thumb has apparently lost its green, and my baby has lost its leaves. I replanted it and I'm still trying. I'm still watering, and I'm still waiting on God to guide me through what to do. And that's what it really takes, to be completely under His thumb, and receive His direction. We all have His rule of thumb, and His guidance.

My green thumb has changed now. I guess you could say I'm all thumbs. And although I can't put my thumb on it as to why, I know God is always giving me a positive thumbs up. Our thumbs are used in different sayings and adages because they are an important part of our body. They can easily symbolize our feelings and skills. We use them verbally and we use them without saying anything, such as in a thumbs up or thumbs down motion. I tell all this to explain how God planted the right people and situations throughout my life. He planted them for only one reason. So that I would grow and be able to give Him glory. And He does this for all of us. We are all important, just like the thumb. And God uses us all in many ways, also like the thumb. He reassures us of this through His word.

*Thus says the Lord GOD: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a*

*high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. Ezekiel 17:22-23a.*

## Firmly Planted - Embrace—April 2026

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*You may have read my article “Hurting Hearts” last month. It was a serious topic and felt heavy in the writing of it. Heavy isn’t generally popular--light, fun, and happy feel so much better; but there is a time for both. This sequel should be a little “lighter,” and maybe you’ll find it helpful and hopeful.*

Winter isn’t my season. Despite a mild one with unseasonably warm weather, the few days below freezing put my perennials into their winter pajamas, not to be removed until danger of frost is past. Their brown dead garb provides protection for pollinators, and for the roots; they stand guard ingloriously. The patio is a mess: tables moved against the house as a sheltered spot for potted plants, chairs out of place, constant leaf litter, and the stock tank pool sports an ugly makeshift cover. Besides all that, the shorter days throw my preferred schedule completely off. For some reason, I sleep more than usual, taking naps even though I’ve had enough sleep. I feel like I’m part chicken, roosting when it gets dark, and part bear, inclined to hibernate the winter away.

But finally...ahh...spring. Removing winter pajamas is done, and new green growth is sprouting out with silent shouts of praise. The final wave of fallen leaves is mostly bagged up or chopped and spread as mulch. The pool is cleaned and ready for a summer soak, looking much more attractive and enticing. It still needs a cover to keep debris out of it, but it’s not unsightly. The days are longer and I’m busy doing the garden tasks I love. The seasonal rotation and pattern go round and round, and each year I learn to embrace it, the good and the bad, a little more.

It used to bother me—the incessant leaves, or twigs, or acorns, falling and making a mess everywhere; a grey-brown landscape instead of green; a covered pool instead of one that shows off shimmering water at all times; plants that don’t stay where planted, or die; rock beds that continuously sprout weeds. I was disappointed that my thoughtfully executed garden plans failed, overwhelmed with the constant clean up, and longed for the impossible perfect Pinterest-worthy garden. That is a set-up for frustration and discontent.

But, somewhere along the way, I began to let go. Somewhere along the way, transformation happened. Not externally in the garden, but internally in my heart. I began to make peace with things not looking as I envisioned, with repeating the same chores over and over, with learning what works and what doesn’t by trial and error. Somewhere along the way, I began to accept the cycles of messiness, the cycle of nature. Trees drop leaves along with providing shade; weeds thrive beside healthy plants; heat, freezes and drought take their turn with beautiful days. It’s a metaphor for Life and a lesson I seem to learn over and over, through circumstances, through gardening.

I recall difficult times, heartaches, regrets. Pressed toward God, I came face to face with questions that matter: *is God Lord of my life, come what may? Is God really good? Can I trust him? Do I want to be formed into the image of Christ?* Conclusions: “yes, yes, yes, and yes.” If I trust God and have given him my life, then I must believe and trust that he is doing just that—that he brings and/or allows things to come my way. Somewhere I read that we should “welcome trials as friends.” That hit a chord. Not easily or consistently, but as a response to those hard questions, I decided to surrender and embrace my circumstances. Ouch.

In the same way, I'm learning to be at peace with the circumstances in my garden—the mess, the clean-up, the lessons of failure and mistakes, the reward of beauty, the repeating cycles...these are my friends, this is Life with God, and I embrace it.

## Moving Forward - Not Alone – by Pam Charro

### Immanuel - "God with Us"

For most of my life, I've been searching for truth and meaning. During the process, I have explored various religions, and Christianity stood out to me as the only one where God relentlessly pursued us instead of us hoping we can be good enough for him. In fact, the only way to truly receive Jesus is by acknowledging that we can never be good enough, accepting the grace that he offers, and growing in understanding of just how loved we must be in order for that to even be possible.

*Even after all these years, this concept never ceases to blow my mind.*

Unfortunately, that truth hasn't yet been able to completely free me of debilitating anxiety. Despite the fact that God, his Word, and the Holy Spirit have faithfully developed my progress in my walk for many years, the habit of thinking and feeling alone in my struggles has persisted, and it has been terrifying. I find myself forced to examine why I still feel that way, and to move closer to God and his promises so that I can find deeper peace and comfort.

God isn't surprised by this weakness. Many of us suffered abandonment and abuse during a particularly vulnerable time - often as children - when we were not equipped to adequately process such trauma. I know that Father understands that healing takes time and repeated proof that he really is there. But I also need to be intentional in insisting that he is faithful and his Word is true. I will never get to where I need to go if I just wait for the feeling to arrive.

*I must push back against the bully of fear.*

It seems to be taking forever, but Bible passages such as these have helped me a lot:

Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

Zephaniah 3:17 The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

Psalms 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Psalms 27:1 Of David. The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Of course, all of this is only a small sample of the comfort that is available in the scriptures, but I find that as I "practice" believing these types of passages, fear not only dissipates, but I also develop a godly indignation toward it. I realize that fear really doesn't have a right to keep bullying me; on the contrary, God has a right to be believed. And what God deserves is all that matters.

I also feel I should mention that overcoming anxiety has been more complicated than it probably should have been because well-meaning believers have, likely unintentionally, caused me to believe I should have progressed further than I have. It has been challenging to maintain my own patience in my journey when others have inadvertently put their *should of* on my own faith. Not everyone can relate to the trauma I have experienced, and, for some, I may seem a little behind in my progress. But God is understanding and he is pleased with my courage in coming this far. If you can relate, please also be patient with yourself. Our journey is sacred and beautiful, and Papa God understands that true intimacy with him takes time.

I'm becoming less fearful and more confident each day. Hallelujah! Praise God for his faithfulness, love, and, especially, his presence in every trial.

## **Unearthly Thing - Hindsight is 50/50: Pity or Praise? A 6th Anniversary Retrospective**

April 2026 marks six years since I began writing my monthly column, "Unearthly Things," in THYME Magazine. I thought it might be fun, or at least insightful, to look back to see what has happened, and what I have learned...or still need to learn.

It's been a blessing to go back through my stories and see how God has been with me through all kinds of circumstances. It's like a journal I get to share with you, and my testament to God's goodness.

My first story for THYME was written during the first month of the Covid lockdown for the April 2020 issue. It was a frightening time that highlighted my struggle with fear and anxiety. But the story contained an excellent strategy to combat fear that I wanted to revisit:

*A Practical Guide for surviving (and thriving through) most everything in life:*

- Read (and memorize) God's Word
- Prayer
- Seek First the Kingdom of God
- Gratitude
- REJOICE!
- *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.

*Amen and Amen!*

It's such a great basic approach I want to remember, because dealing with fear and, consequently, a lack of deep trust in God, is a recurring theme in my stories. I've discovered that not fully trusting God with everything in my life is the root of my struggles.

Circumstances change from day to day, and so will my battles. As well as my attitude. Only in the last month have I conscientiously entrusted all areas of my life to God, telling Him, "I trust You." When things are going well or when the power goes out, and the internet goes down, I tell God, "I trust You," and a sense of stability settles over me, like a quiet confidence. This sounds like peace.

A big part of trusting God is knowing Him, like how good He is, which can be accomplished by keeping a journal of gratitude for all the good things and blessings He has given.

Another aspect of trusting God is knowing His promises. Read His word, and make note of a promise that speaks to you. Also, be confident that God keeps those promises.

While I was re-reading my stories, I compiled a list of a few story portions that struck me.

### **Favorite Quotes from my stories:**

- From my July 2021 story about freedom, titled *Dependence Day*:

“God’s promises teach me about my true freedom. Knowing these promises by heart makes freedom more tangible, so I can live and breathe my freedom daily. They also help me keep a peaceful perspective about the blessings and burdens of everyday life.”

- From my April 2022 story about getting a hysterectomy, titled, “Hysterectomy or Lobotomy...Or Both?:”

“After a couple of days in the hospital, and so much blood drawn (sometimes at 3 AM! Really!), I was told I had a very large tumor in my uterus, and that all my lady bits needed to be surgically removed through a large incision in my abdomen. I was watching the sun rise outside my hospital room window after the doctor left. Before fear started to set up camp in my spirit over my diagnosis, I heard God tell me (so softly and sweetly), ‘It’s not cancer.’”

I didn’t remember this moment. I’m so glad I recorded it in my story. It brings me to tears. I still remember God’s voice in my Spirit. So gentle and loving.

A new quote I read in this morning’s devotion, from “Trusting God’s Process” by Brittany Rust, pulled together my thoughts after revisiting my stories:

”Trust is an indicator of our heart’s condition, reflecting where our loyalty and commitment lies. Trusting God in the midst of our trials and storms shows Him that we count on Him, not the world. When the choice comes, to choose to make things work by the means this world offers or rely on God, we will choose to rely on God.”

*Yes! Yes. A thousand times “yes”.*

I choose to rely on God, trusting in Him completely. I still have a lot to learn to get to the “completely” stage, but I’m on my way.

*Thank You, and praise You, Father. You are so good and Your lovingkindness is everlasting. Amen*

Blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series and THE TORMENTOR’S TALE, as well as many short stories. She just completed the fourth book in The Garden Tales series, “The Mid-Century Breakfast Club,” and is searching for representation for it. Her novels are available on [Amazon](#) in paperback, Kindle, and audiobook formats. Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, and writing and recording music in her studio in Nashville, TN—listen to her latest album [STORMS](#) on your favorite music streaming service. Please drop by and sign up for news, read the latest stories, and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>.*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME All What We Need – by Marcy Lytle**

We were playing in the backyard with 3 year old Camp and his sister, when he had the brilliant idea of making a “restaurant” out of his playhouse. He had various scoops, a pretend chainsaw, and lots of gravel on the bottom floor, as he stood there and asked me what I wanted to eat.

“I’ll have enchiladas,” I said. “And can I have onions, too?”

Camp’s reply is what prompted this article. He answered me back that he didn’t have onions but he could make me a candy brownie enchilada. Wow!

“Can I have sprinkles on top?” I asked.

Camp exclaimed, “Oh yeah, we have all what we need!”

He then proceeded to bake and stir and create my meal. He told me to go sit on the back patio and wait for him to bring the food to me. I obeyed. I did wonder how he was going to make enchiladas with the kitchen “tools” he had. Once I heard the chainsaw and asked what that was, and he said it was the timer.

After a bit of a wait, he carefully walked over to me with his little tin pan full of gravel, all the way to the top. He had scooped and scooped, and leveled and prepared, and brought me my dinner.

Of course, I couldn’t eat the gravel, but I marveled over what Camp prepared and told him it was the best ever. Of course, he smiled so proudly at his creation from his playhouse kitchen.

All week I’ve been thinking about Camp’s phrase, “We have all what we need.” God tells us that all the time in his Word, that his grace is enough, his storehouses are full, he has a table piled high with bounty, every good gift is ours, etc. However, when we ask for something specific, like enchiladas with onions – something that sounds so scrumptious and delicious – we sit in wonder when what we see before us is a pail of inedible gravel.

Haven’t you asked for something good and it seemed God served you the worst plate ever? You asked for healing and you got death. You prayed hard for provision and you lived in want for years. You begged for mercy for your children and their lives keep falling apart. You’ve asked, God said go sit there and I’ll serve, and what you see is not desirable or delicious.

Camp wasn’t deterred by his lack of real ingredients or the fact that he couldn’t make what he promised...at all...because in his little boy pretend imagination he was making a feast. And in my loving admiration of him, I received that bucket of pebbles with joy.

God isn’t a little boy, he doesn’t lack anything, but he does tell us that he has all what we need, over and over again. And while a bucket of pebbles might be not what we asked for at all, it might be what we’re offered for a while, to revel in the fact that He loves us, He knows, He serves, and there’s joy in the sitting and receiving.

I cannot pretend to understand why God doesn’t serve up what we ask for, on a plate, steaming hot, the most delicious thing we can think of. Why wouldn’t he? He takes great delight in caring for his children! And his storehouses are full with “all what we need.”

The joy that day was in receiving what Camp had made, because of who he is, who I am to him, and the relationship we have. I want to KNOW in my heart that God serves up THE BEST, I can sit and receive what he offers with joy because he KNOWS ME, and I can sit and actually have

JOY when it arrives, even if it looks like hard pebbles that are impossible to digest. That indeed is an incredible miracle of grace, to receive what is served with joy, when it's not what we asked for.

He has all what we need, he can take loaves and fishes and feed thousands, he can use a chainsaw if he wants for a timer, and he can transform pebbles into a satisfying meal like none other...while we wait and see that our Father is indeed GOOD. In all things, and in every season.

## **FRESH THYME – The Frame – by Marcy Lytle**

Do you ever just find yourself observing the normality of life and all of a sudden...a thought about what you're seeing just teaches you something profound in a moment's time? It happens to me all the time. And most recently, it happened on vacation.

We stayed in this grand hotel in Abingdon, Virginia called The Martha Washington, and enjoyed breakfast a few days in their own restaurant, where we were seated in the same spot each time. One night, we ate dinner there and a man playing the piano made up an anniversary song just for us! But that's not the story here...

I was eating my food, anxious to get about our itinerary for the day, when I noted the chairs in the dining room. The fabric on them was different and didn't match each other, but yet it worked. I hadn't seen it before, but there were about four different patterns of material, swatches I don't think I would have put together at all. But somehow, when looking across the room, the view was beautiful.

And then I realized that what made all of these different fabrics look cohesive and pretty was the framework of the individual chairs. That was the common piece that coordinated all of the different patterns in the fabric. I wondered if there could have been a dozen different swatches that would have then looked perfect, placed in the solid and repeated framework of all the chairs in the dining room.

I thought of this crazy world in which we live and all the discord among people, even those who profess to be Christian. In fact, there are some days I'm ashamed to call myself "Christian" since there's such a negative connotation because of this exact thing – we're all different! Some of us carry more shades of gray than others because life just hasn't been that colorful. Others have stripes and dots galore because we're just over the top. And still others are elegantly balanced and then out of focus and then clearly back again. We're all so unique, due to where we've been and what we've experienced in life.

And yet, those of us that profess to love Jesus have this framework. We love him, and he loves us, and it joins us together in this pretty and solid wood frame that then surrounds us all and presents to the world a pretty room. One that's inviting to sit and linger with a cup of coffee, or enjoy a guy playing the piano over in the corner. And even when the table is empty, we look nice around it and inviting, offering all those who are hungry or thirsty to come and sit a while with us...in this room full of different yet the same.

The only problem is that we have presented broken chairs to the world, ones no one could possibly sit in because they'd fall to the ground. We've let problems and discord and worry and fret, judgment and sorrow and anger and hate, seep into even our framework. Oh, Jesus isn't broken, we are just forgetting who He is and who we are, and how we're supposed to be the light that's INVITING, not FORBODING.

The dining room where we frequented often that week then took on a whole new look to me. What I hadn't seen before were the differing patterns that were held together by the frame of the common chairs, ones that invited all of the guests to sit in this elegant place and be served the most delicious fare. And the room was for every guest, not just those with the right shoes or political agenda, or those who spoke elegantly or moved in the right circles. It was for those who were hungry...

I appreciate the differences in others, most of the time. But, I too can jump on that train of pointing fingers and causing discord, which only results in scratched finishes and broken arms and legs. A chair no one wants to sit in. And if they do, it's certainly not comfortable.

Jesus is our frame. He's the one who holds us together, bound by his great love. And he's the one that secures the fabric of who we all are to his frame, inviting all who pass by to sit. And all of these differences, along with his sameness, present the prettiest dining room in the world...with the light present streaming in the windows...as we enjoy life together in Him.

## **FRESH THYME – What a Picture – by Marcy Lytle**

I love to hang with Corie, now almost 18 months old, and we have this one routine we do almost every time I'm with her. In the afternoon after her nap, we spread a blanket in the front yard and we sit...no toys or things (except a snack – always a snack)...and we observe. I'll spy things and she points. We listen to the birds, we look at the clouds, and we watch the cars go by.

One thing in particular we do is watch a couple of dads walk down the street toward the elementary school to pick up their kids. Those dads then return about 10 minutes later with those kids, and the dads are carrying the backpacks, the water bottles, and the jackets, while their kiddos are skipping fancy and free.

Oh my goodness.

This picture every week warms my heart. Just to watch these fathers encounter their kiddos who are carrying heavy loads, and then take those loads from the kids' shoulders onto the dads' shoulders – well that's something!

I'm pretty sure none of those kids tugs at all their stuff and says, "No, Dad. I'll carry these things." Instead, they are tired and ready to get home and play, so they gladly hand over their loads. Their hands are then free to swing as they walk.

I'm pretty sure none of those kids feels bad that their dads have to carry the backpacks, because in their eyes their dads are strong!

And I'm pretty sure those dads don't scold their kids or say to them, "Give me your stuff, but you're going to have to learn to carry them yourselves!" The dads gladly take the loads, so the kids can do that thing called skipping.

Corie loves seeing the kids and waves at them (though often they don't wave back...) And I love watching the dads walk beside and in front of the kids, showing the way home.

I don't know why, but we often forget the relationship between us and our Father as well, and when he says come to him and find rest, to lay our burdens at his feet, we hesitate.

We stiffen up and think we need to be strong and carry our loads ourselves.

We aren't sure God can handle our heavy loads. After all, we caused some of them...

Or...we see him shaking his finger at us as he says, "Not again...I'm tired of you!"

And when we look at our Father in this way with questioning hearts and shrinking faith, we miss out on so much.

We miss out on the beauty of his strong arms, the joy He offers to carry our loads for us, and the skipping that's ours if we just let go.

If you haven't seen dads on your street do this very thing, just imagine it, because it happens with earthly moms and dads every day. They pick up the loads and let the kids be kids.

We all end up with a heavy load sometimes at the end of the day, and we can barely think of taking a step...and then there He is...rounding the corner with a smile on his face, so glad to see us. He reaches out, we say, "Here ya go," and he leads and carries, while we follow and smile, swinging and kicking up our feet in joy.