



A BUNDLE OF
THYME
For Every Season

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TIPS

In the Kitchen – Sandwiches for Summer – by Marcy Lytle

Who doesn't love a good sandwich? And they're especially great for taking on a picnic. You can assemble them ahead of time, or take the parts and make the whole, once you arrive! And the picnic can be in a park or even at home on the floor, wherever you like it, and where the weather allows! I love a fun picnic. And packing up all the ingredients for the picnic are so fun!

Enjoy each of these sandwiches this summer:

Gouda Turkey

Ingredients

- ½ c shredded Gouda cheese
- 4 t mayo
- 1 T sliced green onion
- ¼ t garlic powder
- ¼ t ground pepper
- Toasted bread (4 slices for two sandwiches)
- 2 t butter, soft
- Romaine leaves
- 4 slices tomato
- 4 oz deli smoked turkey sliced
- ½ med ripe avocado

Mix first five ingredients. Spread two slices of toast with butter, then cheese mixture. Layer with lettuce, tomato and turkey. Peel and mash the avocado. Spread over other slices of toast, and place over turkey.

Dilly Turkey Melt

Ingredients

- 2 med onions sliced
- 4 T butter, divided
- 4 T BBQ sauce
- 8 slices sourdough bread
- 8 slices Monterey Jack cheese
- 8 slices Canadian bacon
- 8 thin slices cooked turkey
- Dill pickles

In a large cast iron or heavy skillet, saute onions in 1 T butter until tender and set aside. Spread BBQ sauce on 4 slices of bread. Layer each with 1 slice of cheese, 2 slices of bacon and turkey, pickles, onions and another slice of cheese. Cover with remaining bread.

In same skillet over med-low heat, melt remaining butter. Cook sandwiches on both sides until golden brown and cheese is melted.

Simply at Home – I used what I had recently (some of the leftover bacon from above recipe), and he said the sandwich tasted great!

Ingredients

- Multigrain bread
- Eggs
- Canadian bacon
- Cheese

Place a little butter in a skillet and toast one side of the bread, then flip and toast the other – placing cheese slice on top to melt. In same skillet, scramble seasoned eggs and cook the bacon. Stack and assemble, and you're done! This is the simple version, but you can add anything else you like, such as onions, fresh spinach or tomatoes!

Black Bean Swiss

This recipe was adapted from the one posted by Pioneer Woman, and I only changed it a bit. It's really easy and the bean patty stays together so well, instead of falling apart like so many other veggie burgers. Enjoy!

- 2 cups seasoned black beans, drained
- 1 c seasoned breadcrumbs
- ¼ c grated onion
- ½ t chili powder
- 1 large egg
- Salt and pepper
- Canola oil for the pan
- 4 slices Swiss cheese
- ½ c mayonnaise
- Pico de gallo, lemon juice, season salt
- 4 buns, toasted
- Lettuce and sliced tomatoes

Using a fork, mash the beans in a medium bowl til mushy but leaving a few whole beans throughout.

Mix the breadcrumbs, onion, chili powder, egg and S&P into the beans. Add a splash of water if mixture looks dry. Set aside for 5 minutes.

Divide the bean mixture into 4 balls, then flatten into patties. Heat large skillet on med-hi and add a few tablespoons of oil.

Cook burgers til browned, 4-5 minutes each side. Add the cheese to the top of each burger and let it melt.

Combine mayo with pico and lemon juice and seasoning. Spread on buns, top with the cheesy pattie, lettuce and sliced tomatoes.

Chicken Salad

I love a good chicken salad sandwich, and I seem to have several that are favorites. But most often, I just use what I have in the fridge to make one each time, and they taste so so good.

Ingredients (all chopped)

- Cooked chicken
- Carrots
- Olives
- Red onions
- Walnuts
- Celery
- Radishes
- Season salt
- Mayo

Mix everything in a bowl with dollops of mayo until you get the consistency you want. Season to taste. Serve on wheat bread as a sandwich, with a large slice of avocado to go with!

The Dressing – Bangles and Bracelets – by Marcy Lytle

In the colder months, when I wear mostly longer sleeves, my bracelets hang in the closet unworn...but now that arms are showing and sleeves are shorter...bangles are making their grand entrance once again! I think arm jewelry can add SO MUCH to an otherwise neutral outfit. So I'm gathering some pretty bracelet ideas for you, should you want to invite some of these pretties to your party this season!

Enamel and Stretch – These are my newest set of bracelets I purchased at Attic Salt, but I don't see them on line in their store, so I found some like them on Amazon! They go with everything, and you can stack one, two, three or more....

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B085S8DP8M/?ref=idea_lv_dp_ov_d&tag=onamzmarcel05-20&linkCode=ic6&ascsubtag=amzn1.ideas.2TVKQTSKJZ8G6

Wrap Bracelets – I saw these bracelets and liked the latch – magnetic – and the bohemian style. There are two choices of color, and both would be great for the summer months, for a little color on your wrists.

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07T6ZTF4D/?ref=idea_lv_dp_ov_d&tag=onamzmarcel05-20&linkCode=ic6&ascsubtag=amzn1.ideas.2TVKQTSKJZ8G6

Little Words – Have you heard of the Little Words Project? These bracelets can be custom made or you can purchase ones already made, with words of encouragement for women. Each bracelet features a different inspirational word. And these can be stacked, as well! Check them out...

<https://littlewordsproject.com/collections/new-arrivals>

Chain Links – I see these little chain link bracelets everywhere, and I love them. This set and its price is unbelievable, but has great reviews. You might even want to buy some now for Christmas gifts! Or just wear them all yourself...

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08MLNRH5K/ref=redir_mobile_desktop?encoding=UTF8&aaxitk=4f680c5f9363df6c6a368cd01ea36a22&hsa_cr_id=8375719180001&pd_rd_plhdr=t&pd_rd_r=6eec7147-5571-4d50-992b-ead28b33738a&pd_rd_w=lhYR1&pd_rd_wg=msjGV&ref=sbx_be_s_sparkle_mcd_asin_0_img

Love the Beach – Do you love the ocean and hanging at the beach in the summer? This bracelet, found on Etsy, might be the bracelet you need and love. It comes in a choice of blues, and it's so pretty, and also has that great magnetic closure

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/812218029/beach-bracelet-for-women-with-magnetic?qpla=1&gao=1&>

The Ladder – Isn't this a pretty and yet classic bracelet? It's from Madewell, and it can be worn alone or stacked with other bracelets. So nice!

<https://www.madewell.com/tracecraft-bangle-bracelet-96528.html?color=EG5779#q=bracelet&lang=default&context=women&start=1>

Blossom beads – I love this pretty bracelet (they have several similar ones to choose from), and you could wear one or more. But the colors just speak summer and fun! I want one!

<https://www.urbanoutfitters.com/shop/blossom-beaded-bracelet2?category=SEARCHRESULTS&color=000&searchparams=q%3Dbracelet&type=REGULAR&size=ONE%20SIZE&quantity=1>

If you've found a cute bracelet, share with us where you got it in the comments below! And show your arms this summer, then add something classic, trendy, or whimsical on your wrist for summer fun.

Three Moms – Managing Life – by the cousins

Our three moms of nine littles all are working moms. A working mom is a mom, period, whether or not she holds down another job. But for the sake of this month's story, we're focusing on these three that have another job besides their job of mother. One works in a dental office with her husband, the other for a marketing firm, and the other has her own business selling skin care. All three are super busy trying to juggle kids, home, family time, food, working, making money, and oh yes – fun. It's not easy. We asked them to share their experiences:

Mom of Four

As a work mom, I've learned to delegate. We have four kids and two are assigned dishes, and the other two laundry. This definitely helps get us caught up, and my husband enjoys getting groceries and cooking, so he helps!

I've also invested in a cleaning person, a lawn care person, and our kids have friend-Friday – they can have friends over if their rooms are clean. What a motivation!

On Sundays, our kids get an allowance after doing chores, they get half their age for all of the help they've given.

I do have to replenish (take care of myself and all of us!) – a great word given to me by my counselor. Besides work, life has been hard with church, grief and life. so replenish is my word! I take inventory of what that means. For me, it's gardening and working with my flowers, going on walks with my husband (kids can ride or walk behind), sports activities together with my family and cheering them on.

Another way that helps me is a couple of transition times from work before being present with family. Sometimes I go into my room for 15 minutes and look at social media or resting my eyes, or i take a few minutes ot breathe and sit outside. That way I feel like I've transitioned and energized myself.

At night, we have tuck=in ones for the youngest, individual time with them.

Encouragement ultimately comes from the Lord, but one thing that's helped me when I sought counsel is to take care of myself and not go so hard and so long without breaks to replenish. REPLENISH – taking moments daily, and longer in the week, in my marriage and my kids. it's not all about chores and to-do lists, it's okay. Dishes can be in the sink and we can still be fine!

Mom of Two

Being a working mom and a stay-at home mom, there's always a balancing act with everything being a mom entails! It's a weekly chore to focus on! It changes with every season, as well, as our kids grow.

Right now, my season is working full-time about 40 hours a week, helping my husband with his business, and raising two little girls. Keeping up with life and chores is a lot!

I look at the big pictures and my priorities.

First, I am a daughter of Christ – spending time in the word daily gives me energy and focus. I notice when this area is lacking.

Second, is my spouse. That is actually hard with two kids and owning a business. And it's hard to stop talking about work, outside of work! We make a commitment that after work, we don't talk about it. Night times are filled with family.

Third, is my kids. They need to be loved and fed. Of course, I have an internal battle "Am I being a good enough mom?" I try to drop it all when I get home from work and hold them, talk, and play, at least 15 minutes. However, sometimes we do rush to sports practices and games.

Our evenings are family time, and it might be T-ball or gymnastics, but it's definitely family time.

Last, are my chores. I do try to keep laundry going through the week, and other chores like dishes – I sometimes do that after the kids go to bed! My husband pitches in, as well. We also have yard work – and we just do it when we can! I do have a cleaner once a month or two, for deep cleaning.

So, remembering priorities – daughter in Christ, wife, mom – helps create boundaries of pouring into each.

Personally, I spend time with God, I put my phone down, and I play with my kids. Those things bring me joy. There are times when I exit to the store or work out by myself. Sometimes I wake up early and my husband and I work out together. These things help keep us calm and ready for the day!

Mom of Three

Honestly, I don't feel like I manage everything very well from working and being with the kids. I don't have a good "groove" yet because of virtual school, and then back to school, and now summer! We have, however, implemented a few new things that are going well:

I'm "chunking my time" now, instead of "nickel and diming" my time. I need to get chores started and finished. So what I mean, if I have an hour I clean – I don't respond to messages. I can't be distracted, or the chore won't get done. My business is on social media so distractions are many!

I prefer to go to bed with a clean house, so that I can just focus on breakfast and getting kids to school. 15 minute cleanup happens – with a timer – we all five do 15 minutes of cleaning. We put away things in the common area and in the bedrooms. So far, it's working. It helps us all having a time limit. We start a load of dishes at night, so the next morning I make coffee, light a candle and worship – that's my encouragement time! Or sometimes, I clean with worship music – it's peaceful when the rest of the house is asleep. The dishwasher gets emptied and a load of laundry gets started, and I run the floor vac.

Giving the kids attention looks like going outside after school. We might play in the yard or have friends over – a yard full of kids is fun! During sports season, we rotate so that when one's at practice, the other one goes with Dad, and I have the other one at home. That gives us one-on-one time. Or sometimes, he takes all the kids and I have me-time.

Putting the kids to bed looks like reading books and singing songs!

I also include my kids in my business, with helping me make videos, packaging products, and going to the P.O. to mail them.

As far as time as a couple, my husband works at home, so we sometimes watch a movie or have lunch together. Often at night, we chat after the kids go to bed. And date night is a treat, when we can make it happen!

Worship and scripture and my community and team (for my business) are all sources of inspiration for me. We have zoom meetings and group chats for encouragement. Most are all moms like me!

I don't think there's a formula for balancing. I typically am a joyful person, and I feel like I handle stress pretty well. However, if I start being negative and start not feeling good physically, then something's off and I have to see what's out of balance. So, knowing myself and my strengths and weaknesses helps me know that a shift needs to be made! I just have to pay attention to sore throats, my snappy comments, and seeing things negatively. Those are my indicators...and readjustments are made!

Tried and True – Meal Prep – by Marcy Lytle

Do you prep for your meals, or just gather as you go? I'm sure there are lots of us that do either one or the other, and there's no "best" answer. I used to be a cook that gathered as I went, but then after many times of realizing I didn't have a specific ingredient halfway through cooking, I changed. Now I prep ahead and I really enjoy it!

Here are some hints to prepping ahead, when preparing a meal, and the little things that help:

When trying a new recipe or making one of my own, I gather all of the ingredients and lay them out on the counter. Not only does this allow me to see if I have everything I need, but it makes cooking the meal easier – because I don't have to constantly go back and forth to the fridge and the pantry.

Meal prep bowls are so fun. From a pinch of this to a teaspoon of that, I can measure out the small ingredients and have them ready to just add at the right time.

Prepping meals, for me, also means gathering recipes and ideas once a week, printing them out or noting their page number (if in a cookbook), and then typing it all up as a "meal list" and hanging it on the fridge with a magnet! This is a bit time consuming, but I love it. I don't mind a "cook what you have" night here and there, but for the most part I like to know and have our meals scheduled for the week.

Including snacks has been a new addition for me on my meal planning. Besides having entrée items on my list, I include several snacks like homemade hummus, granola, perhaps a pesto, and dips and chips. This way, if a few of these are made, we can easily have a charcuterie board night at least once a week! And those are fun.

When I'm chopping and cutting, I often keep a Ziploc or one of those plastic grocery bags in the sink near where I prep. I toss in clippings, paper towels, ends of carrots, squeezed lemons, etc. That way I have one big bag to toss in the trash, instead of a mess in the sink.

Meal prepping includes looking at your calendar. If we have a picnic for the weekend, I like to plan groceries accordingly with items for that. If we're having guests drop by (yay, we can do that a bit now!) it's nice to have perhaps fun beverages or a cookie recipe available.

Finally, prepping ahead enables me to clean my fridge, realize if I need more of the good stuff like veggies and fruit, makes me more aware of the healthiness of what it is we're eating, and it keeps me organized. And I like organized.

I carve out a few hours each week for meal prep – with groceries and meal planning. I take a few minutes before meals to gather all the ingredients and set them out – before I start. And I love any little bowls or gadgets that help me with meal prep – from tiny pinch bowls to buying garlic already minced to a couple of good sets of measuring spoons and cups I keep hanging nearby (I love Rachael Ray's set!)

Maybe you cook on the fly, and that's great. I have many friends that do, but I need structure. On the fly is fun one night a week, when I clean out the fridge and make a stir fry or veggie bowl. But being prepared is more my "cup of tea."

Seven for You – Travel Time – by Marcy Lytle

It's that time of year for traveling. Over the past year, we've changed our mode of travel to mostly road trips, at least for a while. I love reading travel blogs, shopping for travel accessories, and planning our places to go...don't you? So we asked our panel of women to chime in on their travel tips and ideas and fun...

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We don't travel except for one trip to our family's cabin in Colorado every summer. I've been using the same packing list for over 10 years. We pack clothes, sheets, and towels in large black trash bags. We can press all the air out and conform the bags to fit in any space we have available. We pack very casual clothes. We may go several days without seeing other people so it's all about what the weather is doing that year and how to stay comfy. It is truly a high mountain getaway location. I like the location because I can read, have quiet time, hike or cook.

It is very difficult to cook meals here, freeze them, and travel with them for two days in an ice chest. So, at the last available Walmart, which is one hour from our destination, we pick up pizzas, lasagna, TV dinners, and soup. We have a nice breakfast every morning which consists of some combination of bacon, eggs, oatmeal, toast, pancakes. Lunches are leftovers or sandwiches. Dinners are something frozen (above list) spaghetti or burgers.

– Shelley

The last Thanksgiving I had with my dad was less than a month before he passed away. He told us not to wait for retirement to live our lives. He waited and then lost his sight, his hearing (or most of it), and his health. And the opportunities to do all the things he had waited to do were gone. In 2013, I decided to just go somewhere. My daughter and I took a short trip to San Francisco. I found a quaint hotel, not far from the piers and booked the rooftop room. A single room, all by itself on the roof of the hotel. It was so worth it! The hotel is the San Remo. It's quaint and quirky and the perfect choice for our trip. Below the hotel is an Italian restaurant called Fior. It's the oldest Italian restaurant in America! I kept waiting for the "Brat Pack" to stroll in. I still dream of their Ravioli di Zucca, pasta stuffed with pumpkin, amaretti, and mustard fruit with butter, pine nuts, and safe sauce.

I booked the hotel and the flight but we did very little planning. We knew we wanted to walk everywhere, so I invested in a good pair of Keen shoes. That was the extent of our planning. We found out where the piers were and took off walking. It was early before the crowds arrived and most of the shops were closed. We heard this noise coming from across the way. We just instinctively headed toward the noise. We pushed through two double doors and there they were...the sea lions of Pier 39. We had no idea! Alexandra was in heaven! It was like this huge surprise. The sea lions were all barking good morning to us. The look of joy on my daughter's face was amazing.

The rest of the trip was just as surprising...from finding "Owen" the cat in Dog Eared Bookstore in Castro, to navigating a subway on our own, to diving into piles of chocolate at the Ghirardelli factory.

My advice is to not plan too much...especially do not over-plan. Let yourself just enjoy the destination and do so without fear. I may never get to go back to San Fran, but the memory of that trip will last forever. – Cathy

For me, travel these days requires a few special items. When I am traveling I always take a cross stitch project. This gives me something to do while riding. Plus, the natural light is great for seeing small stitches. I also take disposable, oversized toilet seat covers. I found these on Amazon when I was planning a trip with my 4 year old granddaughter. I liked the long, side panels since littles have to hold on to the toilet as they sit.

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B085LPC413/ref=cm_sw_r_em_api_qlt_fabc_0SAGWTXKVT10F8_S21SCQ?_encoding=UTF8&psc=1

Finally, I like to take travel size Lysol and/or disinfectant wipes, and flushable wipes because you just never know when you might need them. It is important to be prepared as you enjoy a fun road trip. – Gina

I started a few years ago using large Ziploc bags for dirty clothes, instead of a drawstring bag. Each night I fold the day's outfit into a couple of Ziplocs and press the air out. They stack up neatly in the suitcase, instead of having a huge dirty clothes bag with no structure to it.

I always take something good to read, as I'm an early riser and my husband is not. Having magazines or a good book helps me relax and fill that time, instead of trying to wake him up to go...

We start months ahead planning for bigger trips, and paying for things ahead of time, as we go. This helps with the budget. And we now always rent a car for long road trips, instead of driving our own. It's so much less of a headache and worth it, especially if there is car trouble of any kind. And your own car gets to sit at home, free of mileage! – Marcy

A little over seven years ago my daughter-in-law was expecting our grandson, their first baby. They lived three hours away and I was going to be going to stay with them and help for several days after the baby came. As I anticipated how to pack in a rush when that call came, a lightbulb went off in my mind. I decided to buy an extra of everything I would need and have it already packed. All I needed to remember in the rush of leaving would be extra glasses and the pills I took each day. I found a toiletry travel bag that was perfect. This worked so well that I never unpack my extras. I just replace what is needed. We travel a lot, so this makes packing so much more relaxing and so easy. It is already basically done. And what I really love is when we get to where we are staying, I just pull out my travel bag, hang it in the bathroom, and I am unpacked. No fuss, no muss. – Carole

My bag I got at a Thirty one bag party that a friend held. Are you familiar with that brand? This is my second toiletry bag like this and I've almost worn it out! Here's a link to their website.

<https://www.mythirtyone.com/us/en/>

We do have some trips planned for this year. In July, our family is going to see our daughter in Canton, Georgia, which is about 45 minutes north of Atlanta. We are flying (we have been vaccinated and we don't mind wearing a mask). We will have fun playing in Sarah's pool and then we are going to venture to a baseball game for the Atlanta Braves. I haven't been to a baseball game in probably 15 years, but with the grandkids it will be fun (mostly eating the concession stand food!) Then our most exciting trip planned is in October to Carmel, California

for our 40th wedding anniversary. We will visit this beautiful area on the coast of California near Monterrey. They have an awesome state park that we will spend time venturing about and then just driving around seeing the sites. I am sure we will shop and eat yummy food. We will also take some road trips to Ruidoso – where we bought a small cabin this past fall. It's been something we have been dreaming about and saving for the past 20 years, and we were finally able to do it. The summer will be nice and cool. We can work from anywhere (we learned that from covid) so we can be away, but not really be away. I hope in a few years to visit Scotland. Always been a dream - who knows? We will see..... - Melissa

It's so tempting to go nowhere, because funds are low, time off is hard to come by, or planning is overwhelming. As you can see up above, traveling is different for each family/couple/individual. Sometimes planning is great, if you enjoy it. Other times, just going is better. There are always obstacles to getting away, but travel is so fun and a necessity for health sometimes, that it's worth going...even if it's just down the road not very far...with a cooler or not...with an itinerary or "no particular place to go."

So, happy travels wherever you go!



HOME

A Night to Remember – The Main Thing – by Marcy Lytle

It was a Sunday morning, and it was an activity that she had asked her mom if the family could participate in, and they did! There was a community clean-up in their neighborhood, and 8-year old Ayla wanted to help out. So several families got together and cleaned up an area in a construction zone, and collected bags and bags of trash! Being able to serve was the best, and the entire family felt blessed! So how can this idea be incorporated into a family devo?

Start by asking your kids...is it more important to show up for church on a Sunday morning...or to help a neighbor in need?

Preparation: You'll need a small plastic animal, a large sofa for sitting, and a table prepared with snacks.

Let's look at a few stories in the Bible from Luke 14. It was a time where people lived by lots of rules that were just made to control others, like not doing any work at all on the Sabbath Day. So some people took this to the extreme and used it as an excuse to do nothing for anyone else.

So for this story, let's pretend that our rule is - ***no one can speak or move during the lesson.*** Let's say that's our "rule" that we have for tonight.

First, there's a sick man that needs to be healed, on the Sabbath Day. Jesus went against the people's "rules" and healed the guy. The problem was that those questioning Jesus cared more about their laws than they did about love. (Ask a child to pretend they're sick and ask for help...only the family cannot move.) Which is more important, to help our sick family member or sit on the couch and not move? (Obviously to help the sick!)

Jesus asks these questioners if their child or animal falls in a ditch on a Sunday if they would pull it out. (Ask child to pretend he/she is a farmer and the animal falls into a ditch – off the sofa). Will we sit here on the sofa and not rescue the animal and let it die, because we're not supposed to move? No way! (Pick up the animal and rescue it)

Now, let's get rid of that rule, and pretend we're all going to a wedding and the dining table is the best seat in the house! Where would you want to sit? Our new rule is to ***grab the best seat!*** (Let children answer).

Jesus watched these same people as they attended a wedding and ran to get the seat where they could be seen and honored, instead of looking out for the needs of others.

If you have a party, isn't it fun to invite your very best friends only? What if you invited a few kids that have no friends and offered them a seat by you? (Let kids answer with what that might be like.)

Jesus says when we have a celebration we need to invite the ones that others might not invite! In fact, we're supposed to invite people that may never invite us back!

Let's gather around the table for snacks. And let's sit in a chair where we normally wouldn't sit.

Now that we're at the table, the new rule is to ***pass the snacks to the left, only.*** (Start passing the snacks).

But what if we forget and pass a snack to the right? Some rules are not really rules, only just ideas someone has, and we have to be able to tell the difference.

Rules are made for safety and we must follow them to live. But random demands (even ones we make on friends when we play) are just selfish and rude. Look at our rules we made during the lesson and how silly they all were!

We need to make sure we don't make others follow rules that are just mean. Friends don't have to play like we play, and we don't have to be so strict that we cannot care for others.

Back to our first question...

Going to church is a great rule to follow, and a great habit to have in our lives. But there just might be a Sunday when it's best to join with neighbors for a clean-up!

Think about what Jesus teaches us in this story, to care for people. That's the main thing, and should always be the main thing.

An Adage a Day - See the Beauty – by Carole Gilbert

“March winds and April showers bring May flowers and June bugs.”

This saying started in 1886 in the UK because of their wet springtime, but interestingly enough, it still holds pretty true today. Even in our neck of the woods. And we can closely follow this saying; the wind and the showers are correct. We had the March winds and the April showers. Our May flowers were beautiful as always and some are still around. Timewise, we do get June bugs in May also, but they are in full force by June. Did you know June bugs are also called May beetles? So, we are right on time with that part of the saying, also.

I could do without the June bugs, but they could be worse. I can tolerate them far easier than I can some other bugs and besides, it is June! Summertime! It's wonderfully hot, full of bugs and other little wild creatures, but I love it! Like famed sportscaster, performer, and writer Al Bernstein said, “Spring being a tough act to follow, God created June.” And as for flowers, this is Texas. Pretty much flowers left in June are not flowers at all but blooming weeds. And I love all flowers, even weed ones.

I remember one June when I was about seven. There was a pile of building material left on the side of our house. It had been there for a while and in the summer months wildflowers grew up around it. Actually, they were weeds, but to me they were beautiful flowers, and they were mine.

My neighbor friends had a cousin about our age that would come to visit occasionally. She knew how I felt about my “flowers” and she was always determined to pick them just to make me mad. One day, as she started to pick my flowers, I felt something building up inside of me that I had never felt before. I raised my hand to stop her by hitting her on the back and suddenly I heard a familiar voice from the door of our house. It was my Mama. She sternly said, “Carole Lynn, come here now!” I knew I was in trouble and my Mama did not “spare the rod.”

I got over my feelings of uncontrolled anger after that and I hope this cousin eventually got over her feelings of spitefulness. After all, my Mama did allow her to pick all of my flowers that she wanted that day.

If you look at each month in this saying and see the beauty that lies within the mentioned wind, rain, flowers, and yes, even the bugs, you see that God has a purpose for each one. Just like He does for each one of us.

Colossians 1:16 says,

“For in Him all things were created: visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him.”

God did not and does not create anything without beauty and purpose. I learned a lot about how God loves and has purpose for everyone and everything that day from my Mama and I learned

to see the beauty that lies within, even within the people picking my weeds, my “flowers,”
against my wishes.

When it comes to June,
It is all quite clear.
There is still more to come,
But it has already been half of this year.

Chipped China - Good Enough & Grateful – by Jennifer Lytle

“Mom, I put dinner in the oven for you!”

Whew. That is helpful.

Seven minutes later I ask, “Did you take the plastic off the pizza?”

“No.”

I opened the oven and found the boxed pizzas which had been taken directly from the freezer and placed onto the oven racks.

Whew. That is wild.

In my work as a counselor, I have been focusing on the benefits of gratitude with some of my clients. The [neuroscience of gratitude reflects some brilliant findings](#). The brain literally lights up (specific areas in the brain are activated) with expressions of gratitude.

Gratitude is not an all-inclusive party. The mind cannot be both grateful and dissatisfied. What I find pretty exciting, is that we have been empowered to direct thoughts and retrain thought patterns. What a gift! (Please see [Philippians 4:8](#) and [Romans 12:2](#).)

Some days, I acknowledge it's difficult to [lean into the beauty of a perfectly imperfect](#) life or situation. It's one thing to help others with mantras or confessions and another to face your own wrapped and boxed frozen pizza cooking in the oven.

I screamed, “AHH!”

I closed the oven door. I grabbed two oven mitts as I continued to scream.

“Oh my gosh! What did you do? Are you serious?”

Yep. That came out of my mouth. All of it.

My oven mitt hands held onto the two pizza boxes as I commanded, “Open the door. Hold the screen door open for me.”

The edges of two boxes flopped in my oven mitts and floppy pizzas plopped into the trash bin.

After I took a minute to cool my mitts, I came back inside and said, “I'm sorry for screaming like that. I overreacted.”

The counselor likely would have coached her parent-client to continue with, “It was really nice that you tried to make dinner for us tonight. Thank you for making an effort to take care of us. That was so thoughtful. Next time, we can put the pizzas in the oven together.”

In that moment of the pizzas and the plastic and the oven mitts, I admit, I chose to focus on the craziness of boxed, plastic-wrapped pizza heating up and emitting fumes throughout our home. Next time, maybe I can do a little better with acknowledging the intention behind the action, praising the effort over the achievement, and being thankful that I have both a son and pizza.

You know what my son did though?

He said, “Okay, Mom.”

That simple apology was good enough for him. For that, I was grateful.

I Don't Do Teens – Up Through a Crack – by Marcy Lytle

I often take walks in my neighborhood, and this day was no different. I stepped across the street to start my usual path and spotted a huge array of wildflowers growing up through a crack in the concrete, on the side of a ditch, and it was as if they were screaming, "Look where I'm blooming!" And I did! They provided a beautiful sight right there in the middle of ugly concrete. They weren't planted in anyone's yard, not tended to by any human, but they were seeds that had blown and taken root and bloomed profusely – with only the care from above.

I started thinking about this, and how it relates to parenting. We all may have kiddos that are compliant, easy going, obedient (for the most part) and we sigh and give thanks. And then...there are those kiddos that keep us on our knees daily, because they're – wild – so to speak. They are hard to manage, always questioning, constantly getting into trouble, and we sigh and throw up our hands!

Let's think about flowers again, and compare them or use them as a story about our own children.

Some flowers we plant in beds and in our yards, they require quite the attention of fertilizer, water, and a perfect place to bloom, and they do. And we're so proud of the array of blooms that people see when they walk up to our door. They might comment, "That rose bush is beautiful" as we smile and think of when we planted it, how we pruned it, and how it's done so well.

Then there are seeds that we plant and fertilize and they just don't grow well at all. In fact, they disappear, because maybe some bird picked them up and flew away with them. We really worked hard, but no fruit appeared on that squash plant, or the petals on that particular rose bush were eaten and left with gaping holes, until the whole bush was diseased and gone.

Perhaps we tended both groups of seeds the same, but one bush grew and the other one didn't. Let's call those that didn't "wildflowers." These seeds were blown away by the wind or flown away in the beak of a bird.

We may see those beautiful roses that grew so well near our doorstep for years, people may comment, and we may smile over and over again. But those wildflowers...we wonder...and we wait...for them to appear from the cracks in the concrete.

And then that day comes, when we've prayed, we've wept, we've thrown up our hands in the air...and we just decide to leave those seeds in HIS HANDS, and take a walk.

We step off the curb of our lawn with the blooming rosebushes behind us, snugged neatly into the places where we planted them, and there...we see them. The gasp occurs and our heart skips a beat. Those seeds did scatter but they landed. They were tended to by Someone Else and they're among the most beautiful array of flowers we've ever seen, and the beauty actually takes our breath away.

Parents, don't lose heart. Maybe you have one child, or many, that just aren't blooming where you planted them, and you feel as though they've left and you've lost. There comes a time in all parents' petitions, when we have to open our hands and ask God to take those seeds that were blown by the wind and carry them. And he will. We may lose sight of them, they may wander around in the wind, but they will land. And it might be in a crack in the concrete. But then the rains will come, the sun will shine, and there they show up – tall and beautiful – planted over there. And not in our yard.

Be encouraged. And wait for the wildflowers of the season to appear...because they will.

Practical Parenting – I'm Bored – by Marcy Lytle

It's the two-word phrase that makes parents want to pull their hair out, especially when there are lists of things our kids can do, but instead they want to plop on the sofa and moan at the state of their world of boredom. We recently had the kiddos in our backyard to play and we had spent a while cleaning up their "play area" and adding new items for their little villages they make, and it was quite inviting...or so we thought. Five minutes into play and setup, one of the three lounged on the porch to declare the two words mentioned in the title of this story. *What?* I was shocked...but I don't know why...because I've said the same thing.

The kids are going to get bored this summer, no matter what we have planned to keep them occupied and happy. It won't matter that the family is going to Disneyworld, on multiple picnics, heading out for bike rides, or even enjoying creative activities at home. There's always one that's going to find whatever it is that we've planned to be NOT what they want to do. But what DO they want to do? Who knows?

What if being bored at times is okay, and we should just let the kids be bored for a bit? It's not really up to us to constantly cater to our kids when they're listless and don't know what to do. Yes, it's fine to suggest things, and yes there are times when maybe they are really tired of their same ole' existence, but let's focus here on the times when they have no good reason to be bored.

Aren't there days and hours when you feel things and think thoughts that are based on no good reasons, as well? Maybe you feel unloved, when everyone around you has told you they love you and you know it, but one afternoon you just don't feel it. Or perhaps you too have a list a mile long of things to do, you're away on a romantic weekend for two, and you find yourself thinking about being bored, as well.

So if we're bored for no good reason, here's maybe a reason we can consider:

Sour moods can lead to laziness and boredom, and sometimes we just need to decide to stop the downward trajectory toward depression that starts with the first stair of boredom. It might be good to tell that child that boredom isn't a choice today, and to get up and move and do, and chase those thoughts away.

Ungratefulness can be a root of boredom. Many of us have so much, yet we want so much more, and ingratitude visits our table and wreaks havoc with our emotional state. Kids often want more than, different than, what they already have. One idea might be to give that bored kid a pen and paper and let them start writing all the good things in their life, until they get to 20.

Boredom might not be what we're feeling at all, but rather a need to rest! Maybe that child, and we as well, need to close our eyes and take a nap or empty our minds or be still and do nothing, while we destress and readdress and then get up and move again...

Finally, boredom might just be perspective. Maybe we see the things we do as unimportant or boring because they're the same day after day. Or maybe the tasks and chores on our list today, instead of fun in the sun, seem like burdens instead of blessings. Our menial tasks can

be laced with worship, if we let them. And we can teach our kids to do so, as well. Teach her to whistle while she works. Show him how to smile while he makes his bed. And teach yourself how to rejoice while washing that load of clothes.

It's easier to just say "I'm bored," than to analyze and get off the sofa and move, or close our eyes and rest, or decide to give thanks or whistle a tune. But it's worth reminding our kiddos and ourselves to at least try a little exercise of the mind, soul and body (maybe exercise is the key!) and see if boredom doesn't flee.



YOU

Healthy Habits – The Nap – by Marcy Lytle

Sometimes, it's all that's needed to either make or break our day, or even our relationships – that little thing called a nap! I see young people taking naps, and obviously older people do as well. And while too much of a good thing like a nap can make one feel worse, just the right length and place can rejuvenate and make us all pleasant people again...

So how and why and where are naps to be had and taken, for good health?

The why is that we often have sleepless nights, we often work really hard, and sometimes we just need our body to rest. "They say" 20 minutes is a good length for a nap to reset our droopy eyes. Some don't nap because they have this idea that napping equals laziness. Not so! I encourage my husband to nap after a long work day, because we can then go out for the evening and he's happy! Sometimes, I can just close my eyes for 10 minutes and I feel like a new person!

The where varies from person to person. I prefer NOT to nap on the bed, where we sleep at night. Oddly enough, I prefer to retreat to the car, lay back the seat, and close my eyes. I start with a bit of reading and then I'm out. However, if I'm disturbed right when I'm sleepy (like someone calls and I hear it because my phone is still on!) then forget it. I'm wide awake. However, he loves to nap on a bed with the fan on, to drown out noise. And that's that.

The how to make naps happen when life is so busy is really a choice. If we're too busy for a quick nap, then maybe we can shorten our lunch, leave a to-do until tomorrow, or request of our family that 20 minutes that we need, and then take it – without guilt. It might be that we need to purchase a cute little pillow (I did – for the car!) or stretch out on the sofa, or drive the car to a park under a shade tree (we've done that, too!) When our families realize how much better we seem after we nap, they'll gladly allow the time...believe me.

The healthy part of napping is this. According to *Psychology Today*, our bodies are wired to slow down midday and rest. Isn't that interesting? Napping can even help our dull minds become sharper, after a brief break. Decision-making is never good when tired, so go ahead and nap for that reason, as well. And reducing stress can boost our immune system, so a nap is a good way to relax, sigh and breathe at rest.

Little babies require naps to grow. Toddlers start fighting naps so they can play. Older kids think naps are for babies. And then there are the adults that think staying "productive" all day long is the key to success. Without a nap, we might just make a lot of mistakes, say the wrong thing, or find ourselves sick for no good reason.

So go ahead. Take a nap. Enjoy it. Set your timer so you're not oversleeping and waking up groggy. And smile while you drift off to the 20 minute non-workout that your body, soul and mind needs on a regular basis.

Life in a Nutshell – All the Nuts – by Marcy Lytle

It's a busy season for our usual writer in this space, and I'm filling in for her! I want to keep with the topic of the column – which is usually about her awesome pecan orchard and business, coupled with raising her beautiful daughter. I've visited a couple of pecan orchards on vacations and have loved riding or walking through the trees and seeing these nuts and how they grow!

So since I'm filling in for Jill, I thought I'd write about the pecans in my life and how and why I enjoy them!

Since I can remember; my dad shelled pecans every Christmas. He has a HUGE pecan tree in his yard, but even if it didn't produce enough, or if the squirrels got all the nuts, he found pecans around town. Dad drove to where he knew pecan trees were and got out and gathered them in sacks, from off the ground. He knew just how many he needed for his holiday gifts!

Every time we drove up to his house in the fall, Dad was in the garage at an old table with a very old pecan sheller (he did not want the new kind!), cracking the shells and bagging the nuts. One year we even had labels made for him to stick on the bags that said "Melvin's Pecans." And all of his friends at church, and all of our family, looked so forward to receiving our bags of pecans.

Sometimes, we kids thought he gave away pecans mostly hoping he'd get back desserts made, from friends using the pecans!

This past Christmas was the first time Dad didn't shell any pecans. He's declining and forgetting and wasn't able to go foraging, and all the things. And it was sad. That was part of who Dad was, the giver of all the nuts to all the people. And all the people loved that gift SO much.

I never eat a pecan without thinking of Dad and his sheller, his bags, and his joy in giving those nuts. And the best thing about the nuts, according to Dad, was Mom's pecan pie. I'll leave the recipe below for you to try. As for me, I'm not a pie fan, but I love tossing a few nuts in a small container with some pieces of dark chocolate, to slip into the theater to eat with my popcorn when the movie begins.

It's Father's Day this month, and the dad I knew is disappearing rapidly. I'm super thankful for his example of taking what he had (a huge pecan tree) and using it to bless friends and neighbors. It brought smiles to their faces and brings a smile to my face now, as I think about him and his gift.

If you have a good memory of your father, pin it up on the wall of your mind and hang it there with pride, and smile. If your father was absent or not a good father, then think on memories of gifts the Father has given you in the form of others, sunrises and sunsets, health and food and shelter, and even June bugs and swimming pools. And hang those photos up on that wall, and give thanks.

I'm so thankful for pecans, not only the memories of Dad in his garage, but the reminder that God provides for all of us in all of creation because of the Good Father that he is, at all times.

Thank you for "listening" to my story about Dad, and I hope you have a story to share about your father or Father, to your friends or kiddos or family, as well.

LIFE RIGHT NOW – The Sweet Stuff - BY Hannah Bouck

So much. So little time.

Currently, I am sitting in my new office cubicle sipping on one of my favorite drinks with my husband, Chik-Fil-A diet lemonade! I discovered it in college when I moved down to the South and it quickly became one of my all-time favorite things. I love how something as sour as a lemon can become something so crave-able with just some water and sugar added.

It got me thinking about some lemons we have encountered over the last year and things we/I have learned, but it never ceases to amaze me how quickly we can also forget. And, I am referencing this last season of life we ALL as a world experienced... Quarantine. Now, I know this wasn't the case for everyone, but quarantine was (honestly) not all that bad for me. I was able to rest, spend time with family, laugh, cry, listen, learn, and more. We stepped away from the hustle and stepped into unknown.

Interestingly enough, I welcomed the unknown with open arms because I was WORN OUT. With 60 + hours of work a week, grad school, planning a wedding, family drama, and simply navigating life, I wasn't thriving; I was barely living. All of a sudden life blossomed and living looked like working from my in-law's house, waking up and kayaking in the lake in their backyard, going on walks, late nights of laughing and baking peanut butter cookies, and simply being.

As soon as quarantine lifted and my office opened back up, life quickly began to speed-up again. Everyone all so quickly began to forget the short-lived peace we experienced and began to run back towards the shrine of the hustle. But for some reason I didn't. Yes, I do know the importance of working and finding purpose, but I began to feel more worn out and depressed than I had before quarantine. I had finally begun to experience the life I actually wanted to live, a life filled with family, quality time, outdoors, and rest.

Work became more draining by the day and originally monotonous tasks became more like nails on a chalkboard. I knew I had enough, but I didn't know what to do. We couldn't afford for me to not be working, but I also knew I couldn't continue as I was. So, we did what we knew to-do – we prayed. After months of praying, an opportunity came up for me to work at a local church, full-time with a flexible schedule, and a genuinely more life-giving environment. Super bonus: It also allowed me to join with my husband where our offices are only feet apart vs. an hour's drive away. It's definitely a transition, but it has put me in a place closer to the life I want to live.

Life right now isn't exactly as relaxed as it was in quarantine, but it's a lot less of the hustle. It's more about people and time well-spent with them. As it should be. The craziness we've all experienced as a people this year wasn't ideal, but I am grateful for the lemonade it's made and to be sipping some of that sweet stuff beside my husband, in this new season.

Strengthening Your Core – In the Moment – by Marcy Lytle

I'm the most terrible at living in the moment. Honestly, I'm only writing about it because it's on my mind and my heart quite often, because learning to live in the moment seems a much better way to live than the way most of us operate on a daily basis.

I go to bed thinking about tomorrow and my to-do list, about the meals I'm going to prepare, and dream about the next getaway. I suppose there's nothing wrong with that, but besides those things, I think about the sad news I've just watched on TV, the worries others have shared with me, or the future and how bleak it seems, and pretty soon...my mind is full like a bulging sack of trash that literally needs to be removed and taken out!

I also waste a lot of time thinking about regrets or things I wish I'd done differently, or how I shouldn't have felt that way or this way, or why did I let that rudeness slip off my tongue. I pine sometimes for what was, or who used to be present, or all sorts of things that cannot be changed and pretty soon...my mind is sagging like a scary Day of the Dead piñata that needs a bat taken to it, so that its contents can spill and the piñata be thrown away.

I suppose those are odd visuals, but it's what I thought of when I realized how much time and space in our hearts and minds are taken up by everything BUT the moment.

The picture here was definitely one I took for social media, but the setting, my backyard and all that's growing is definitely a "live in the moment" place. It's a yard where we've planted lots of living things in hopes that they will grow and produce color and brilliance and happiness around our home. And they do! But only if I methodically, daily in the summer months, exit the back door and stay a while.

I get the water hose, I turn on the faucet and I start spraying. It's not a quick pass, but it's a slow soak, that keeps the blooms alive in the heat of the season. And there's nothing else I can do but stand there and wait while the water soaks in, and the plants drink. I can almost see drooping leaves perk up in a matter of a few minutes.

And it's there in my backyard that I get as close to living in the moment as I ever do. I'm out of the house where chores beckon and lists lay by pens screaming, "Pick me up and add more!" I'm in the sunshine and the wind and I feel the warmth of something real and moving and life-giving, and I hear a small voice whispering to me to notice...

...the rainbow that appears in the spray of the water from the fanning of the water droplets in the sun

...the honeysuckle vine that clings to the fence and climbs and spreads out, even after the freeze that destroyed other plants, a few months back

...the peppers hanging on the plants waiting patiently until full grown, to be picked and enjoyed and eaten

...the roses that we first planted decades ago, now giving birth STILL to profuse blooms as long as water is near

...those plants that only bloom when the heat is on and the cool temps are past, as they fascinate and emerge so tall

And I live in the moment surrounded by living and breathing plants, some that come back year after year, and some that I've just planted. I have no other agenda except to water and observe and wait and feel...and maybe that's what living in the moment looks like.

Gardening and yard work is hard in the Texas heat, and it won't be long until the heat keeps me indoors more than out, but I'll still find the early morning or late afternoon hours to exit and tend and water and snip...every single season.

And if I don't do this, the color and beauty starts to fade and slip away...without my ever having noticed.

When's the last time you lived in the moment, and what did that look like? I'd love to know...

Under Pressure - Golden Images – by Debbie Haynes

When we think of images of gold, the Oscar statue might come to mind, or perhaps exquisite jewelry, or even maybe the golden arches at McDonalds! But for our story this month, we're referring to an actual image of gold that was 5X10 feet wide, set up by King Nebuchadnezzar (King Neb) in Daniel 3. Let's look at what he did:

He called together all the rulers to come to the dedication of a huge image that he set up, and then commanded everyone to fall down and worship this gold statue. When the people heard music from all sorts of instruments; then that was their signal to kneel. And if they didn't worship the image, they were cast into a furnace of fire! So, of course, when the people from all nations and languages heard the music, they did what they were told and worshipped this golden image.

Right after this command, plots began to take place against the Hebrews and others came to the king and said, "Didn't you command everyone to obey?" And they proceeded to point out specific Jews that were only worshipping God and not the image. In particular, there were three brothers that weren't bowing, by the names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The king was angry and wanted to see them.

The three brothers knew about a higher command back in Exodus 20 given to them by God to not have any other gods before the one true God, and to not make any images and bow down to them. They responded to the king with great conviction that they would not bow to the golden image. And they went on to declare that if they were thrown in a furnace, God would be able to deliver them. And then, they went further to state that even if God didn't deliver them, they would still not bow to the image!

Of course, King Neb was furious so he heated up the furnace seven times hotter than it had been before, and sent the brothers into the flames. Maybe you know the story, but right away the king jumped up and stated that he saw four men in the fire – the fourth man looking like the Son of God.

That visual, that realization of the truth of what the brothers had said, and that awakening, caused the king to make a brand new decree for the people.

He blessed God and said there is no other God who can deliver in this way that he witnessed, and he promoted the same three guys that stood up to the king's original command. What a shift!

One thing to note in this story is that the people were blind followers of a corrupt leader, with no truth to anchor them. They were easily led to follow a dead idol. Seems silly, but it still happens to us today.

We copy behaviors and customs around us, without seeking the truth. We have to stay true to God's word or we could find ourselves bowing down to images that have no life, as well. The only way to remain rooted and true to God is to know what the word says about his character and to align our thinking with that!

Aren't you curious how the king knew the fourth man was the Son of God? It could be that God just revealed himself at that moment, when the king looked and saw what he had done, and God showed up and revealed what he could do.

Psalms 25 tells us that if we fear the Lord and choose his way, God himself will teach us, and our souls will dwell at ease, and our seed will inherit the earth.

Isaiah 43 reminds us that when we pass through waters and rivers and even walk through flames, we won't be burned.

Will we choose golden images to worship...or will we see the image of a fourth man? One brings certain death, and the other delivers us from that death.



MARRIAGE

After 40 Years – Beautifully Different – by Marcy Lytle

We go to the movie theater a lot. It's a happy place for us. And I often am amused at how he can sit by me and laugh at the same previews and commercials we've seen a dozen times before, as if it's the first time he's seen them. And last night, when this happened again, I looked at him and gave thanks for this man that is so different from me in so many ways, because I need different. I need to glean from him the way he sees every day as if it's new and fresh...because it is!

We take walks often, on different trails throughout our city, and he marvels at many things I wouldn't even notice. He spots a cardinal in the tree or hears the sound of water and walks to the side, and catches the sight of a small waterfall in a creek behind the bushes. I would have passed on by, as my thoughts of what's for dinner or my to-do list kept me preoccupied from the beauty of the moment. I need to walk by this man that notices and points out, and calls me to look...because it's wonderful!

We sometimes share in projects and cleaning in the house, when we're having company or just sprucing up the yard. I hurry through projects and chores, ready to get them done and move on. He, however, takes time to make sure these things are done correctly so that the fix lasts, the plants get full attention, or the cleaning is thorough. I need to work beside this man that is meticulous and precise, when I'm haphazard and quick...because I'm in too big of a hurry!

We read a page a night from a devotional book by Max Lucado, so that the last thing before we go to sleep is truth from His word. Sometimes, I'm looking at my phone or I'm preoccupied in thought, and he starts reading. He holds on and smiles at and wonders with the writer, over just one little truth. And often, I might daydream or think of something else and miss what he's read altogether. I need this man that simply loves God and his word...because I need that Word of life, as well!

I could keep writing about our differences and they would be many. We are about as different as night and day in so many ways. But just like we need the night and the day to complete a 24-hour turn, he and I need each other. I can easily forget this sometimes and become annoyed at those differences, and that makes for an unpleasant evening. But when I stop and admire the way he laughs again at that ad, when I look up at that bird he notices, when I observe and learn from his skills, and when I lay my head on the pillow at night and really listen, our marriage is at its best.

Sure, my husband has issues just like all of us do, but so do I. And those issues can sometimes become bigger than the beauty of our differences that complete the two of us into one beautiful whole.

Right now, he's asleep, because I'm an early riser and he prefers a couple more hours. He's going to eat things for breakfast I wouldn't touch. By the end of today, we will have done and observed and operated in entirely different ways in our work and play. And I hope that I always pause to observe this man who's so different, so beautifully different, from me.

Date Night Fun – On the Floor – by Marcy Lytle

We have recently had several fun nights arranging our floor in the living room while we eat and watch a movie, so that we feel like it's a date. These can also be moved outdoors to your yard, instead, if you wish! Hope you enjoy them all and try several, and share your pictures with us, or leave a comment below. And have fun setting up each experience as you date night on the ground this month of June.

At the Beach – Open a couple of umbrellas (Target has \$5 ones in the dollar spot!), bring out your beach towels, set out a picnic basket and pick a movie. For the food, just use a big tray and arrange everything you have in the fridge and pantry for a charcuterie board. Leftover veggies, dips, nuts, crackers, etc. and some cute plates/napkins in a beach theme that you get at the dollar store will make your night breezy and fun!

Dinner for Two – Spread out a white sheet (or tablecloth) or black, whichever you have. That's your table. Light a couple of candles, and set out your finest plates (or nice paper ones) and cloth napkins. For dinner, consider ordering a delivery dinner from a nice restaurant, and then enjoy a romantic movie of your choice (We recently enjoyed *As Luck Would Have It* on the Hallmark Channel).

Fly Away – Set up your area like an airplane by setting your two dining chairs close together. You'll use trays on your lap for your food. Serve your drinks in the clear plastic cups like they offer on the airplane. And have your drinks in a small cooler to choose from, right beside you. Choose a variety of perhaps a soda, water, and a fizzy drink. In basket, set out airplane snacks like trail mix, peanuts, crackers, chocolates and all sorts of snacks. Provide one comfy blanket to cover your laps, and pick your favorite movie located in a destination far away...

Breakfast in Bed – Lay out a huge blanket and bring in your pillows. Set up a tray in the middle, with all the breakfast goodies like bacon, scrambled eggs, sausage, potatoes, etc. to make breakfast tacos. Prepare all of this together before you snuggle in. Even make some fresh-squeezed orange juice. Oh, and be sure to wear your pj's. How about an old classic movie for this date idea? And a dinner mint under your pillow after the movie is over?

Story Time – Who says story-time has to just be for kiddos? Stack all of your throw pillows around the floor, in three "stations." Provide a travel book by one stack, a book of poems by the second, and an inspirational book by the third. Remove your shoes and come in your socks, and provide crunchy veggie snacks and dips for enjoyment, while you move around to the different stations and read and share the night away...

If the floor is too hard or not appealing for a place to sit, be creative and move your ideas to the bed, or the sofa, or out in the yard at your picnic table, but be creative with all of the ideas and more - and enjoy each other as the summer begins!

For Better or Worse - Ten Years – by Kaelin Scott

Next month, my husband and I will celebrate our 10th anniversary. Sometimes it feels like a lifetime has passed since we said our vows, and sometimes I wonder how ten years passed by so quickly. I know that many of you readers have been married much longer than that. To you I may still be a newlywed. And that's the beautiful thing about this magazine. It connects people in all stages of life.

Despite feeling as if the past ten years have flown by, I have learned a lot about marriage in that time. And I have certainly learned much about myself, as well. Most importantly, I have learned a lot about God. I've seen parallels between His love for me and the love of a husband. I've witnessed what it means to sacrifice, compromise, and heal.

Marriage is a wonderful gift, no matter how long you've been married. But it can also be very hard at times. How on earth do you take two people and make them into one flesh? Especially when they have different opinions, feelings, and strengths. It seems nearly impossible at times, and it can certainly be frustrating as well.

But nothing is impossible for God, and I've found that to be the only secret to keeping our marriage alive. God has to be at the center.

Not me, not my husband, not our kids. God alone must be first and foremost in both our hearts. If we want to survive the obstacles and hardships thrown at us along the way, we have to fix our eyes on Him. It sounds simple, and sometimes it's easier than others. Just like Peter, when those dark, difficult days come, we tend to get distracted by the waves.

But when we start to sink, we have a choice. We can struggle to swim on our own, drowning in the weight of our problems. Or we can cry out to Jesus for help, and He'll pull us back up again. Nothing is beyond healing, fixing, or saving, marriage included.

My husband and I haven't made it through the past ten years without our share of struggles. We've hurt each other, we've made mistakes, and we've seen sorrow together. But Jesus carried us through each of those times. He never let the waves overtake us. Instead, He took our hands and walked us back to safety.

I'm sure the next ten years will have struggles of their own. But we will face them together, keeping our eyes on Jesus and trusting His love for us.

In This Together - Rain or Shine – by Marcy Lytle

I was asked to cover this month for this column, and I'm happy to, because it's what friends do. And when I said yes, I thought of how that concept applies to my marriage as well. Those famous vows we make in front of our guests to honor each other in sickness and in health mean that when one is down, the other one will offer a hand up. However, that's not so easy, when one is going through a hard time!

I remember when my husband had a deteriorating hip, eventually resulting in a hip replacement, and I had to be patient while he recovered. Patience is a virtue, and it's not one of my strong ones! I usually give him 24 hours to feel bad, and then I'm ready for him to rise up and go! However, I had to wash his hair, serve him and take care of him, much like a nurse, for a few weeks. I didn't like it, but it's what I vowed to do.

That was just a physical test, but what about the emotional ones? I'd say my husband has had to come my assistance way more than he knew he would have to, when he said "I do" those decades ago. I'm pretty sure he had no idea that I was such an emotional number line – going from 1 to 100 – all in one day sometimes! I might wake up cheerful and playful, and by the end of the day be drained and snappy...and he has learned to recognize and offer that patience that he definitely has more of than I do.

I've watched friends that have had devastating accidents, where one of them ended up in a wheelchair or completely lost mentally, and I've watched the care required by the other half of the couple. It's heartbreaking to witness, and yet beautiful all at the same time. We know a lady who had early onset of dementia, and watched her husband recently at a restaurant take her hand with the most gentle of care and walk her to their car. I wanted to cry for all sorts of reasons, and I gasped at the beauty AND the pain of it.

I've also had another friend that received a diagnosis of cancer early on in her marriage, and her husband ended up leaving her because he "didn't want to have kids with a cancer patient." I cannot imagine the pain she felt when he left her in the middle of her pain. And yet later, she remarried an amazing man and recovered from the cancer, and life was good again.

I could go on and on, reciting stories of my own marriage, and stories of others, of watching that sickness/health vow play out over time. No one wants sickness of any kind, or even to lean on the other partner so heavily when we cannot walk by ourselves. However, there's something about suffering that refines and makes glorious an image that reflects his love and his mercy.

We recently read a devotional that said to let your suffering be your sermon. I suppose that means that the way we handle these setbacks in our marriage, the way we rise to offer a hand, love beyond the physical, and serve without expectation, speaks volumes about the love of Christ to those who observe and see. And it also gives us the opportunity to lean on HIM to receive his grace and mercy to achieve the impossible that we never thought we'd face.

My friend needed a hand up for the story, this month. And I'm happy to help. My husband needed a shoulder this week, because he lost his brother. And I hope I've been patient and kind, because he will be grieving for a while.

And as for me? I need a hand up daily because I'm just wired that way, and I'm thankful my husband is with me in every season, rain or shine, and opens the umbrella for me to walk close so that I don't drown in the deluge...



ENCOURAGEMENT

My backyard feels like an oasis in the midst of a desert. Surrounded by houses in the middle of a subdivision, in the middle of a city—an oasis is the next best thing to being surrounded by forests, or a greenbelt. Sitting on the patio in the early morning, the dull roar of IH 35 traffic is usually an annoying backdrop to the gurgling sound of water fountains—but not today. It's quieter for some reason—so quiet that I caught the sound of baby birds chirping.

Several months ago I hung a bird house (most likely a thrift store find, but I have a dim memory of a garage sale) on the lattice screen at the back of the garden. It was mostly for show, because I didn't think a bird would actually use it, but a little wren must have thought it was a perfect nesting place. When I saw her actually going inside, my heart soared! This morning, a month or so later, I heard the chirping and watched as momma made several trips back and forth bringing food to the little ones. Each time she brings food the chirping frenzy begins, and then they quiet down until the next time. How many trips is she going to make? Do they feed all day long? I hope to find out.

There's one problem. I have a cat. If you read my story "Guardian of the Garden" (available in August 2020 archives) you know Jasper was an answer to prayer about my rat problem. I had serious reservations about a cat because I love the birds and encourage them with many birdfeeders (which also encourages rats!); but Jasper has proven to be pretty laid back. It seems his presence, made known by the scent of his private garden facilities (litter box au natural), more than his hunting skills, keeps rodents away. I haven't seen one in months! He's intrigued by the birds, but he only killed a couple early on when survival mode was still on. Now, he watches them and only half-heartedly stalks them before they fly away; however, this birdhouse is near a bench and would be easy for him to get to, especially if baby birds begin to emerge. So far, he hasn't noticed the chirping or momma's activity, but I'm going to have to keep a sharp eye out—he is a cat after all. I really hope the babies make it.

Since the Big Freeze most things are actually coming back. Many plants were unaffected, but some didn't make it, so there were several holes in my garden space that needed to be filled. Plants are harder to find, and more expensive, because the growers lost plants too. My gardening buddy and I have made many trips to local garden centers hunting for plants, which has been so fun! We also went to a plant exchange in the neighborhood and got some surprise plants and met some great people. I hope to see them again.

The holes left in my garden have opened up the space, letting in some sun, which means I have more plants to choose from. I'm enjoying adding new plants and redesigning certain areas that needed a change. My boundaries have expanded, and I'm embracing the change. The Big Freeze was devastating to many....lost plants doesn't compare to the losses others suffered. I hope that those who suffered more than lost plants—damage to property and even lost lives—can see some sunshine come through. I hope that the "hole" created by devastation is being filled with new opportunities, new perspectives, and hope, that keeps us afloat.

Moving Forward - The Path to Peace – by Pam Charro

Peace is such an easy thing to lose! Life is full of challenges and difficulties, and modern times are certainly no exception. I could describe my current situation to you, and you would very likely feel I have every right to be losing my mind right now.

Fortunately, I've been in training, for many years, in finding the path to peace. In John 14:27, Jesus makes a promise to me that the path always exists, no matter how my circumstances appear. So I gave up my excuses and justifications for staying miserable and set my mind on finding it. I have learned that it's simple to do, but not necessarily easy. I often picture the path as a narrow trail going straight up a pine tree-covered mountain.

Sounds fun, right?

It takes good vision to see the path, and discipline and commitment to stay on it. But it's something that can be done, and here is how:

I have decided that I will believe God's word, lean on his promises, and spend time in his presence, no matter what. I will keep going back when I feel something negative. I won't stop until I receive that promised peace. It doesn't depend on what I see or think I know to the contrary, although I sometimes have to spend a lot of time with him before I feel the peace he is offering. But he has been faithful over and over again, so I know he will give what he has promised. And his peace surpasses understanding; it is more powerful than anything the enemy can do to steal it, as long as I commit myself to remaining surrendered to my God.

I have wandered around through trees and have even bumped my head on some of them. But my path to peace is becoming more and more worn from constant travel, and I always come down the mountain radiant.

I am grateful for God's promise that the path to peace is always there .. and that he walks it with me.

Rooted in Love - Treasure for Me – by Kaelin Scott

Do you believe that God hears your prayers?

Because He does.
Every single one.
Big and small alike.

Every year, we take our family on a weeklong vacation to the beach. We collect tons and tons of seashells, and we see lots of broken sand dollar pieces too. Last year when we went, I really wanted to find a perfect, whole sand dollar. I had never found one before, and I thought it would be so neat if I did. So on the first day of our trip, as I headed out with my boogie board, I said a simple prayer that I would find one. I didn't think about the sand dollar too much after that, although I did look around any time I got near the water.

Fast forward a few days. I was walking along the edge of the water with my little ones, watching and laughing as they ran after shells and other treasures. We had quite the collection going in our little bucket, but something about beautiful seashells is just so irresistible. We had gone a good distance down the beach and I knew their little legs would soon tire out, so we turned to start heading back. But suddenly, a flash of white in an incoming wave caught my eye.

Without even thinking, I ran over and bent down, reaching my hand into the swirling water. I grabbed onto the object and pulled it up, and my heart skipped a beat. In my hand was a beautiful, perfect, whole sand dollar. I immediately remembered the prayer I had said a few days before, and I knew God had sent that sand dollar just for me. After showing it to my excited kids, I tucked it away safely, smiling and thanking God for His little treasures.

As I walked back down the beach, surrounded by the sound of wind and waves and laughter, I was struck by the sovereignty of God. Nothing is too big for Him, and nothing is too small, either. If He is loving enough to bless me with something as tiny as a sand dollar, then surely He is faithful in the big things as well. Thinking about this encouraged me and bolstered my faith.

The struggles in my life that feel overwhelming – He's got them under control. My prayers and tears and heartache – He sees and hears them all.

I'm so thankful for this reminder of God's faithfulness and goodness. He cares deeply about me, and He cares deeply about you too. Nothing is impossible for Him. And He wants us to bring our hearts to Him.

Every fear,
every worry,
every dream,
every hope.

Nothing is too big, and nothing is too small.

Simple Truths – A Little Louder, Now – by Marcy Lytle

This year, for the first time ever, we hired a lawn service guy. And it's been fantastic. My husband was driving home one evening and saw this guy working hard on our street, in a neighbor's yard, stopped and visited with him – and he was hired for our yard.

A few weeks later, my husband saw Raul across the street in another neighbor's yard. After talking to him, Raul stated that the neighbor had seen Raul trimming our yard and invited him to start on his.

This all made me think how Raul didn't have to do any advertising on our street, because his work and his performance spoke for him. His actions and the result of them (the pretty yards) made people take note, stop and ask, and then hire him! How cool is that?

You know how we've always heard that actions speak louder than words. And while we do have to use our words, actions are really the best form of attraction to anything we're trying to "sell." If we want people to listen to us talk about a subject we know, maybe like home decorating, the best pitch is to let them see our own houses and how well we decorated our own walls. I remember as a child being frustrated when Mom took me to buy a pattern and cloth, because the ladies that worked in those departments often wore the ugliest clothes! That wasn't good advertising! Or what about when we step inside a salon and the hairstylist about to cut our hair has hair that is unkempt and unattractive. That's downright scary, right?

As I've lived, over the years, I've found that the best "witness" I can be to others regarding God's love is to love others, and live like I know that I'm loved as well. I can preach about his love and teach about it and talk about, but if I'm found hating myself or others – those words fall to the ground. If we're telling our little girls that God loves them, and yet we stand in front of mirrors and hate our bodies out loud, that's all the little girls remember. In fact, anything we talk about falls on deaf ears if we don't exhibit that in the "neighborhood."

I'm sure Raul perhaps leaves his cards on the doors of houses, or maybe he has a Facebook page. But the best he can hope for is that his work hires him. My husband saw his fine work, talked to him and realized his pleasant manner, and invited him to our yard. The neighbor across the street saw our yard, observed Raul, and invited him to his grass. So cool, isn't it, how a ripple effect starts when actions speak louder than words.

I'm pretty sure I've spoken louder many times and left actions behind, so then what I spoke about had no good effect at all. I can tell my husband how much I love him, but then run him down with my words, if I'm not careful. However, if I'm constantly serving him, or others, or giving or treating as I want to be treated, then trust develops and relationships happen, and questions are asked. And we can give good answers.

I often feel like I should be saying more to spread the good news about Jesus. After all, I profess that he is everything to me. But I'm pretty sure that I need to be doing more, instead. Serving, loving, giving, forgiving, going the extra mile – all the things that SHOW his love – speak much louder! And then, when that person sees and crosses the street to ask me

something about what I've just done, I can honestly answer and point to HIM. And they might just listen then to the good news that He loves them, too.

Unearthly Thing - Fixing My First – by Angela Dolbear

New things excite me. The rumble of the UPS truck as it pulls into my driveway makes my adrenaline rush.

An email that says a treasured item I searched out and purchased online has shipped makes me mentally say, “Squeee!”

But I hate this feeling.

Hate may be a strong word, but this fondness for material things screams to me that my priorities are out of order.

My flesh, my base, un-regenerated self, is in control.

The title of my monthly column is “Unearthly Thing,” a phrase I adopted after reading a quote from C.S. Lewis about treading lightly on this earth, because it is not our home, and Heaven is. I try to live by this.

Recently, my husband and I have started a mission to get out of debt. When we are stirred and motivated by acquiring new things, the justification for throwing down the credit card is easy, but the consequences are definitely not.

It physically hurts me to say “NO” to myself.

I mourn the cancelation of my monthly cosmetics subscription box. The thought of not experiencing that anticipation of opening the box to see what is new, and colorful, which I can play with, saddens me. I feel like I am walking around like Charlie Brown, with my head hung low, and shuffling my feet.

But this must change. It struck me this morning how much my flesh decides, how much it still rules me. And I don't like it.

One of the devotionals I read this morning was spot on. (God always brings me words of encouragement exactly when I need them!)

When pursuing a goal, in my case it's to be free of debt and materialism, “depend on Him for the strength to do it, and then go after your goal with everything in you,” Joyce Meyer's devotional says. “Be full of holy determination—not some kind of fleshly determination or willpower—but true God-given determination. You do have self-control. It is a fruit of the Spirit, and it is in you—believe it and begin walking in it.”

Yes, and amen.

It has also occurred to me that getting out of debt is not the primary goal. Of course being debt-free will be awesome, but the most important goal is to have that excitement I used to have for new things, instead be fulfilled with the things of God. His words, His wisdom, and His missions for me.

Telling myself “NO” will be good for squelching my fleshly desires, but it needs to be replaced with something trustworthy. I'm sweeping my mental house clean of harmful attitudes, but it's important that something bigger and better be put in its place. (For more information, please see [Luke 11:24-26](#), and [Matthew 12:43-45](#) .)

I think I have not been putting the Kingdom first. My first Love, my Lord, needs to be in that place that I have been filling with the need for new stuff. I am reminded of Jesus' words to the church in Ephesus in Revelation. It stings my soul to hear Him talk about those who lost Him as their first love. But the burning sensation lets me know He is working. (See [Revelation 2:2-5](#) for the story).

I need Jesus.

So simple, so true, and so peacefully right.

Jesus needs to be on the throne of me, of all mind, heart, and soul. Lord, please help me make it so.

Yes, and amen.



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - The Family Walk

A few weeks ago, we all had dinner together at my son's home, and one of my favorite things we did was take a family walk after we ate. I have heard that walking after meals is a common practice in other countries, and I wish it were so here! There are so many good reasons to walk together with all the generations, around the neighborhood. Our path this particular day was behind my son's house where lots of new houses were being built. But we could have picked a trail, just as well.

Here's what made me so happy as we walked:

There were conversations about the homes being built, and my husband quizzed the family on certain aspects of building to see if they knew the terms (like a brick ledge). That was fun and informative.

The two sister-in-laws walked side by side telling stories and sharing life, and they looked like they were having so much fun just chatting.

We had two of the littles with us, and they climbed on rocks, picked up sticks, and wondered at the new homes – especially when we went inside one of them – with ooohs and ahhs.

One child was tired near the end and her feet hurt (notice the red boots – NOT made for walking), so she hopped on her uncle's back for the rest of the walk home.

I stayed behind a couple of times to snap pictures of the loves of my life.

Walking together as a family enabled us all to work off what we just ate, for sure. But more importantly, we walked together in the same direction for the pure pleasure of observing and noting and enjoying and wondering. And I don't know what could be better than that.

As we turned on the last street, I even found myself skipping a little because my heart was so full and light.

It's not often that the family gathers and takes a walk, because conditions have to be just right. We need the time, the weather has to be good, and there has to be a place to walk. And oh yes, everyone needs to be willing to go.

I enjoyed noting the different styles of houses going up in the neighborhood, I also marveled at the purple flowers spreading out and growing right through rock, and I loved the exercise it gave us all.

However, the best part of the entire time together was watching my family and listening and being outdoors and taking the time to move out of the house, into the streets and onto the sidewalks. I cannot explain it in words. But it made my soul sing.

Try it. Some may moan that they don't have the correct footwear. Tell them ahead of time to be prepared to walk. Others may whine that it's too hot. You can always provide hats and

sunscreen, or water bottles for all. And you may not know where to walk. Just take off from the point where you meet. Get up from the table and go.

The family walk. I like how that sounds, and I want to keep it around...

FRESH THYME - Give Me Both

As a kid, I learned bible verses. I hope your kids are learning them, as well.

John 3:16 is a must

Psalms 23 is a comfort

John 11:35 is the shortest verse in the bible – I'll never forget that.

Jeremiah 29:11 is a life verse

Many more come to mind, because these random verses that packed such power were read to me, quoted around me, or practiced in my learning as a kid. And I'd say that often, I run to those verses as a reminder of the truth and His goodness, and all the things.

I also learned bible stories, like Daniel in the lion's den, Moses and the burning bush, Noah and the ark. And our kids need to know these stories, because they tell of God's great power and provision and miracles and hope! So I love knowing these stories and having them sink deep into the fabric of my life. They are definitely life-giving.

As an adult, I have learned over the years that those verses and those stories are not enough for good and healthy sustenance. They are a support and a rock, but I miss SO MUCH without the context! And that's what I've been looking at these past years, the context of the verses.

Imagine reading a novel and pulling out quotes from the story. They might be awesome ones, as are quotes from past leaders. And they might provide food for thought. But if we don't actually read the entire book or the history and story of the person, we are missing so much. It's like eating one bite of an entire array of food spread out before us!

For example, the verses that say his ways are higher than ours has always been used in situations where we don't understand God's ways. So we just throw up our hands and say oh well, his ways are higher. But did you know that in the context of those verses, there is a call to abandon our anxious thoughts and elevate them to his thoughts? That's a world of difference in the meaning!

And if we don't know the entire story of the bible, the little verses we've picked out and learned as a child will be comforting and life-giving, but our framework will be full of gaping holes where wind howls loud and debris flies, when storms occur.

So I say, give me both. Give them both. Let's learn the verses and the stories, but let's then read the entire context around those verses and stories, and know the person and character of the God we sing about and memorize verses about.

I feel like just now, after living decades without it, the housing of my mind is no longer just framework, but I'm filling in with coverings and adding load-bearing walls, and windows that open and shut to let the cool breezes blow, and doors I now know how to lock and unlock to choose the guests that enter or not.

Next time a childhood verse or story pops into your mind, open the Bible and read the context, the commentary, and learn. And start with Genesis and read the synopsis of each book in the Bible and stand amazed at the story that started then and continues now, in the lives of those who are created to love and be loved by Him.

Make sure both are present in your family and in your life...as you grow in the knowledge and grace of the One you call Lord.

FRESH THYME - Hard to Decide

We have roses along our back fence that bloom profusely once spring arrives and then they last for a good while until the summer heats stunts their production. But right now, they're in full bloom and gorgeous. And I have this dilemma every time I look out the back window and see the color they provide in our yard. Do I leave them on the bush so they look pretty, or do I snip them and place them in a vase and bring that beauty into our home?

I used to leave them be. And while they grew and looked pretty and bloomed, they also withered and died over time, and the petals fell, and the bushes didn't prosper. It became clear to me that as I snipped and removed the gorgeous blooms, this allowed for other blooms to emerge and for the bushes to grow fuller.

Yes, for a bit the rose bush might look bare because I snip and transfer the beauty to a vase in the house, but soon there are always more buds emerging.

And guess what? I love looking at the roses in the vase in the house. The beauty is no longer just "out there." It's "in here."

I love removing the leaves from the bottom of the stems, also trimming herbs from the garden box, and picking other flowers for fillers, as I arrange them all in the vase. And again, these flowers and brilliant colors only last a few days, and it's time to discard, exit the house and start snipping again.

It's so hard to decide on leaving the beauty be...or snipping it to enjoy for me.

I suppose I could spiritualize this story by saying that we need to allow our beauty (love for others) to be transplanted, snipped and pruned, enjoyed by others. But I think you get the picture about that.

For now, I'm just sharing how it's sometimes hard to decide about things, and there's not always a "right" answer. I can stand at the window and deliberate all day and wish those roses were inside, but not want to ruin the beauty of outside, and I'm missing the point!

It's both/and.

Maybe one day I'll snip five roses and place them in a vase and smile at them all day long. Maybe the next week I'll leave the roses to adorn the fence and catch the water droplets from the sprinkler, so they glisten in the sun, and watch their petals drop in the mulch, being scattered by the wind.

The point is to enjoy their beauty. Inside and out.

The point is to gaze at their brilliance. Inside and out.

The point is to marvel at their appearance. Inside and out.

It's hard to decide sometimes about the fun and the beauty in life. Do we stop and enjoy it, leave it be, or invite it into our home? The answer is a great big YES to all three!

FRESH THYME - The High Road – by Marcy Lytle

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Take the high road?” It pretty much means to not fire back when insulted. In other words, forgive and let go. It also means to do the right thing, even if it’s not popular. Taking the low road would involve taking revenge.

We recently saw a movie called *Wrath of Man*, starring Jason Statham. He plays a father seeking vengeance for the death of his son who was mercilessly killed by criminals. So throughout the entire film, this man with a mission sets about killing off everyone in his path until he gets to the one that did the deed. I’d say this character definitely took the low road. Oh, he was vindicated in the end, but dead bodies were left in the wake of his vindication.

When I got home, the phrase “take the high road” kept popping into my head. And while (thankfully) I don’t know anyone seeking revenge in the way this man did on the movie, I do know lots of us that think about revenge, wish for revenge, and don’t really forgive and let go. What kind of movie would that be, if the high road was taken and forgiveness was offered, instead?

Toddlers are born with the low road instinct, aren’t they? He takes her toy and she slaps him or crawls over to take his. We have to train and teach our kids to take the high road when insulted or teased or mistreated, but so often it’s a hard line to walk – especially if the insults or mistreatment keeps coming. And isn’t there a time to fight back?

Perhaps, our definition of fighting back is different among all of us.

- For some, if an insult is hurled, a fist is given. That might stop the insult, or it might result in a harder blow!
- For some, if a wrong is made against us, it’s only right and satisfactory to act wrongly back to the person that wronged us. If she pinches us, we pinch back harder.
- For some, if teasing occurs, we make sure to slander that person so that we hurt their friendship with others, thus making ourselves feel a bit vindicated.

It’s so tempting to take the low road....

There’s this beautiful lake we enjoy walking around, and on one end there’s a choice to walk a lower path closer to the water, or take a higher one up on a hill where the view is prettier. We almost always take the higher path because my husband likes the view, it’s away from most of the others walking, and there is also a field of wildflowers on the other side that can’t be seen from the lower path.

I’ve found in my own life, especially in my marriage relationship, that taking the low road never ends well. Offering back insult for insult only results in a huge boxing match, and in the end we’re both wounded and don’t even remember what started the first blow. I’ve also realized that it all comes down to trust.

Sure, we tell our kids to alert a teacher if they’re insulted or teased, and that’s good. But we have to tell our kids and ourselves that the higher road is one that starts on our knees. I’ve

seen many times (it's taken practice and I still fail often) where I've prayed about the situation or the person, kept my mouth shut (hardest thing to do ever...) and seen God work in the heart of the perpetrator...or often in my own heart first.

That road, that visual of presenting the case to a higher power that can actually change the root of the problem, enables us all to view things a little differently and observe beauty on the other side that we never knew existed, and would never have seen, had we chosen the low road with the masses.

Look for the high road and take it. And trust that He'll meet you there.